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## Where the good times roll: New Orleans as a destination for sports event tourism

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**WHERE THE GOOD TIMES ROLL:  
NEW ORLEANS AS A DESTINATION FOR SPORTS EVENT TOURISM**

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
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in

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by

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## **ABSTRACT**

Over the past several decades, sports event tourism has been a growing area of research for scholars in the fields of sport administration, strategic communications, destination marketing and tourism. The city of New Orleans is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the United States, with its various entertainment, sports, and cultural events. Over the past three decades, New Orleans has hosted over 30 major sports events and will host several more major events including the BCS National Championship, NCAA Men's and Women's Final Four, and the Super Bowl through February 2013. This case study shows several primary reasons that New Orleans is continually chosen as an event host, including its reputation as a vibrant, unique tourist destination along with its facility infrastructure. In-depth interviews conducted with New Orleans tourism and sports commission officials show that the presence of large stadiums and convention facilities, along with many hotels and restaurants in close proximity to these facilities, and the authenticity of the city as a tourist destination is what primarily sets New Orleans apart as a premier host and destination for major sports events.

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Tourism and Sport in the City of New Orleans**

New Orleans, Louisiana has built a reputation as a distinctive city with unique cultural and entertainment offerings that appeal to people of all ages and walks of life. With its mild climate and relative ease of access by both air and ground transportation, New Orleans is a primary destination city for thousands of tourists every year. Major events such as Mardi Gras, the Jazz and Heritage Festival, the French Quarter Fest, and Essence Festival annually attract several hundred thousand tourists to the city. With plentiful hotel, conference, and convention space, the Crescent City can also accommodate organizations seeking a destination for corporate conferences, conventions, and trade shows. Most importantly, though, it is in the area of sports tourism that New Orleans has proven to be most successful in recent years.

The state of Louisiana is known as Sportsman's Paradise and has long been a desirable destination for all types of sports events. While cities throughout the entire state are often selected to host various different sports events, the city of New Orleans is the predominant host location for many major events. This study focuses on New Orleans' ability to remain in the forefront as a host and destination city for both bid-based and recurring major sports events. More specifically, it will examine the ways in which tourism and sports officials strategically market and position the city of New Orleans as an attractive and desirable destination for major sports events such as the Bowl Championship Series (BCS) Championship game, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Men's and Women's Final Four tournaments, and the Super Bowl. Each of these events draws thousands of fans and tourists to the city and also generates significant publicity for the city through national television broadcasts.

According to a study conducted jointly by hospitality and economic development researchers at the University of New Orleans and Louisiana State University, tourism is one of the primary drivers of the local economy in the city of New Orleans, with nearly 70,000 jobs directly attributed to the hospitality industry (“Louisiana Tourism Forecast,” 2009). In addition, from 2006-2009, nearly 27 million tourists visited New Orleans resulting in nearly \$18 billion in spending. This spending has a significant impact on the entire community, as Orleans Parish collected over \$1.2 billion in combined revenue through hotel sales, non-hotel sales, and the Louisiana Superdome and Exposition taxes, and expects to collect an estimated \$1.35 billion through the same sources over the time period from 2010-2013 (“Louisiana Tourism Forecast,” 2009). The city of New Orleans was selected to host Super Bowl XLVII in 2013 after that study was conducted, so those estimated numbers may increase significantly.

Tax revenues collected as a result of tourism have a direct impact on the city's infrastructure, as these monies are often re-invested in order to finance facility renovations and other municipal projects. This established infrastructure of hotels, restaurants, convention and exposition facilities, and entertainment venues is one of the primary reasons New Orleans has been able to continually attract major tourism-driven events. New Orleans has been able to further distinguish itself as a primary host for major sports events due to the presence of facilities such as the Mercedes-Benz Superdome (Superdome), the New Orleans Arena, and the Ernest M. Morial Convention Center. The city is home to two professional sports franchises, the New Orleans Saints of the National Football League (NFL) and the New Orleans Hornets of the National Basketball Association (NBA), along with the New Orleans Zephyrs, a Minor League baseball team and the New Orleans VooDoo, an Arena League football team. In addition, New Orleans has one NCAA Division I institution, Tulane University, which can serve as the

designated host institution for NCAA Championship events in sports they sponsor. The presence of the professional teams provides year-round occupants for the Superdome and the New Orleans Arena, allowing for constant upkeep. Regular renovations to these facilities are also required so bid specifications can be met. Tax revenues collected through major sports events can be a significant source of funding for facility renovations which are needed in order for the city to continue to be a frontrunner to host these sports events.

