



To: Town of Ridgway
From: Ridgway Area Chamber of Commerce
Subject: Bi-Annual Lodging Tax Report
Date: July 8, 2021

Dear Ridgway Town Council,

The Ridgway Area Chamber of Commerce (RACC) is pleased to share our bi-annual report with the Town of Ridgway.

Included with this report is the Chamber's Lodging Tax P&L statement. As a reminder, RACC's QuickBooks structures are organized around the Town approved marketing plan and managed by Middleton Accounting. These actuals are a direct pull from QuickBooks and reflect a continued diversification of investments designed to support our local business community.

We continue to advance a number of strategies to improve year-round economic opportunities for our local business community, while considering the sustainability of our town and surrounding natural resources. Much of our marketing and advertising is focused on the off-peak season when our visitor economy has room to grow. Over the years, the RACC has shifted visitor information to align with responsible travel best practices and strategies. We are actively participating in a number of regional and local partnerships to ensure alignment with the greater community and to be a voice for our business community. Committees and groups include: quarterly meetings with Montrose and Ouray, the Ridgway Creative Main Street Committee, Ridgway Visitor Center and Heritage Park Advisory group, upcoming participation in Region 10 strategic planning meetings, and the Colorado Tourism Office Mountains and Mesas Region planning group.

We continue to see progress being made as a result of the organizational infrastructure investments made over the last four years, which includes RidgwayColorado.com as well as strategic visitor messaging and marketing that support a sustainable economic growth model.

We look forward to any questions or comments you have regarding this report and continuing to partner with the Town of Ridgway to advance the interests of local businesses and the community as a whole.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Hilary Lewkowitz". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the "y".

Hilary Lewkowitz
Marketing Director
Ridgway Area Chamber of Commerce

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COVID-19 Impacts and Chamber Response

The RACC continued to respond to the impacts of COVID-19 throughout the winter. In anticipation of a slow winter due to COVID-19, the Chamber launched a Shop Local campaign to drive economic opportunities from December 2020 to April 2021. Campaign accomplishments include: a new banner in Hartwell Park encouraging drive-thru traffic to stop and shop; weekly social media and e-blasts featuring member specials; shop local [landing page](#) on chamber's website; and inclusion in the [SBDC statewide shop local campaign](#). The Chamber continued to update the COVID-19 resource page that was linked on the homepage. This page was unpublished in June once town and county restrictions were relaxed.

Staffing

The Chamber continues to utilize local expertise to fill staffing needs, while the board stays actively involved with oversight and some organizational duties. Marketing Director, Hilary Lewkowitz, leads the organization on marketing-related initiatives. Duties include: staff management, working with the board to identify marketing goals, guiding the direction for all marketing-related projects, state grants, regional partnerships, administrative duties, as well as town and chamber joint projects.

Tanya Ishikawa continues to play an integral role with the organization. Tanya supports several communications projects, including: lead editor on the annual Visitors Guide, managing the Chamber's Facebook account, website content, business promotion, annual career fair and other special projects.

Jeanne Robertson is the Visitor Center Manager and Volunteer Coordinator. Jeanne is responsible for managing visitor center volunteers, visitor inquiries and visitor guide requests, as well as visitor center merchandise.

Our exceptional group of local consulting partners and staff includes:

- Marketing Director – Hilary Lewkowitz
- Online Content and Storytelling Consultant – Tanya Ishikawa
- Visitor Center Manager – Jeanne Robertson
- Accounting – Middleton Accounting (Jane Pulliam)
- Website and Technology Partner -- Peak Media (Josh Gowans)
- Media and Design Partner – Sprout Design Studio (Nicole Green)

Board of Directors

All Board of Directors positions are currently filled. Newly elected board members include David Nunn, Ridgway Ouray Friends & Neighbors. We are sad to see Daniel Richards step down from the board due to a busy schedule running his businesses. We thank Daniel for his years of service. The board elected new officers during their annual retreat in January. Board member details:

- President – Tim Patterson (RIGS)
- Vice President – Jason Bojar (Balance Natural Medicine)
- Secretary – Ashley Perkins (Alpine Bank)
- Treasurer – Jane Pulliam (Chamber Member, Middleton Accounting)

- At Large
 - o David Nunn (Ridgway Ouray Friends & Neighbors)
 - o Kane Scheidegger (Kane Scheidegger Gallery)
 - o Adam Dubroff (Ridgway Lodge and Suites)

2020-2021 Colorado Tourism Office Winter Marketing



The RACC participated in the Colorado Tourism Office Winter Co-Op Paid Media program. The program entailed a \$1,500 investment from the RACC, and the CTO matched with \$2,000. Marketing efforts were focused during the winter season, from December 2020 to March 2021. Marketing deliverables included targeted email campaigns and targeted online banner advertisements. The campaigns received over 1 million impressions. Media drove 268 visits to RidgwayColorado.com. Ridgway was also featured in one direct email campaign sent to 640,000 subscribers with 144K opens, 12K clicks, and 22.6% open rate.

