

Tourist Development Council

Applicant Package - Involved in Tourist Industry/Tourist Development

Tourist Development Council - Involved in Tourist Industry/Tourist Development

Term 01 Oct 2025 - 30 Sep 2029

Positions Available 2

Number of applicants in this package 3

- Johnson, Greg
- Porter, Erin
- Smith, Julie

Name: Johnson, Greg

Address: 5437 NW 46th Terrace, FL, 32653

Email: gregjohnson2@icloud.com

Board Name: Tourist Development Council

Primary Phone:

352-281-1249

Please list any civic and professional accomplishments/honors, training or experience related to this appointment::

President The Gainesville Orchestra

Please list any current/previous Advisory Board appointments:

Chamber of Commerce board of directors

What Contributions do you feel you could make if you were selected to this board?:

Extensive knowledge of the local business and arts community

Please Agree with the following statements:

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Yes

Note: This question is for the Gainesville-Alachua County Airport Authority Board

Do you currently hold any publicly elected office in the State of Florida?:

No

Employer :

Coldwell Banker

Occupation:

Commercial Realtor

Are you currently serving, or have you ever served, on an Alachua County advisory board? :

No

I do hereby attest that, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- 1. I have maintained good moral character throughout my personal and professional life.**
- 2. I have not engaged in any conduct or behavior that would reflect adversely on my honesty, integrity, or ethical standards.**
- 3. I have not been convicted of any felony or misdemeanor involving dishonesty, fraud, or moral turpitude.**
- 4. I have adhered to all applicable laws and regulations in my personal and professional dealings.**
- 5. I strive to uphold the principles of fairness, respect, and responsibility in all my interactions.:**

Yes

Time of Submission: 10/14/25 3:42:04 PM

Attachments

- Greg Johnson-CoverLetter.pdf

Greg Johnson
Commercial Realtor
Coldwell Banker/MM Parrish Realtors
Cell phone: 352-281-1240
5830 NW 39th Avenue
Gainesville, FL 32606

My 6 years as a member of the board of directors of The Gainesville Area Chamber of Commerce made it possible for me to be very involved with economic development and the fact that all companies who showed interest in our area always inquired about what we had to offer their employees in quality of life such as the arts! It showed me that the arts are not only for our enjoyment but also have a huge economic impact on our community. I also served on the steering committee that created the Innovation Square and Chaired the Small Business Council. Serving for the past 11 years as president of The Gainesville Orchestra has reinforced my understanding of the importance of arts in our community.

Name: Porter, Erin

Address: Gainesville Regional Airport, 3800 NE 39th Ave., Suite A, Gainesville, 32609

Email: erin.porter@flygainesville.com

Board Name: Tourist Development Council

Primary Phone:

3526816786 (cell)

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I am actively involved in Alachua County Hospitality Council, area chambers (Gainesville, Ocala, Alachua). I serve as the airport's Marketing, Public Relations, Government Relations and Air Service Development Manager. I have spent the majority of my career in aviation marketing, and also spent five years working for Hilton Hotels Corporation at their headquarters in Beverly Hills as Manager of Special Projects. I was nominated for and won the Fierce Award (Guide to Greater Gainesville) in 2022.

Please list any current/previous Advisory Board appointments:

Served on the TDC for one term starting 2018. Currently serve on Gainesville Chamber Economic Development Committee.

What Contributions do you feel you could make if you were selected to this board?:

The airport is a critical part of the hospitality and economic landscape in our community. We work hand in glove with the other members of our community to bring people in and out of our community safely and efficiently. During my eight years at GNV, the airport has undergone extensive renovations and improvements, including the expansion of some key routes, such as DFW. I have collaborated with many members of this organization and cherish our relationship.

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If so, please disclose the nature of the transaction.:

As an employee, I attend monthly board meetings and present whatever information the board requires of me, including annual marketing budget and whatever other projects or information they need.