New Orleans is able to set itself apart from other cities as a host for major sports events because of its successful track record of hosting these events in the past (see Appendix D-Major GNOSF Events). New Orleans is also able to successfully set itself apart as a tourist destination because of its strong hospitality infrastructure and its unique tourist attractions. This success is due to the city's ability to simultaneously position itself as a viable major event host and an attractive tourist destination. Various different public and private entities such as the New Orleans Convention and Visitors Bureau (NOCVB), the New Orleans Tourism Marketing Corporation (NOTMC), the Greater New Orleans Sports Foundation (GNOSF), and SMG are responsible for maintaining and promoting the city's image as a tourist destination and a major sports event host. This case study seeks to gain the perspectives of professionals who represent these organizations to better understand how New Orleans continues to have success as a major sport event host.

### The Role of the Sports Commission and DMOs

Sports tourism has been defined as an attractive mix of both sport and tourism that is also an economic, environmental, social, and political phenomenon (Gibson, Willing, & Holdnak, 2003). It is further defined by Hall (1992a) as non-commercial travel to participate or observe



sporting activities away from home (Leiper, 1990). Leiper (1990) defined a tourist attraction as " 'a system comprising three elements: a tourist or human element, a nucleus, or central element, and a marker or informative element' " (Hinch & Higham, 2004, p. 7). As New Orleans continued to seek and obtain major sports events with greater frequency, the creation of an organization dedicated to serving as a liaison between the community and sport event organizers became a necessity. In 1988, the Greater New Orleans Sports Foundation (GNOSF) was organized with a mission to have a positive economic impact on the city of New Orleans through attracting and managing sports events (GNOsports.com). Since 1992, New Orleans has hosted 38 major events, including the Super Bowl (twice), NCAA Men's and Women's basketball tournaments (including the Final Four), an NBA All-Star game, an Arena Bowl, the Bassmaster's Classic, and Olympic Track & Field trials (Greater New Orleans Sports Foundation, 2011). The GNOSF's primary role is to serve as a resource for both sport event organizers and other organizations in the community who are responsible for driving tourism in New Orleans.

The influence of destination marketing organizations (DMOs) is vital for cities such as New Orleans that rely so heavily on their tourism brand. According to Gotham (2007) and as cited by Evans (2003), branding is a means of identification which tries to establish "a link between the diverging individual and collective cultural identity, reconnecting the locale with a sense of socio-cultural 'belonging' to a city, neighborhood, or nation" (p. 420). Many cities, including New Orleans, have a convention and visitors bureau which contributes to building its tourism brand. Convention and visitors bureaus were once a primary function of city government created in order to streamline governmental involvement in positioning destinations as viable locations for business and leisure travelers (Wang, 2008).

After the establishment of the Association of Commerce in 1913, a convention and visitors bureau was established in 1915 in order to focus greater efforts on creating “an institutional foundation for disseminating New Orleans’ destination image through organized promotional activities and network connections with national and international tourism organizations” (Gotham, 2007, p. 317). The NOCVB was established in its current organizational structure in 1960. It is resource for both leisure and business travelers who are planning trips to the city along with members of the media who are covering or broadcasting from New Orleans.

The NOCVB has many strategic roles including economic driver, destination image/brand developer, advocate/facilitator of tourism projects, and builder of community pride (Wang, 2008), and is therefore also principally involved in driving sports event tourism in New Orleans (see Appendix C-Strategic Roles of the CVB). Since tourism is a consumable product, it is the mission of the NOCVB to shape and influence consumption decisions in order to increase tourism to the city (Gotham, 2007). As such,

in the signifying act of the tourist advertisement, otherwise disconnected images could be transferred from one social activity and reference set to another. In this sense, the advertising of New Orleans as a tourist site became an important and strategic device in the production of urban space (Gotham, 2007. p. 308).

