

From the hit HGTV show

“Home Town Take Over”

to

DESTINATION

TRANSFORMATION

How a Culture of Collaboration
Rebuilt a Tourism Ecosystem
for Sebring/Highlands County, FL
[#VisitSebring](#) | [VisitSebring.com](#)



Casey Hartt

**Visit Sebring/
Highlands County Tourist
Development Council**



Shellie Phelps

Biggest Fish Consulting

The Opportunity

When a Hit Television Show Comes to Town

In 2024, Sebring was selected
for Season 3 of
Home Town Takeover
on HGTV

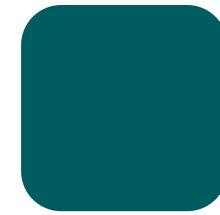
- **Six episodes**
- **MILLIONS of viewers**
- **SPOTLIGHT of a lifetime**



How could we turn
SIX EPISODES
into
TEN YEARS
of
POSITIVE IMPACT?

The Reality Most Destinations Face

Tourism Silos are REAL



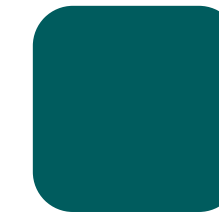
Cities Competing for Attention



Historical Rivalries



Stakeholders Working Independently



No Shared Vision for Tourism Growth



Limited Regional Collaboration

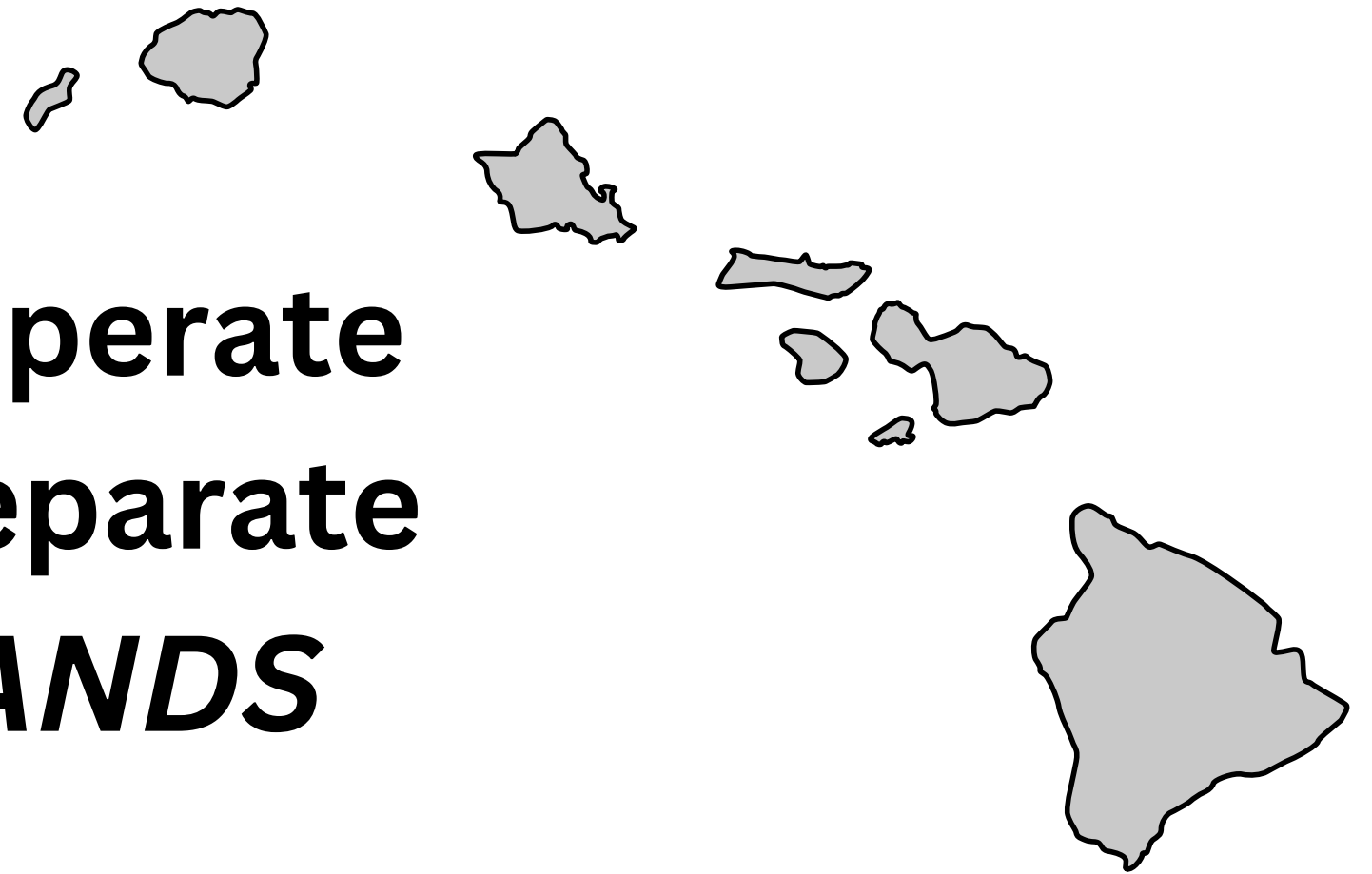


Apathetic Locals



**EVEN A
GREAT
DESTINATION**

**Can operate
like separate
*ISLANDS***



A Lesson from Wetumpka, Alabama



Shellie Phelps
helped lead the team
in Wetumpka, Alabama
during Season One
of Home Town Takeover

The biggest insight she
shared with Sebring:

A TV show CANNOT SAVE A TOWN.

The people who live there must work

TOGETHER...

And create a powerful *ripple effect*

Shellie's advice from Wetumpka's experience...



- **Success is relational.**
- **Visitors do not see city lines.**
- **Coordinate on regional tourism efforts for maximum ripple effect.**
- **Your job is to make them [tourists] fall in love with you, so they come back.**