Employer :

Gainesville Regional Airport

Occupation:

Manager, Marketing and Public Relations

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Yes

Time of Submission: 10/08/25 2:50:10 PM

Attachments

- Erin Porter-Resume.pdf

ERIN E. PORTER

10000 SW 52nd Ave, #EE183 ♦ Gainesville, FL 32608 ♦ (703) 395-2141

<http://bit.ly/4oGDCdZ>

erin.porter@flygainesville.com or erinporterinc@gmail.com

CAREER SUMMARY

Media, public relations and project management professional passionate about creating and executing clear communications programs and plans to define, unlock and attain short and long term goals and identify new opportunities. Recognized for developing strong relationships across organizations and for a collaborative, supportive leadership style that develops and fosters high performing teams. This proven leadership has driven results in both large and small organizations including Gainesville Regional Airport, Hilton Hotels Corporation, Virgin Group of Companies and the National Park Service, in addition to numerous consulting clients.

Media and Public Relations ♦ Project Management ♦ Operations Analysis ♦ Business Development
Marketing ♦ Events Management ♦ Protocol ♦ Book and Documentary Film Production

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

GAINESVILLE REGIONAL AIRPORT, Gainesville, FL

Feb 2018-present

Manager, Public Relations and Marketing

Responsible for marketing, public relations, media, government relations, special events and air service development for Gainesville Regional Airport in Gainesville, Fla. Representative of the airport in civic, community and industry organizations and events.

ERIN PORTER ASSOCIATES, Inc., Wayzata, MN /Alexandria, VA/Wilmington, NC/Gainesville, FL

2004-present

Strategic public relations and project management consulting firm

President

Provide consulting in the areas of business development, project planning, media, marketing, public relations, social media, special events, research projects, technical writing, report preparation and analysis, complete and accurate proposal writing, speechwriting, logistics, web design and operations analysis for international clientele including Virgin Group of Companies (multinational conglomerate), Wolf Marketing and Media (healthcare marketing services and publishing company); Cruiser Aircraft Inc. (exclusive Western Hemisphere distributor of Czech Sport Aircraft); Seahawk Innovation (Innovation incubator where my clients included SportGait, a concussion management software company and SeekerDNA, a synthetic DNA company); American Society of Consultant Pharmacists (healthcare association), SONIFI Solutions (entertainment/media), Mineseeker Foundation (charitable organization that uses technology to seek and destroy landmines) and numerous consulting clients.

REACTRIX SYSTEMS, Inc., Redwood City, CA. 2004-2008

Interactive digital media and technology services start-up in the Silicon Valley

Divisional Manager

Held multiple leadership positions overseeing venue management and client relationships at 80+ venues in Chicago, Dallas, Detroit, Houston, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Cleveland, Cincinnati, St. Louis and Milwaukee. Reactrix's customers included Simon, General Growth Properties, Westfield, Best Buy, National Cinemedia, and National Amusements; numerous trade shows and special events around the globe. Led efforts in business development, field operations, customer service, pilot program management, technical manuals, budgeting, content and creative development, site selection, trade show coordination (including Consumer Electronics

Show,) executive-level video presentations and briefs. Other positions held include Senior Regional Manager, Operations; Field Service Supervisor (overseeing and staffing management of nationwide Field Service Representatives for over 170 venues in the top 70 Demographic Market Areas in the United States); Field Sales Representative and Sales Service Executive.

- Facilitated brand positioning development and Business Development Services to establish Reactrix as a compelling new medium
- Created and executed site selection and installation plans, including field service programs
- Led nationwide field service program
- Spearheaded field research program and made strategic recommendations to home office

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, First Flight Centennial

2003

Media and Public Information Specialist

In 2003, I served as Media and Public Information Specialist for the First Flight Centennial at Wright Brothers National Memorial, creating and executing yearlong special events and managing international media relations. Directed communication flow and maintained internal and external relationships between the project, the U.S. Centennial Committee and other partners such as AOPA and EAA, ensuring contracts were conducted within National Park Service standards. In addition to the yearlong centennial- related special events at Wright Brothers National Memorial, I managed the week-long December celebration, attended by the President of the United States; the 100 heroes of aviation and aerospace, VIPS from government, military, aviation and aerospace industry and over 800 international media representatives.

SOUTHWEST CONFERENCE PLANNERS, Inc., Scottsdale, AZ

1/2011 – 9/2001

Full-service Destination Management Company

Program Manager - Operations

Responsibilities included thorough planning and execution of programs consisting of special events, corporate launches, ground and air transportation, teambuilding and tours for Fortune 500 Companies. Responsible for creating the company's manuals, budgeting, monitoring our website and promoting SWCP's services to its clientele.