In the study of tourism, place is said to matter most because “an analysis of *why* and *how* tourism develops will need to take into account *where* (and when) it develops” (Gotham, 2007, p. 827). The NOCVB therefore plays a primary role in promoting images of New Orleans as a place for tourism activities; as a destination which must be experienced to be understood. Unlike other consumable goods, “a branded place is spatially fixed, non-transportable, and consumed by people at the point of production” (Gotham, 2007, p. 827). More specifically, “urban branding is

a process of differentiation and diversification whereby local tourism organizations, arts, cultural facilities, museums, and historic preservation groups harness and construct place images and help produce tourist sites to attract consumers and investment” (Gotham, 2007, p. 827) to a particular place. The NOCVB is instrumental in leading the effort to accurately convey these images to tourists, and it is through these images that they are able to promote New Orleans as a vibrant destination that is unlike any other city in the country.

While the NOCVB plays a primary role in promoting tourism and the hospitality industry, tourism marketing is very dependent on collaborative efforts between various organizations such as the NOCVB and the NOTMC, along with their agency partners and state and local government. The advantages of these types of collaborative efforts in tourism marketing have been widely acknowledged in previous academic studies (Wang, 2008). Given the frequency and diversity of entertainment and cultural events in New Orleans, it is important that DMOs and city leaders work collaboratively to accurately and consistently convey the image of such a unique destination.

Another such organization designed to promote New Orleans as a travel destination is the NOTMC. Their mission is "to promote and position New Orleans as the number one leisure tourism destination through a broad program of advertising, public relations, social media, Internet marketing, promotions, research, and other marketing strategies" (neworleansonline.com, 2011). Their tourism promotion efforts are intended to achieve goals through strategies designed to maintain the city's image as a desirable place to visit, increase visitation to the city, and increase tourist spending. The NOTMC produces the city's official visitor's guide(s), manages several websites including the official tourism website, NewOrleansonline.com, and also manages the official travel blog, GoNOLA.com

(neworleansonline.com, 2011). The NOTMC and the NOCVB work collaboratively to attract both leisure and corporate travel, and to manage the relationships with tourists after their departure to encourage return visits.

In recent years, marketing and communication strategies in many industries have changed in order to accommodate the added communication channels that technological advancements created. There is currently a lack of academic research on the changing roles of tourism marketers, along with changes in the relationships between customers/suppliers/marketers and the tourism product in this advanced technological environment (Li & Petrick, 2008). Adapting to these technological changes is especially important in targeting younger generations of tourists, particularly “Millennials,” or those aged 18-to-24, whose population numbers account for nearly 80 million and who have greater spending power than their predecessors (Loda, Coleman, & Backman, 2010). There is also a lack of academic research on the tourism preferences for this demographic, but for DMOs, understanding this group will be important in the future (Loda, et al., 2010). In addition to major sports events, New Orleans has countless other events and festivals which appeal directly to younger adults, therefore effectively targeting this demographic is essential in order to build a base of consumers who will potentially make return trips to the city. Furthermore, since this generation does have such strong buying power, it is also appealing to event sponsors whose products and services are marketed to similar age groups.

Consumption of tourism activities can be influenced both directly (by physically experiencing the city) and/or indirectly (through some form of media). There is evidence that destination exposure through television commercials is positively related to intent to travel to that particular destination (Pan, 2011). It could be argued, however, that destination exposure

through images seen during a nationally broadcasted event or online through the internet and social media would be more impactful, especially when targeting the younger demographic. In a recent study of the effectiveness of social media on tourism in the state of Louisiana, 55% of Louisiana Travel Facebook fans and 56.1 % of their Twitter followers had traveled within Louisiana over the previous 12-month period (“Louisiana Office of Tourism,” 2011). Furthermore, 37.7 % of Facebook fans and 31.8 % of Twitter followers surveyed reported that content on the social media account influenced their decision to take a Louisiana trip (“Louisiana Office of Tourism,” 2011). While this study did not take into account whether or not these respondents were residents of Louisiana or another state, it does show the growing importance and impact of social media on destination image and intent to travel.