- **You must figure out how to create sustainable tourism and make these people love this place.”**
- **HGTV is going to bring them here, but you need to know who you are and have positive branding and be secure, cohesive, and consistent so they want to come back.**
- **This is not about tourism dollars. This is about positively changing your community for future generations.**

A Strategic Shift

Instead of only focusing on:

FILMING

PUBLICITY

**TOURISM
PROMOTION**

What if we could

REBUILD OUR

REGIONAL TOURISM ECOSYSTEM?

Our New Focus

**COMMUNITY
ALIGNMENT**

**LEADERSHIP
ENGAGEMENT**

**STAKEHOLDER
COLLABORATION**

What if we could

BLUR THE CITY LIMIT LINES?

Connect
Communicate
Collaborate

CREATE CHANGE

Start the Community Conversation



We created Stakeholder *LISTENING* Sessions in each community.

We asked questions and encouraged honest constructive conversation.

- **City Leadership**
- **Tourism Partners**
- **Business Owners**
- **Art Organizations**
- **Civic Groups**
- **Chambers of Commerce**

People had so much to say ...

They had never been asked before.

Tourists can't see our city limit lines

- Updated county-wide visitor guides w/HGTV section
- Updated websites w/HGTV pages
- Digital & printed maps
- Hashtags & QR codes
- Signage
- Bandwango trail pass
- Interactive kiosks
- Updated welcome monuments



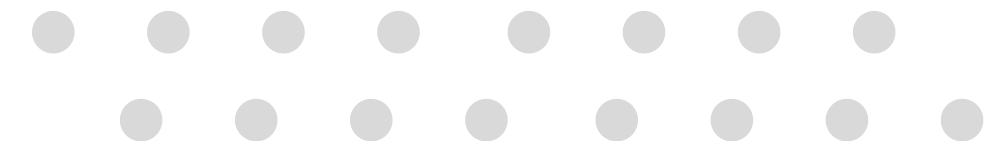


Created a **REGIONAL LEADERSHIP TEAM**

GAME CHANGER

We brought together a team of leaders from across the county to build relationships across the city limits and align our vision.