COMMUNICATION LINKS, Scottsdale, AZ

12/1999 – 12/2000

Public Relations and Advertising Agency with nationwide golf-related clients

Account Executive

Developed marketing/public relations strategy, imaging, corporate brochures and project collateral, communications protocols, advertising and websites for Discovery Land Company's properties, including The Estancia Club, Iron Horse, The Santa Lucia Preserve; Kuki'o; The Vaquero Club and Red Cedar. Wrote comparative analyses, conducted historic and photographic research, developed budgets and advertising campaigns for Grayhawk Development's Whisper Rock and Glenwild projects. Created special events, including Xerox Fun Day and Host Day for the 2000 and 2001 Phoenix Open. Incorporated novel ideas and secured donated prizes in excess of \$10,000. Collateral development and publicity for The Detour, a charity golf tournament and concert, benefiting Helping Hands for the Homeless.

VIRGIN GLOBAL CHALLENGER AROUND-THE -WORLD BALLOON PROJECT,

London, England

10/1995 - 3/1999

Director of Protocol

Led diplomatic efforts and secured overflight permission from nearly 100 countries on behalf of Sir Richard Branson, Steve Fossett and Per Lindstrand during their attempts to be the first team to circumnavigate the earth by manned balloon. Served as liaison between project and network of over 400 individuals worldwide, including London-based embassies, British embassies overseas, civil aviation authorities, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and the *Fédération Aéronautique Internationale* (FAI). Assisted with operations, test flight coordination, sponsorship, media relations and trade show exhibits. Coordinated Survivors' Ball Fundraiser (1200+ attendees) for the Queen Elizabeth Disabled Foundation at the Commonwealth Institute, London.

AMBASSADORIAL HOSPITALITY COMMITTEE FOR THE 1996 REPUBLICAN NATIONAL CONVENTION, San Diego, California

6/1996 - 9/1996

Executive Director

Directed and supervised activities of 18-person committee dedicated to the hospitality, transportation, security, logistics and special needs of the Washington, DC-based Chiefs of Diplomatic Missions and spouses, representing 80 countries, who attended the 1996 Republican National Convention in San Diego. Served as liaison between Ambassadorial Hospitality Committee and the U.S. Department of State – Office of Protocol, San Diego Host Committee, Mayor's Office, Diplomatic Security, California Highway Patrol, hosts and sponsors, including United Airlines, Bechtel Group, Inc., Gulfstream Aircraft, Inc., and Qualcomm, Inc.

HILTON HOTELS CORPORATION, Beverly Hills, California

6/1992 - 10/1995

Global hospitality company

Manager, Special Projects /Project Consultant, Marketing and Public Relations

Executed various corporate marketing projects, including ongoing competitive research, benchmarking, research for trademark activity, retail programs, special attractions, guest award programs and related assignments. Review and execution of select sponsorship opportunities and promotions. Reported directly to Chairman Barron Hilton on the Earthwinds Hilton Project, an attempt to be the first manned, non-stop global circumnavigation by balloon. Led communication efforts between project and sponsors, key agency personnel and worldwide media. Acted as media spokesperson and facilitated interviews for key project personnel. Managed sponsorship, video production, VIP hospitality, creation of public relations materials and marketing of promotional merchandise. Public speaker to various civic, aviation, scientific and engineering groups. Coordinated project newsletter, educational displays, planetarium, museum, trade show and aviation-related exhibits, presentations and volunteer activities.

EDUCATION

University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, College of Journalism and Communications BS, Broadcast Production

CERTIFICATIONS

I am in the process of obtaining my PMP (Project Management Professional) Certification

OTHER ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Recipient of Guide to Greater Gainesville Fierce Award – 2022
 - Served on the Tourism Development Committee in Gainesville, Florida in 2022
 - Serve on the Greater Gainesville Chamber's Economic Development Committee
 - Actively involved in Living Legends of Aviation
 - I have worked as a production and research assistant on one documentary film, "How Strong is the Wind," on the Wright Brothers, based on the award-winning book, "Kill Devil Hill" by Harry B. Combs
 - I assisted in the research and writing of several books, including "The Legend of the Painted Horse," and "Brules" by Harry B. Combs.
 - I am currently collaborating on a book project with Virgin about various global ballooning attempts.
-