#### Corporate Investment, Facilities and Destination Exposure

Many prominent sports events obtain major corporate sponsors in order to offset the costs of producing the event. Facilities that regularly host major events are often able to negotiate contracts for naming rights in addition to corporate sponsorships. The additional economic impact generated through corporate sponsorships is yet another by-product of being a desirable destination city, particularly for major sports events. According to Forbes.com, the quantitative measures can be difficult to accurately assess, but qualitative measures such as brand strategy and venue linkage through major events and media coverage are among the most valuable [measures] to corporations (Levy, 2011).

Historically, New Orleans has relied heavily on positive media exposure gained through hosting major sports events. In the 1960s, when consumption of sport still remained inherently local in nature, technology and media began to play an important role in sports, particularly in

the NFL. Travel across the country by airplane allowed for a nationwide league, and the Sports Broadcasting Act of 1961 provided for collective negotiations of national broadcast rights by individual organizations (Martin, 2006). The city of New Orleans began seeking a professional football team in the mid-1950s, citing its desire to become “big league” (Martin, 2006). The opportunity for vast media exposure created through the Sports Broadcasting Act of 1961 pushed New Orleans into the national spotlight, and having an NFL team would allow New Orleans to legitimately compare itself to other cities in the national marketplace.

New Orleans was awarded a franchise on November 1, 1966, a date which already had religious significance in the predominately Catholic city—All Saints’ Day (Martin, 2006). For the city of New Orleans, and the New Orleans Saints, as the team would soon come to be named, having an NFL franchise further solidified its standing as a tourist destination (Souther, 2003). It also served as a unifier for the citizens of the city and as Martin (2006) further notes,

Not only did the new team place its city on a level with other cities, but it also brought its residents themselves up to the level of the residents of other “big league” cities. Sports became a defining characteristic in a time when distinctiveness, even in such a distinctive city such as New Orleans, gradually faded, thanks in large part to a media of mass culture that homogenized national and regional tastes and to suburbanization that fractured local communities (p. 127).

Gaining the distinctive quality as an ‘NFL city’ gave New Orleans yet another opportunity to market the city as a destination and to develop strong networks of support both locally and nationally for the new team and for increased tourism promotion opportunities.

Shortly thereafter, the Louisiana Superdome was created (by law), with actual construction taking place from 1971-1975 (louisianasuperdome.com). Tourism and political leaders then brought the first Super Bowl to the Superdome, Super Bowl XII, in 1978 (although this was not the first Super Bowl the city hosted) and would subsequently host the event in 1981, 1986, 1990, 1997, and 2002 (Louisianasuperdome.com). Few other cities have hosted the Super

Bowl as many times as New Orleans, further proving the city's ability not only to be a superior host because of its tourism and facility infrastructure, but also to continually draw the numbers of attendees needed to ensure the success of major sports events.

With no major renovations having taken place since the facility was built, the Superdome was already in need of enhancements when Hurricane Katrina struck in August 2005. The extensive damage forced all of the major events scheduled to take place at both the Superdome and the New Orleans Arena to relocate to other venues. The Saints and Hornets were displaced to San Antonio, TX and Oklahoma City, OK, respectively, and the tenuous status of New Orleans' recovery put their return to the city in doubt. Local leaders were committed to having both teams as well as all of the facilities' regularly scheduled events back in New Orleans as soon as possible, which required extensive collaboration to expedite facility repairs. It is because of the reciprocal commitment from state, local, franchise, and venue management leaders that the major facilities were restored, along with the entire tourism infrastructure, so major sports events could eventually return to the city.