- **City Governments**
- **Tourism**
- **Economic Development**
- **Chambers of Commerce**
- **Elected Officials**



CONSULTANTS PLAY A KEY ROLE

- **Bring in outside talent and perspective**
- **Have an elevated knowledge base**
- **Are part of a much larger national network**
- **Have specific relationships beneficial to tourism development (PR, sports)**
- **Are an integral part of our Regional Team**

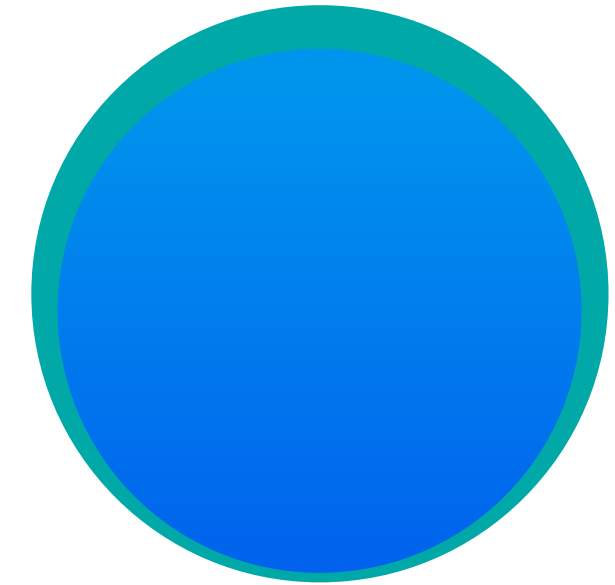
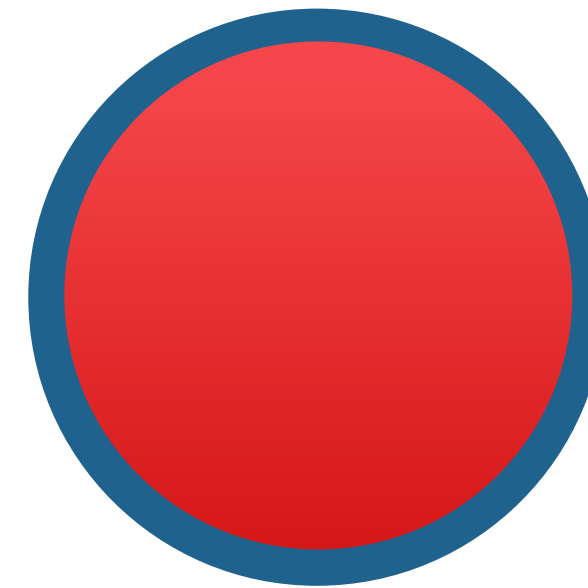
TDC doesn't have to hire more full-time staff.

County-Wide Hospitality Training with GAME SHOW TRIVIA!

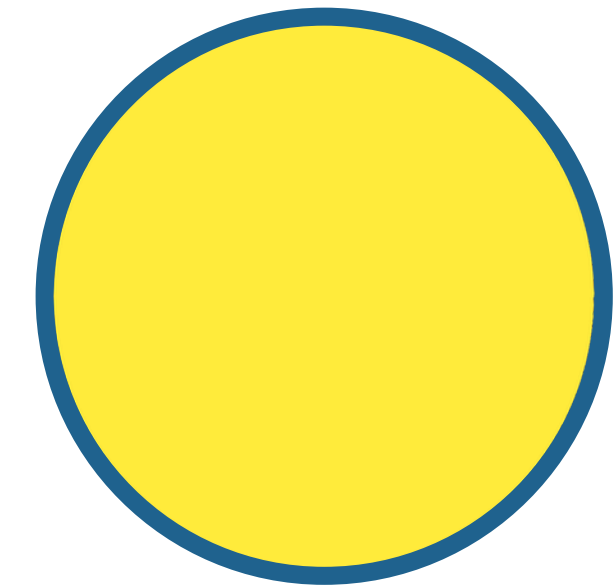
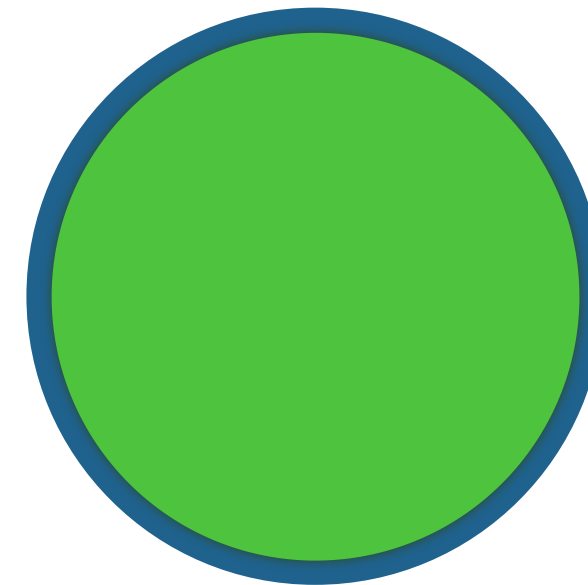
**HIGHLANDS
COUNTY**