Name: Smith, Julie

Address: 14924 NW 125th Street, Alachua Florida, 32615

Email: Julie@highspringswhatshappening.com

Board Name: Tourist Development Council

Primary Phone:

352-857-9037

Please list any civic and professional accomplishments/honors, training or experience related to this appointment::

Santa Fe College CIED – Contracted for outreach and business connectivity Blount Hall.
Alachua Chamber of Commerce – Active partner promoting all events and fundraisers
Greater Gainesville Chamber Partner – Building rural small business resource links.
Alachua Business League – Board Member, supporting entrepreneurship and local business growth. Alachua Fall Harvest Festival B – Organizer and promoter of 240+ vendor festivals with 10,000+ attendees. Visit Natural North Florida Tourism Task Force – Advocate for ecotourism opportunities across the region. Alachua Hospitality Council – Monthly participant, fostering county-wide tourism relationships. High Springs Business Networking - Organizer and Promoter She Means Business - Local Business networking for Woman only in Gainesville Gainesville Woman’s Club – Active contributor to civic and hospitality initiatives. Gainesville Business and Real Estate Professionals Networking - Monthly Networking Group in Gainesville

Please list any current/previous Advisory Board appointments:

Visit Natural North Florida Tourism Task Force

What Contributions do you feel you could make if you were selected to this board?:

If selected to serve on the Tourism Development Council Advisory Board, I would bring a unique combination of public relations expertise, business development experience, and ecotourism advocacy from the private sector as the voice of local business owners in Alachua County especially the western sector where tourism is the main source of revenue for local business owners. I will also ensure that local businesses understand the TDC mission to strengthen and expand Alachua County's tourism economy and resources available for such. My contributions would include: Representation for Western Alachua County: High Springs and surrounding rural communities are home to some of the county's most valuable natural and cultural assets—springs, rivers, trails, outfitters, and family-owned businesses—that are often underrepresented in countywide tourism grant funding and marketing resources acknowledgement . Small Business & Tourism Advocacy: With 25+ years of hospitality and business leadership experience, and as the founder of High Springs What's Happening LLC, I understand the direct connection between tourism traffic and the survival of local businesses dependent on ecotourism. I would contribute strategies that highlight the TDC initiatives that can support their restaurants, lodging, outfitters, and retail in our smaller municipalities with grant funding. Marketing & Digital Media Expertise: My professional background includes building a trusted platform of 30,000+ community members, producing successful grassroots marketing campaigns, and mentoring over 195 local business sponsors with valuable insights into how digital platforms and authentic storytelling can extend Alachua County's tourism reach, particularly in ecotourism. Community Engagement & Transparency: I specialize in connecting residents, businesses, and government through accessible communication. This experience can help the Council strengthen public trust and community buy-in for tourism initiatives, while fostering collaboration across municipalities. Tourism Development with Sustainability in Mind: My passion for ecotourism ensures I will advocate for balanced growth—promoting tourism that preserves our natural resources, elevates family-centered experiences, and contributes to long-term economic sustainability. In summary, I would bring the perspective of a business owner, community advocate, and tourism professional who has both on-the-ground experience and a proven record of building engagement. My role on the board would focus on ensuring that Alachua County's western communities are fully represented, that local businesses benefit from tourism investment, and that our county continues to grow as a destination rooted in natural beauty, economic opportunity, and community pride.

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Yes

Note: This question is for the Gainesville-Alachua County Airport Authority Board

Do you currently hold any publicly elected office in the State of Florida?:

No

Note: This question is for the Gainesville-Alachua County Airport Authority Board

Have you, as yourself or as an employee, agent or consultant for another person or legal entity, transacted business with the authority within the last 3 years?:

No

Employer :

High Springs What's Happening llc

Occupation:

Founder

Are you currently serving, or have you ever served, on an Alachua County advisory board? :

Yes

If yes, please list board(s):

Visit Natural North Florida Tourism Task Force

I do hereby attest that, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- 1. I have maintained good moral character throughout my personal and professional life.**
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Yes

Time of Submission: 10/07/25 2:47:17 PM

Attachments

Why am I Seeking This Advisory Appointment?

As someone with over three decades of experience in hospitality, public relations, and community development—and as the founder of a platform dedicated to locally owned small business and tourism visibility—I see a critical need for stronger representation of western Alachua County on the Tourism Development Council.