"After Katrina," said Doug Thornton, SMG Senior Vice President, "we had a strategic vision to recreate the building into an ultra-modern stadium that would accomplish numerous objectives, including re-igniting a major economic engine, securing the Saints long-term, and returning an icon to the New Orleans skyline" (Louisiana Superdome, 2011). The multi-phase project cost nearly \$336 million, but that is still a fraction of the cost of building a new facility (Louisianasuperdome.com). With sports having such a significant impact on the city, renovating the Superdome and bringing the region's only NFL franchise back was imperative for New Orleans to begin to re-establish its status as both a tourist destination and a successful sports event host. On, September 25, 2006, the New Orleans Saints returned to the Louisiana

Superdome, and that event represented one of the most significant milestones to recovery for the city. Several hours of pre-game media coverage presented images of New Orleans' continued resurgence, images which are invaluable to tourism promoters and destination marketers who were facing the challenge of completely re-branding the city as a viable tourist destination. Other events such as the 2007 BCS National Championship and the 2008 NBA All-Star game further solidified New Orleans' return to prominence as both a viable tourist destination and a major sport event host.

While many sports venues across the country have reached agreements with corporate sponsors for facility naming rights, the Louisiana Superdome has never had such a deal. For the past several years, the New Orleans Saints, together with SMG and city officials, were seeking an opportunity to sell the naming rights for the New Orleans Superdome given its past success as a major event host and the exposure it routinely receives from national media. New Orleans' ability to prove it is a successful host city and destination for major sports events along with the resulting media exposure gained from hosting these events likely played a large role in city leaders aggressively pursuing and finally achieving this goal.

On October 4, 2011, Governor Bobby Jindal, together with Saints owner Tom Benson and Ernst Leib, then-President and CEO of Mercedes-Benz USA, announced a ten-year agreement between Mercedes-Benz and the Saints' organization to rename the Louisiana Superdome the "Mercedes-Benz-Superdome" ("Governor Jindal & Saints," 2011). This is the first time in the facility's history that naming rights have been acquired ("Governor Jindal & Saints," 2011). While the actual dollar value of the deal was not disclosed, the agreement is likely to reduce or possibly altogether eliminate millions of dollars in payments made to the Saints by the state of Louisiana (taxpayers). Mercedes-Benz USA will have an immediate



opportunity to capitalize on the brand recognition generated through global media exposure as a result of hosting the 2012 BCS National Championship game, the 2012 NCAA Men's Final Four, the 2013 Super Bowl, and the 2013 NCAA Women's Final Four, among other events, in the newly-named Mercedes-Benz Superdome ("Governor Jindal & Saints," 2011).

The media exposure generated from broadcasts to national and sometimes worldwide viewing audiences adds to the continued success New Orleans has as a destination for sports events because it presents countless opportunities for both sports and tourism leaders in New Orleans to market and promote the unique attributions the city offers as a tourist destination. According to Nielsen data, the New Orleans Saints tied for 8<sup>th</sup> place along with the Indianapolis Colts in media exposure rank of NFL teams, which measures media exposure both on television and online ("Cowboys Tackle Top Spot," 2010). The Saints also achieved the top overall ranking in one part of this measure, local television rank, which demonstrates the strong local support the Saints have in their home market ("Cowboys Tackle Top Spot," 2010). Additionally, New Orleans rated in the top 10 local markets for both pro football and NCAA football according to a recent Nielsen study ("The Changing Face," 2010), which provides exposure for the city on many nationally televised event broadcasts (see Appendix E-Nielsen Statistics). In addition, of an estimated 103.9 million viewers of college football bowl games in 2010, 43 million combined viewed the R+L Carriers New Orleans Bowl, the Allstate Sugar Bowl, and the Tostitos BCS National Championship game ("Bowl Games," 2011). Although the BCS Championship was held in Arizona that year, the data offers insight into the opportunities for destination exposure given the numbers of viewers the telecast can reach.

Through collaboration with the NOCVB, along with state and local officials who are a part of the Louisiana Stadium and Exposition District (LSED), New Orleans has hosted or is

poised to host the following events from December 2011 through April 2013: the Allstate Sugar Bowl (annual), the R&L Carriers New Orleans Bowl (annual), the BCS National Championship (recurring-2012), the Southeastern Conference (SEC) Men's Basketball Tournament (2012), NCAA Men's Final Four (2012), Arena Bowl XXV (2012), Super Bowl XLVII (2013), and the NCAA Women's Final Four (2013). The ability to host prominent, major events in such a short period time underscores New Orleans' ability to set itself apart from other destination cities as both a primary host city and tourist destination for major sports events.

