

Custer County's Tourism Board was able to accomplish many goals this past year in marketing two very strong assets that can be enjoyed by everyone. First is the spectacular scenery in the valley with the panoramic view of the Sangre de Cristo Mountain range. Our geography is very unique and beautiful scenery is a top attraction. Second is our star-filled night sky. We are well placed to take advantage of the current trends in travel: digital detox, roads less travelled, adventure heading in wild(life) directions, astro-tourism and the desire to slow down. We've got it all!

- The tagline "*Come for the mountains. Stay for the stars.*" captured the essence of Custer County. This year's marketing campaign took advantage of the whimsical "Westcliffe" mural. The stickers were a big hit with citizens and visitors alike.
- We received three marketing grants from Colorado Tourism Office for 2020. The collaborative \$25K Marketing Matching Grant will establish a Colorado Stargazing, Experience the Night itinerary with Huerfano, San Luis Valley and Mineral counties; the \$15K Tourism Development Grant will help develop a fresh brand; and the \$10K Arts & Antiques tour is in partnership with Florence.
- In 2019 we provided \$500 grants to five local non-profits to promote their events to bring visitors into town. We increased the budget for Partner Grants and recently awarded \$5,000 to seven non-profits for 2020 events.
- Our Facebook and Instagram accounts have greatly increased in activity thanks to frequent posts that highlight local scenery, activities and events. Sharing rates are high, and it is common to see people stating their plans to visit. Much of the success we are seeing is due to strategically marketing key posts to target groups outside of the area. We created an Instagram presence from zero with over 160 website clicks from the Instagram profile.
- Custer County public relations highlights include booking esteemed journalists for press tours in the fall. Articles in the *Denver Post*, *New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *ThinkColorado.com*, *West of 105*, *5280*, *Vail Daily*, *San Antonio Magazine*, *OutThereColorado.com* and several travel blogs. Inclusion in widely circulated Colorado.com press releases, many of which featured travel deals for local lodging providers.
- A monthly e-newsletter showcases attractions, activities, events and local businesses. Our email database has increased significantly, growing by 236% to 1,076 subscribers since the beginning of the year. On average for this year, the open rate is 45% with about 15.5% of subscribers clicking through to the website. These numbers are far above the industry average.
- Board members attended many industry conferences to network and learn from other communities to share ideas including the Governor's Tourism Conference. Bylaws were updated from the last revision done in 2012.
- VisitCusterCounty.com has fresh content of images, videos and articles to promote who we are and what we have to offer. A growing pool of talented photographers keep the website stocked with stunning pictures, while

cinematographer and board member Bob Swanson has contributed his expertise on a video project that would have cost tens of thousands of dollars to produce otherwise. The site's homepage has been upgraded to include more images, upcoming events and teasers to key areas of the website. The website saw more than 64,000 unique sessions this year (up from 17,000 in the previous year) with more than 127,000 page views.

- Visitor's Surveys were available throughout the summer to evaluate where visitors heard about Custer County and why they come here. Thank you to all the family & friends that encouraged their family and friends to visit here as that was by far the number one way visitors heard about us. You are spreading the good word. Folks came here for many outdoor reasons, festivals and shopping with stargazing clearly on the top of the list.
- International media reports an increased interest in the importance of preserving the night sky. We are proud to be the first International Dark Sky Community in Colorado even though we are no longer the only one. Next year we celebrate the fifth anniversary of becoming a certified Dark Sky Community with the Sangre Star Festival in June 2020. Dark Skies is leading the effort to bring citizens and organizations together to make the event a community endeavor, and the Tourism Board is taking an active role in marketing the experience outside of the area through public relations, Facebook and e-newsletter. This is a stellar community collaboration of sharing the best of who we are, day and night! For a full itinerary of the three day event, go to SangreStarFestival.com.

There are a lot of wonderful things happening in our marketing efforts to promote sustainable tourism for Custer County. Tourism board meetings are the second Tuesday of each month (except in July) from 9 to 11 AM held at the Westcliffe Town Hall. We welcome public input as we move forward in 2020. Thank you.

Custer County Tourism Board

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