High Springs and its surrounding areas depend heavily on ecotourism and the preservation of our natural resources, such as the Santa Fe River, springs, and trail systems. Small businesses here—restaurants, outfitters, lodging, and retail—rely on tourism as their lifeline. While Gainesville and Alachua County benefit from established visibility, the western side often lacks the same access to resources, marketing, and council-level advocacy due to a lack of digital asset knowledge and availability.

My background uniquely positions me to bridge this gap. Through High Springs What's Happening LLC, I actively spotlight local businesses, manage community-driven tourism campaigns, and build trusted connections between residents, entrepreneurs, and visitors. I believe the Tourism Development Council needs a voice who not only understands ecotourism but is deeply embedded in the daily challenges and opportunities of businesses in High Springs, Alachua, Newberry and the surrounding areas.

By serving on this advisory board, I will ensure that the valuable assets of western Alachua County—its springs, rivers, festivals, small businesses, and family-centered culture—receive a voice and support as part of our countywide tourism strategy and resources available, especially grant opportunities.

Thank you for your consideration of my appointment to the Alachua County TDC.

Julie Smith

Founder/Owner – High Springs What's Happening

☎ 352-857-9037 – ✉ julie@highspringswhatshappening.com

Julie Smith

Public Relations | Community Advocate | Executive Administrator

About Me

Vision-driven public relations and business development professional with a deep passion for supporting small business growth, advancing local tourism, and fostering community engagement through authentic storytelling and digital media assets accessibility.

Founder and operator of High Springs What's Happening LLC, a B2C Facebook platform with 30,000+ members built to strengthen North Florida's economy by spotlighting businesses, events, and government transparency.

Honors & Recognition

- Recipient of the 2024 ABLe Award (Alachua Business League) for:
 - Actively engaging with the community
 - Believing in others and their potential
 - Leading with heart and purpose
 - Elevating local business visibility

Dedicated to helping North Florida's entrepreneurial and ecotourism ecosystem thrive through collaboration, education, and community-first messaging.

Professional Experience

Founder / Owner - High Springs What's Happening LLC | 2020 – Present

- Built and grew a trusted hyperlocal social media platform to 30,000+ verified members.
- Onboarded and promoted 195+ pre approved paid business sponsors offering one on one digital asset tutorials (Chat GPT), and weekly content creation options, Google Meta ads and Word press website development. .
- Delivered public-facing updates on city planning, governance, real estate, nonprofits, and ecotourism.
- Serve as a "lifeline" for local business owners—providing content coaching, marketing mentorship, and engagement strategies.

Executive Administrator & PR Lead

Anderson's Outdoor Adventures | 2021 – 2023

- Managed PR, compliance, and HR for a premier outdoor outfitter.
- Designed campaigns such as "Wildlife Wednesday" to drive awareness.
- Oversaw DBPR inspections, FDEP contracts, HR onboarding, and insurance compliance.

Public Relations Consultant

Pink Flamingo Diner (Karl Spain Developments) | 2022 – 2023

- Promoted multi-phase renovations with ribbon cuttings, press releases, and digital countdown campaigns.
 - Increased public engagement by highlighting new attractions including a bandstand and putt-putt course.
-

Political Campaign Social Media Manager

High Springs City Commission Races

- Led digital branding and social strategy for Commissioner Chad Howell and Candidate Sue Weller.
 - Set up and manage campaign platforms across Gmail, Google Drive, and Meta.
-

Digital Tools & Platforms

- Social Media: Meta Business Suite, Instagram, Facebook Ads
 - Finance & Payroll: QuickBooks, ADP, Square, Peek Reservations
 - HR & Compliance: FrankCrum, Blue Cross, Colonial Insurance
 - POS & Sales: Toast, Aloha, Schedulefly
 - Productivity: Google Workspace, Microsoft Office, Salesforce, Zoho CRM
-

Education & Certifications

- Business Law & Marketing Studies – Daytona State College (1998–2004)
 - Licensed Florida Realtor – Active since 1998
 - ServSafe Manager Certification – Current through 2028
 - 25+ Years of Hospitality Leadership Experience)
-