Although New Orleans is comparatively smaller in population to other popular destination cities such as Atlanta, GA, Dallas, TX, Los Angeles, CA, New York, NY, Phoenix, AZ, St. Louis, MO, the city consistently competes with these cities and has proven to be very capable of hosting the same major sports events that are also awarded to those locales. With the availability of suitable facilities, proximity of entertainment and hotels, strong support from public and private entities on both the local and national level, and effective destination marketing, the city has proven to be equally or more successful than many of its larger counterparts when hosting major sports events.

New Orleans also benefits as a leisure tourism destination from the various events which are held on an annual or recurring basis, such as the Sugar Bowl, the BCS Championship, the New Orleans Bowl, Bayou Classic, the Essence Festival, the Jazz and Heritage Festival, and Mardi Gras. These events allow the city to continually and consistently prepare for an influx of tourists and to maintain the infrastructure necessary to serve as a host destination. A recent Wall Street Journal article discussed the host site bid and selection process for the NCAA (Men's and Women's) Final Four, highlighting adequate seating capacity from an appropriate venue, ample hotel room capacity for both NCAA officials, teams, media and fans, as well as space for other

ancillary events, along with the proximity of all facilities and transportation options as primary considerations in bid evaluations for events like the Men's Final Four (Fry, 2004). Additionally, the NCAA's format for hosting the Men's Final Four includes having the designated city host earlier rounds of the tournament in the years preceding their Final Four host date in order to ensure quality and consistency can be achieved (SportsTravel Magazine, 2010). This further indicates that demonstrated past success as a host for major sports events plays a significant role in future host site selection; a primary reason New Orleans benefits from hosting various major events, including sports events, on a frequent and recurring basis. This case study seeks to explain, through the perspectives of various sports and tourism professionals in New Orleans, exactly how the city maintains its image as not only a unique tourist destination but also a major sport event host location.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **Destination Image and Tourism Studies**

Product positioning, or creating an accurate image in the minds of target markets, is recognized as one of the most important aspects of marketing and communication strategies (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993). Destination image is a main component of this strategy in tourism marketing. The conceptualization of destination image is composed of "perceptions of individual attributes (such as climate, accommodation facilities, friendliness of the people) as well as more holistic impressions (mental pictures or imagery) of the place...and each of these components contains functional and psychological characteristics" (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993). Major sporting events can be an important component of destination marketing for many cities, and the resulting beliefs that are formed can impact intent to visit (Funk, Toohey, & Bruun, 2007). In addition, perceived benefits of escape, social interaction, prestige, relaxation, cultural learning, and knowledge exploration along with the option to combine a vacation with a sport tourism experience are some of the primary benefits to convey through destination image (Funk et al., 2007).

Destination image has been studied extensively as it relates to the hospitality and tourism industry, but there is a lack of current academic studies which examine destination image as it specifically relates to tourism for major sports events. Sports events which are examined in terms of destination image are primarily large, international events such as the Olympic Games or the World Cup (Funk, 2008). In particular, there is a lack of information on destination image and the perception of cities that host major sports events such as the BCS Championship game, the Super Bowl, and the NCAA Final Four, among other major sports events. The interrelationship of these concepts must be further studied to assess their potential influences and

impact on consumer behavior (Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007). For some, intent to visit is directly related to the sport or team and attending the game with the destination (location) being a secondary factor, but for others, the destination may be the primary factor (Snelgrove, Taks, Chalip, & Green, 2008). This distinction is important for destination marketers to understand particularly in cities like New Orleans where there are various other promotional opportunities for tourism at the destination in addition to the primary event or attraction.