**Everyone
Matters**

**We are ALL
AMBASSADORS!**



HOW MUCH DO YOU KNOW?



LET'S PLAY!

Team Ranch Retreat

<u>AVON PARK</u>	<u>SEBRING</u>	<u>LAKE PLACID</u>
JACARANDA	HARDER HALL	MURALS
SFSC - ENTERTAINMENT	SEBRING RACEWAY	GLADIUMS
MILE LONG MALL	HGTV	LAKES
CLEAR LAKES	CIRCLE	JOURNAL PLAZA
DONALSON PARK	HIGHLANDS HAMMOCK	CLOWNS
FAMILY FRIENDLY	LAKE JACKSON	AIRBOAT TOURS
MULTIPLE PLACES TO DRINK BEER	SHOPPING BOUTIQUES	LAKE ISTOPAGA
BASEBALL	BIG BOX	BOUTIQUE SHOPS
BOMBING RANGE / HUNTING	DINING CHOICES	CONCERTS
AP AIRPORT	GOLF	BOAT RACING
GOLF COURSES	MAX LONG COMPLEX	
SOUTHERN COOKING INDCOR	PARKWAY	
	FAIRGROUNDS	
	SEBRING FIREMEN ORGANIZATION	HOTELS
	SODA SHOP + SOULFEST	HEALTH CARE
	SEBRING INDUSTRY AIRPORT	
	<u>ATTRATIONS</u>	WATERSPORTS
	TIEDIN	ACCESS TO LAKES (NGB)
	RELIGION + CHURCHES	FAMILY ACTIVITIES OPPORTUNITIES (NATURE)
	FISHING	MORE BEACHES
	AGRICULTURE / RANCHES	

How can we connect regionally as a destination for greater economic impact?



From Competition to Unique Identity...

Destination
Identity
Workshops



What makes them DIFFERENT...
is their *SUPER POWER*

Turning Collaboration into Tourism Products

- **Art and Culture Trails**
- **Regional Event Partnerships**
- **Multi-City Visitor Itineraries**
- **Shoulder Season Solutions**
- **Cross Promotion Between Communities**