Community Involvement & Leadership

- Santa Fe College CIED – Contracted for outreach and business connectivity Blount Hall.
- Alachua Chamber of Commerce – Active partner promoting all events and fundraisers
- Greater Gainesville Chamber Partner – Building rural small business resource links.
- Alachua Business League – Board Member, supporting entrepreneurship and local business growth.
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- Visit Natural North Florida Tourism Task Force – Advocate for ecotourism opportunities across the region.
- Alachua Hospitality Council – Monthly participant, fostering county-wide tourism relationships.
- High Springs Business Networking - Organizer and Promoter
- She Means Business - Local Business networking for Woman only in Gainesville
- Gainesville Woman's Club – Active contributor to civic and hospitality initiatives.
- Gainesville Business and Real Estate Professionals Networking - Monthly Networking Group in Gainesville

Personal Life & Values

- Married 17 years to Bill Smith, Cox Communications Engineer (led \$4.5M High Springs build-out).
- Proud mother of Morgan (Office Manager) and Wyatt (U.S. Army Intelligence Staff Sergeant).
- Grandmother to Rowan (4) and Sebastian (8 months)—my inspiration for family-first community values.
- Passionate advocate for North Florida's natural resources—paddleboarding the Santa Fe River, fishing, and promoting ecotourism.

Let's Build Together

My vision is to grow High Springs What's Happening into a replicable digital incubator model supporting small businesses across rural towns. Partnering with Santa Fe College's Entrepreneurship Incubator would be a transformational step forward in shaping sustainable tourism and economic opportunity for North Florida.

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Address: 5437 NW 46th Terrace, FL, 32653

Email: gregjohnson2@icloud.com

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President The Gainesville Orchestra

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- 2. I have not engaged in any conduct or behavior that would reflect adversely on my honesty, integrity, or ethical standards.**
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- 4. I have adhered to all applicable laws and regulations in my personal and professional dealings.**
- 5. I strive to uphold the principles of fairness, respect, and responsibility in all my interactions.:**

Yes

Time of Submission: 10/08/25 2:50:10 PM

Name: Smith, Julie

Address: 14924 NW 125th Street, Alachua Florida, 32615

Email: Julie@highspringswhatshappening.com

Board Name: Tourist Development Council

Primary Phone:

352-857-9037

Please list any civic and professional accomplishments/honors, training or experience related to this appointment::

Santa Fe College CIED – Contracted for outreach and business connectivity Blount Hall.
Alachua Chamber of Commerce – Active partner promoting all events and fundraisers
Greater Gainesville Chamber Partner – Building rural small business resource links.
Alachua Business League – Board Member, supporting entrepreneurship and local business growth. Alachua Fall Harvest Festival B – Organizer and promoter of 240+ vendor festivals with 10,000+ attendees. Visit Natural North Florida Tourism Task Force – Advocate for ecotourism opportunities across the region. Alachua Hospitality Council – Monthly participant, fostering county-wide tourism relationships. High Springs Business Networking - Organizer and Promoter She Means Business - Local Business networking for Woman only in Gainesville Gainesville Woman’s Club – Active contributor to civic and hospitality initiatives. Gainesville Business and Real Estate Professionals Networking - Monthly Networking Group in Gainesville

Please list any current/previous Advisory Board appointments:

Visit Natural North Florida Tourism Task Force

What Contributions do you feel you could make if you were selected to this board?:

If selected to serve on the Tourism Development Council Advisory Board, I would bring a unique combination of public relations expertise, business development experience, and ecotourism advocacy from the private sector as the voice of local business owners in Alachua County especially the western sector where tourism is the main source of revenue for local business owners. I will also ensure that local businesses understand the TDC mission to strengthen and expand Alachua County's tourism economy and resources available for such. My contributions would include: Representation for Western Alachua County: High Springs and surrounding rural communities are home to some of the county's most valuable natural and cultural assets—springs, rivers, trails, outfitters, and family-owned businesses—that are often underrepresented in countywide tourism grant funding and marketing resources acknowledgement . Small Business & Tourism Advocacy: With 25+ years of hospitality and business leadership experience, and as the founder of High Springs What's Happening LLC, I understand the direct connection between tourism traffic and the survival of local businesses dependent on ecotourism. I would contribute strategies that highlight the TDC initiatives that can support their restaurants, lodging, outfitters, and retail in our smaller municipalities with grant funding. Marketing & Digital Media Expertise: My professional background includes building a trusted platform of 30,000+ community members, producing successful grassroots marketing campaigns, and mentoring over 195 local business sponsors with valuable insights into how digital platforms and authentic storytelling can extend Alachua County's tourism reach, particularly in ecotourism. Community Engagement & Transparency: I specialize in connecting residents, businesses, and government through accessible communication. This experience can help the Council strengthen public trust and community buy-in for tourism initiatives, while fostering collaboration across municipalities. Tourism Development with Sustainability in Mind: My passion for ecotourism ensures I will advocate for balanced growth—promoting tourism that preserves our natural resources, elevates family-centered experiences, and contributes to long-term economic sustainability. In summary, I would bring the perspective of a business owner, community advocate, and tourism professional who has both on-the-ground experience and a proven record of building engagement. My role on the board would focus on ensuring that Alachua County's western communities are fully represented, that local businesses benefit from tourism investment, and that our county continues to grow as a destination rooted in natural beauty, economic opportunity, and community pride.