Tourism has been described as a sociocultural event (Gibson, 2003) and therefore it is important for DMOs to understand the effects and impacts of the images that are created as a result of participating in or experiencing a sociocultural event in order to more effectively market destination cities and events. As Gotham (2007) describes, the tourism industry began to see a marked shift from leisure activities for elite members of society to events at hotels, conventions, and other facilities contributing to its expansion. It was also during this time that many cities began to establish organizations such as chambers of commerce to develop promotional strategies which could portray the city as an ideal place for both commercial and leisure travel (Gotham, 2007). While many scholars have empirically examined the commodification of tourism, there is a lack of research which connects this empirical analysis with the linkages between tourism, consumer culture, and mass consumption (Gotham, 2007).

In recent years, technology has also played a much more prominent role in the availability and accessibility of information, particularly as it relates to travel. With countless websites dedicated to travel and tourism, the “virtual experience” of a destination is perhaps one of the primary drivers of intent to visit. A recent study of over 1,100 users of the website Travellerspoint.com indicates that 23.5% of respondents were influenced by television, 23% by their own previous travel experiences, 19.1% by friends, 13.4% by magazines, and over 8% by

information on the internet (Govers, Go, & Kumar, 2007). This study helps to show that consumers do rely on television and the internet for destination and travel information gathering, but it also shows the greater importance of both indirect and direct influences that can impact intent to travel. Since this intent to travel is a primary focus for DMOs in developing marketing strategies, it is important to understand consumers' primary methods of consumption of tourism information and the potential impact this consumption has on destination image formation.

Several studies have analyzed sport team identification and its effects on local attendance along with sport subculture identification and consumption choices (Snelgrove et al., 2008). There is also much more to be learned about how an event's brand impacts destination image and ways to co-brand sports events and destinations since the publicity generated from an event can enhance the destination image just as the destination can offer other tourism appeals (Chalip, Green, & Hill 2003). In New Orleans, there are countless opportunities to cross-promote and co-brand cultural and entertainment events, particularly sports events, throughout the year given the variety and frequency of their occurrence. Many of the consumers of these entertainment and cultural events are also likely to be in the target market for sports event tourism, making cross promotion to generate return visits even more essential.

The greatest appeal of an event is to experience it firsthand (Getz, 2008). Since live sports events are infrequently or likely never duplicated, it is essential to understand how to most appropriately market and promote that experience. Given the appeal of such events, the sports tourism industry is rapidly becoming one of the fastest growing segments of the tourism industry (Hritz & Ross, 2010). Several studies have analyzed sport team identification and its effects on local attendance along with sport subculture identification and consumption choices (Snelgrove et al., 2008) but there still remains much more to be learned about how event brands impact

destination image and ways to co-brand sports events and destinations. Since publicity from the event can potentially help to enhance the destination image just as the destination can offer other tourism appeals in addition to the event (Chalip, et al., 2003), therefore event consumption methods are essential for destination marketers to understand in order to properly position and publicize their tourism brand.

The importance of maintaining an image as a unique tourist destination and major sport event host is a primary component of the entire hospitality industry in New Orleans. Examining destination image and tourism individually and as interrelated components will provide a foundation for this study from an academic perspective. These components will then be further examined through the viewpoints of sports and tourism professionals in order to determine the ways in which their strategic tourism marketing and host destination goals for New Orleans are operationalized. The tourism industry is dependent on all types and sizes of entertainment events, and the ways in which New Orleans is able to set itself apart as a viable host location is the focus of this case study.

#### Destination Product Placement and Impact of the Olympic Games

Destination markets must target their product (the destination city or event) appropriately for individuals or groups who are indirect consumers in order to have the desired effect of direct consumption. Chang, Newell, & Salmon (2009) examined product placement in motion pictures by studying effects of publicity and the resulting images created by the use of a given product in a particular movie. The results of this study indicated that some instances of product use were the result of a charitable agreement (sponsorship), some resulted from a contractual agreement (paid use), and some happened just by mere chance of immediate availability on-set (Chang, et

al., 2009), but the value of the exposure generated is ultimately most important to marketers. However, if promotion of the destination through product placement does effect actual visitation, it is somewhat uncertain whether that is a result of an actual change in the consumer's image formation of the destination or its temporarily increased saliency to the viewer (Chalip et al., 2003).