REGIONALLY



FOCUSED

 **Sebring Soda Festival**
April 18 at 11:50 AM · 🌐

From fizzy drinks in Sebring to beautiful flowers in Lake Placid.... See more

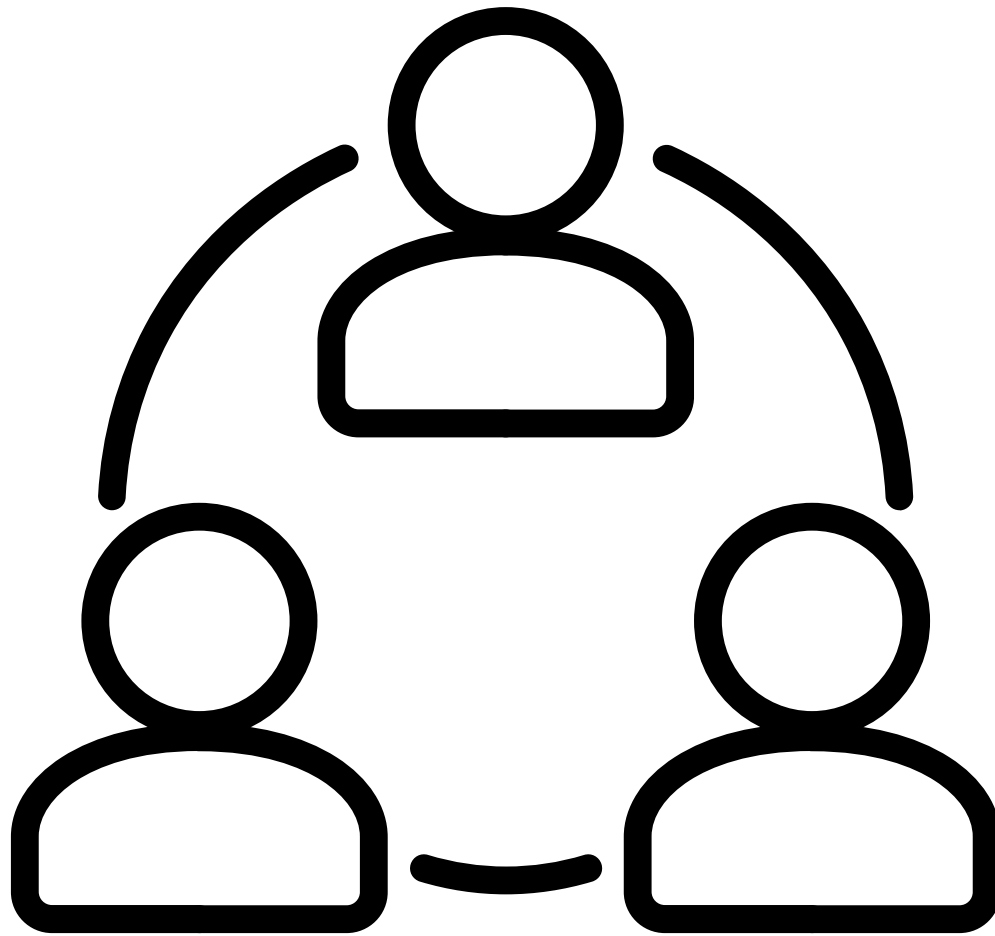
**PART OF THE FESTIVAL FAMILY
SUPPORTING OUR NEIGHBORS**

Sebring
Highlands Hammock State Park
Lake Placid
Sebring
Sebring
Sebring

**JUST DOWN THE ROAD IN LAKE PLACID
CALADIUM FESTIVAL**



Cultural Shift



It has been a PROCESS.

UNITY Breakfast

**Regional Leadership
Tourism Team Members
In the same room....
for conversation and coffee**



COME FULL CIRCLE

Creative Campaign

Right in the middle of Florida, you'll find the center of everything. Circle up at sporting events, round out a family road trip, and meet our circle of friends: Avon Park, Lake Placid, and Sebring. Here, memories are made, and life comes full circle.

"Come Full Circle" highlights the convenience and accessibility of Sebring's central location, the connection between Avon Park, Lake Placid, and Sebring, the versatility of experiences, and the satisfaction that comes from a well-rounded trip.

Early Outcomes

As we continue to evolve, the wins we have already experienced:

**STRONGER
COLLABORATION
BETWEEN
MUNICIPALITIES**

**INCREASED
STAKEHOLDER
PARTICIPATION**

**NEW
PARTNERSHIPS
ACROSS
ORGANIZATIONS**

***REGIONAL
TOURISM
MINDSET***

The spotlight produced much more than a great television show, it has been a catalyst for long-term regional vision and cooperation.

any community can do that

Lessons Learned

**OUR ADVICE FOR ANY COMMUNITY WANTING
TO WIN WITH A REGIONAL MINDSET**

**INVEST
IN
OUTSIDE
FACILITATION**

**FOCUS
ON
IDENTITY
NOT
COMPETITION**

**CREATE
LEADERSHIP
TEAMS THAT
SUSTAIN
MOMENTUM**

**TOURISM
WORKS BEST
WHEN THE
WHOLE REGION
WINS!**

A New Model for Destination Leadership

**The role
of a
DMO
is
EVOLVING**

We are no longer simply:

- **marketers**
- **event promoters**
- **visitor service centers**

WE ARE:

- **Conversation Starters**
- **Community Conveners**
- **Collaboration Creators**
- **Regional Storytellers**

A television show can spark attention.....

**But it is the
CULTURE OF COLLABORATION
that
SUSTAINS TRANSFORMATION**

**The most powerful tourism asset
that any destination has
is not their marketing budget.....**

It's a community that works together.

THANK YOU!

Casey Hartt

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