Please Agree with the following statements:

I understand this application is the property of Alachua County and subject to public records laws. I hereby certify that the statements made on this application are true and correct. I understand that Appointees to advisory board/committees are required to attend scheduled meetings as specified in the "Guidelines for Citizen Advisory Boards and Committees". I understand that some boards and committees require Financial Disclosure (Chapter 112, Florida Statutes) and I am willing to file if required. I affirm that my personal and business (if applicable) affairs within Alachua County are in substantial compliance with all county regulatory and taxing authorities rules and regulations?:

Yes

Note: This question is for the Gainesville-Alachua County Airport Authority Board

Do you currently hold any publicly elected office in the State of Florida?:

No

Note: This question is for the Gainesville-Alachua County Airport Authority Board

Have you, as yourself or as an employee, agent or consultant for another person or legal entity, transacted business with the authority within the last 3 years?:

No

Employer :

High Springs What's Happening llc

Occupation:

Founder

Are you currently serving, or have you ever served, on an Alachua County advisory board? :

Yes

If yes, please list board(s):

Visit Natural North Florida Tourism Task Force

I do hereby attest that, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- 1. I have maintained good moral character throughout my personal and professional life.**
- 2. I have not engaged in any conduct or behavior that would reflect adversely on my honesty, integrity, or ethical standards.**
- 3. I have not been convicted of any felony or misdemeanor involving dishonesty, fraud, or moral turpitude.**
- 4. I have adhered to all applicable laws and regulations in my personal and professional dealings.**
- 5. I strive to uphold the principles of fairness, respect, and responsibility in all my interactions.:**

Yes

Time of Submission: 10/07/25 2:47:17 PM

Attachments

Why am I Seeking This Advisory Appointment?

As someone with over three decades of experience in hospitality, public relations, and community development—and as the founder of a platform dedicated to locally owned small business and tourism visibility—I see a critical need for stronger representation of western Alachua County on the Tourism Development Council.

High Springs and its surrounding areas depend heavily on ecotourism and the preservation of our natural resources, such as the Santa Fe River, springs, and trail systems. Small businesses here—restaurants, outfitters, lodging, and retail—rely on tourism as their lifeline. While Gainesville and Alachua County benefit from established visibility, the western side often lacks the same access to resources, marketing, and council-level advocacy due to a lack of digital asset knowledge and availability.

My background uniquely positions me to bridge this gap. Through High Springs What's Happening LLC, I actively spotlight local businesses, manage community-driven tourism campaigns, and build trusted connections between residents, entrepreneurs, and visitors. I believe the Tourism Development Council needs a voice who not only understands ecotourism but is deeply embedded in the daily challenges and opportunities of businesses in High Springs, Alachua, Newberry and the surrounding areas.

By serving on this advisory board, I will ensure that the valuable assets of western Alachua County—its springs, rivers, festivals, small businesses, and family-centered culture—receive a voice and support as part of our countywide tourism strategy and resources available, especially grant opportunities.

Thank you for your consideration of my appointment to the Alachua County TDC.

Julie Smith

Founder/Owner – High Springs What's Happening

☎ 352-857-9037 – ✉ julie@highspringswhatshappening.com

Julie Smith

Public Relations | Community Advocate | Executive Administrator

About Me

Vision-driven public relations and business development professional with a deep passion for supporting small business growth, advancing local tourism, and fostering community engagement through authentic storytelling and digital media assets accessibility.