Colorado Creative Corridor

For the third consecutive year, the Ridgway Chamber teamed up with the Town of Ridgway and the Ridgway Creative District to support the Colorado Creative Corridor (CCC) project. Over the past three years, a majority of this work has been funded through three consecutive Colorado Tourism Office \$25,000 Marketing Matching grants. The CCC is a 331-mile route that links the mountain towns of Carbondale, Crested Butte, Paonia, Ridgway, and Salida. Ridgway works with the four partner communities to promote visitor experiences, which include event programming and activities.

2021 grant funding will continue on the success built over the past three years. One of the primary deliverables for this year is a new CCC website. The RACC participated in the website subcommittee to provide feedback and content for the new website. We are happy to announce the website is now online, as well as the grant funded [promotional video](#) that was created in 2020. The website can be viewed at: <https://coloradocreativecorridor.com/>

We are excited for this project to continue to bring value to the business and creative economy for years to come, and look forward to this continuing to be an important example of the positive impact of Chamber/Town collaboration.

Online Media Assets: Website, Digital Newsletters & Social Media

RidgwayColorado.com remains the #1 Google search result for keyword "Ridgway Colorado" as well as other high value keywords. In general, average rankings continue to improve and overall keyword count is growing. We periodically review target keywords to establish content priorities and to track relevant topics. Improvements in general rankings have resulted in increased traffic to the site (for the quarter ending June 30, organic search is responsible for 83% of traffic to the site) with user visits up over 22% from the previous period. We will continue to invest in additional content and our staff to monitor the site and keep content updated.

A digital copy of the annual Visitor Guide is available as gated content on the website in various locations, including the homepage. Implemented in 2019, this strategy allows the RACC to continue to build out our lead database. All email leads are automatically added to our CRM system and sent the weekly e-blast or quarterly visitor news (based on user preferences). For the quarter ending June 30, the site captured 181 individual sign ups and 266 visitor guide downloads.

The weekly community e-blast continues to be sent out to a steadily growing list of 2,100 contacts. Newsletter content includes: business promotion, winter shop local campaign, special events, job opportunities and Chamber news. The RACC is currently working on a new automated newsletter campaign to our visitor newsletter list (6,000 contacts). The new drip campaign will send an automated email when users sign-up for the visitor newsletter, then periodic visitor newsletters after sign-up. This new system will ensure consistent emails to the visitor newsletter list, while allowing staff to focus on other tasks.

The RACC Instagram account, @RidgwayColorado, continues to be presented as a visitor-facing platform to promote Ridgway tourism assets and local businesses to potential visitors. All outdoor recreation related images include text on responsible travel best practices, such as Leave No Trace and Care for Colorado. The RACC Instagram account has 2,480 followers. Facebook continues to be a platform that we communicate to our local community with 2,185 followers.

Visitors Guide

In July, we will begin the process of planning the 2022 Ridgway Visitor Guide. The plan is to continue our partnership with BCI Media, which has produced and distributed the annual Visitor Guide since 2017. We will use our staff and contractors on content design, led by contractor, Tanya Ishikawa. Since January, the 2021 Ridgway Visitor Guide has been distributed in Ouray County and across the Western Slope. The goal is to distribute 30,000 print copies this year. An online version is available through our website.

Sustainable Tourism

For several years, the Chamber has been on a path to educate visitors on how best to enjoy our local resources. The pandemic and related visitor trends reinforced the need for us to support the community by promoting awareness of responsible, sustainable tourism practices. Part of this strategy includes the

continuation of strategically marketing Ridgway as a year-round destination. Since 2018, the Chamber has focused advertising dollars in the off-peak season of November through May.

Efforts for this year include banner text and link on the RidgwayColorado.com homepage that directs users to the Responsible Travel webpage. The Responsible Travel webpage includes best practices for outdoor recreation and COVID-19, as well as ways to enjoy Ridgway year-round and how to best support our local businesses and nonprofits. The Ridgway Visitor Center now has Leave No Trace brochures available for visitors. Volunteers are directed to hand out the brochures when visitors express interest in outdoor recreation experiences. In partnership with the US Forest Service, the Chamber will be hosting a Leave No Trace training at the Ridgway Visitor Center this July. The training will be available for visitor center volunteers and local businesses that talk with visitors about outdoor recreation opportunities.