Founder and operator of High Springs What's Happening LLC, a B2C Facebook platform with 30,000+ members built to strengthen North Florida's economy by spotlighting businesses, events, and government transparency.

Honors & Recognition

- Recipient of the 2024 ABLe Award (Alachua Business League) for:
 - Actively engaging with the community
 - Believing in others and their potential
 - Leading with heart and purpose
 - Elevating local business visibility

Dedicated to helping North Florida's entrepreneurial and ecotourism ecosystem thrive through collaboration, education, and community-first messaging.

Professional Experience

Founder / Owner - High Springs What's Happening LLC | 2020 – Present

- Built and grew a trusted hyperlocal social media platform to 30,000+ verified members.
- Onboarded and promoted 195+ pre approved paid business sponsors offering one on one digital asset tutorials (Chat GPT), and weekly content creation options, Google Meta ads and Word press website development. .
- Delivered public-facing updates on city planning, governance, real estate, nonprofits, and ecotourism.
- Serve as a "lifeline" for local business owners—providing content coaching, marketing mentorship, and engagement strategies.

Executive Administrator & PR Lead

Anderson's Outdoor Adventures | 2021 – 2023

- Managed PR, compliance, and HR for a premier outdoor outfitter.
- Designed campaigns such as "Wildlife Wednesday" to drive awareness.
- Oversaw DBPR inspections, FDEP contracts, HR onboarding, and insurance compliance.

Public Relations Consultant

Pink Flamingo Diner (Karl Spain Developments) | 2022 – 2023

- Promoted multi-phase renovations with ribbon cuttings, press releases, and digital countdown campaigns.
 - Increased public engagement by highlighting new attractions including a bandstand and putt-putt course.
-

Political Campaign Social Media Manager

High Springs City Commission Races

- Led digital branding and social strategy for Commissioner Chad Howell and Candidate Sue Weller.
 - Set up and manage campaign platforms across Gmail, Google Drive, and Meta.
-

Digital Tools & Platforms

- Social Media: Meta Business Suite, Instagram, Facebook Ads
 - Finance & Payroll: QuickBooks, ADP, Square, Peek Reservations
 - HR & Compliance: FrankCrum, Blue Cross, Colonial Insurance
 - POS & Sales: Toast, Aloha, Schedulefly
 - Productivity: Google Workspace, Microsoft Office, Salesforce, Zoho CRM
-

Education & Certifications

- Business Law & Marketing Studies – Daytona State College (1998–2004)
 - Licensed Florida Realtor – Active since 1998
 - ServSafe Manager Certification – Current through 2028
 - 25+ Years of Hospitality Leadership Experience)
-

Community Involvement & Leadership

- Santa Fe College CIED – Contracted for outreach and business connectivity Blount Hall.
- Alachua Chamber of Commerce – Active partner promoting all events and fundraisers
- Greater Gainesville Chamber Partner – Building rural small business resource links.
- Alachua Business League – Board Member, supporting entrepreneurship and local business growth.
- Alachua Fall Harvest Festival B – Organizer and promoter of 240+ vendor festivals with 10,000+ attendees.
- Visit Natural North Florida Tourism Task Force – Advocate for ecotourism opportunities across the region.
- Alachua Hospitality Council – Monthly participant, fostering county-wide tourism relationships.
- High Springs Business Networking - Organizer and Promoter
- She Means Business - Local Business networking for Woman only in Gainesville
- Gainesville Woman's Club – Active contributor to civic and hospitality initiatives.
- Gainesville Business and Real Estate Professionals Networking - Monthly Networking Group in Gainesville

Personal Life & Values

- Married 17 years to Bill Smith, Cox Communications Engineer (led \$4.5M High Springs build-out).
- Proud mother of Morgan (Office Manager) and Wyatt (U.S. Army Intelligence Staff Sergeant).
- Grandmother to Rowan (4) and Sebastian (8 months)—my inspiration for family-first community values.
- Passionate advocate for North Florida's natural resources—paddleboarding the Santa Fe River, fishing, and promoting ecotourism.

Let's Build Together

My vision is to grow High Springs What's Happening into a replicable digital incubator model supporting small businesses across rural towns. Partnering with Santa Fe College's Entrepreneurship Incubator would be a transformational step forward in shaping sustainable tourism and economic opportunity for North Florida.