Print Media

The Chamber coordinated co-op ads with local businesses in the 2021 San Juan Skyways publication. The San Juan Skyway is distributed throughout Colorado and is considered to be a marketing asset for local businesses as well as the Chamber. The San Juan Skyway magazine is available at the Ridgway Visitor Center. An online version of the magazine is available here: <https://pubhtml5.com/vedz/tztg>

In 2020, RACC staff updated and converted the True Grit Walking Tour brochure into a digital copy available on the [website](#). This spring, copies were printed, so that brochures are available for anyone stopping by the Ridgway Visitor Center. Other print media projects include advertising the reopening of the Ridgway Visitor Center in the Ouray County Plaindealer. Also, the Town and Chamber split the cost of the new Ridgway Visitor Center and Heritage Park sign that stands east of the building.

Ridgway Visitor Center

The Ridgway Visitor Center reopened its doors on May 28, 2021 after a year of being closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. RACC staff spent a bulk of time in May getting the space ready for the public, since the building had not been open since the Railroad Museum transitioned out of the space at the end of 2019. The Ridgway Visitor Center hours of operation for 2021 are Thursday through Sunday, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Volunteers are cleaning the restrooms once per day, and the space receives a thorough weekly cleaning to help mitigate risk of infections. The full article can be viewed here:

<https://ridgwaycolorado.com/news-events/ridgway-visitor-center-opens-may-28-for-2021-season>

The Chamber made several renovations to the building this spring in order to utilize unoccupied space and to make the building more COVID-safe. In partnership with the Town of Ridgway, the Chamber utilized CARES Act funding to purchase a new dutch door on the southside of the building and plexiglass for the front desk. The updates allow two options for volunteers to more safely interact with visitors. Other updates include a new wall and door on the west side of the building that allows visitors to use the restroom without walking through the building. The former museum space is being transformed into a new meeting venue and storage closet.

From January to June, Chamber staff and board members participated in the Ridgway Visitor Center and Heritage Park Advisory Committee. The purpose of the advisory committee was to convene local stakeholders to provide recommendations to the Town Council on implementation priorities and next steps for the current building and surrounding park space.

Youth Apprenticeship Program & Career Experience Fair

For the fourth time, the Ridgway Chamber helped organize the Ridgway Youth Volunteer & Career Fair at Ridgway High School to introduce students to job and volunteer opportunities. On April 21st, eight nonprofits and ten companies, as well as the Ouray County Sheriff's Office, Ouray Police Department, Ouray County Emergency Medical Service, Ridgway Volunteer Fire Department, and National Guard interacted with middle and high schoolers on the school's front lawn. Eight of the participating organizations were chamber members. Thirteen organizations were from Ridgway, six organizations were from Ouray, and two businesses were from Telluride. Approximately 100 high school students circulated around the tables for the first half hour of the fair, and approximately 80 middle school students visited the tables for the second half hour.

We sincerely thank the Town Council and staff for their support and partnership.



Ridgway Area Chamber of Commerce
Profit & Loss for Lodging Tax Class
 January through June 2021

	Jan - Jun 21
Ordinary Income/Expense	
Income	
Lodging Tax Income	22,930.64
Total Income	22,930.64
Gross Profit	22,930.64
Expense	
Advertising and Promotion	
Creative District Corridor	1,270.00
Online Media and Advertising,	4,682.41
Print Media and Advertising	2,324.53
Visitor's Guide Fullfillment, P	4,522.50
Website Upgrades and Operations	735.43
Total Advertising and Promotion	13,534.87
Dues and Subscriptions	418.65
Office Supplies	481.26
Over / short	40.00
Payroll Expenses	
Hourly Wages	504.00
Payroll Taxes	38.56
Payroll Expenses - Other	3.02
Total Payroll Expenses	545.58
Postage	44.31
Professional Fees	
Accounting Fees	1,976.31
Total Professional Fees	1,976.31
Subcontractors	12,693.00
Sustainable Tourism	225.00
Visitor Center Operations	
Electric	330.16
Natural Gas	169.67
Property & Liability Insurance	857.00
Telephone and Internet	673.02
Trash	12.57
Water & Sewer	435.00
Total Visitor Center Operations	2,477.42
Visitor Center Redesign	2,624.11
Visitor Center Marketing/Merch	84.78
Total Expense	35,145.29
Net Ordinary Income	-12,214.65
Net Income	-12,214.65