As an integral component of forming destination image perceptions, product placement during live broadcasts of sports events could stimulate the desire to travel to a given destination. This could have relevant applications for destination marketers and those studying sports tourism on the premise that their study "asserts the existence of a predictable structure for the business of product placement. In doing so, this offers guidance for researchers, regulators, and advertisers to navigate the expanding practice of integrating brands and entertainment" (Chang et al., 2009, p. 784) and could therefore be highly useful in better understanding how to more effectively co-brand sports events and destinations. For destination marketers, product placement is an integral aspect of promotional campaigns which ultimately drive tourism to their destination, so it must be accurately understood from various different public relations, marketing, and business perspectives.

Funk (2008) defines sport and event consumer behavior as "the process involved when individuals select, purchase, use, and dispose of sport and sport event related products and services to satisfy needs and receive benefits" (p. 6). Mega-events like the Olympic Games as well as major events like the Super Bowl generate interest from consumers all throughout the world. In addition, media coverage often begins months or even years before the Olympics take place, offering opportunities for the host nation and event locales to showcase their product to an international audience (Green, Lim, Seo, & Sung, 2010). Media exposure generated through



sports events, in addition to the images of ancillary activities that create additional coverage of the location itself, is intended to portray the overall appeal of both the event and the locale.

According to Chalip et al. (2003), the economic impact of a sports event is dependent on both the added exposure a destination receives through event advertisement and the increased numbers of tourists who visit the host destination during the event. With the international appeal of the Olympics, the added destination exposure of hosting a mega-event must be properly leveraged by the host in order to have a lasting impact. In recent decades, tourists have become increasingly interested in sport, primarily due to the increased visibility and popularity of international championship events like the Olympics and the World Cup (McCartney, 2005).

Media exposure can play a significant role in national image formation, and many countries utilize their status as a host of a mega international event such as the Olympics as a primary strategy in their destination marketing appeal (Zeng, Go, & Kolmer, 2011). In a study of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, there were over 7,000 news stories about China consumed in nine different countries in just a three-week period prior to the start of the Olympics (Zeng et al., 2011). As Hede (2005) further indicates, after the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, Greece, “38.7% of [survey] respondents indicated their overall attitudes towards Greece as a tourist destination had improved as a result of telecast consumption of the Athens Olympics” (Zeng et al., 2011, p. 321). Not all of the coverage is positive, though, as in the cases of major crimes or incidences that occur in the host locations, and over-saturation of event advertising can also have negative effects (Green et al., 2011). Given the lack of academic studies on visitation as a result of destination image advertising consumption during the event or through pre-event media, the actual effects or impacts are still somewhat unclear.

Other major considerations for nations and cities who host mega-events like the Olympics are the economic impacts. Oftentimes, there are major infrastructure upgrades which must take place in order to meet the requirements of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) bid packet. The facility requirements to host the Olympics are often greater than what the community can sustain after the event is over, and therefore the long-term value of the infrastructure improvements are not as great to the locality (Porter & Fletcher, 2008). In addition, an input-output study by Baade & Matheson (2002) found that the post-event employment effects of both the Los Angeles and Atlanta Olympic Games did not meet projections (Porter & Fletcher, 2008). However, more short-term Gross Domestic Product (GDP), employment, and investment objectives, along with strategic goals of cultural and political improvements, stronger regional identity, and urban infrastructure improvements, may be more realistically achieved (Tien et al., 2011). Communities and nations must, however, be keenly aware of the upfront investments required and whether or not their communities can sustain an influx of unique facilities over the long-term. For cities like New Orleans, whose regional population base is comparatively smaller than that of other major destination cities, the scale of the Olympic Games and infrastructure improvements necessary to submit a competitive bid are likely more than can be sustained by the community and region.

For many countries, the economic investment required to host an Olympic Games must be strategically aligned with the nation's growth goals, and only a few countries and regions are able to meet these demands. Event media, however, does provide an opportunity to promote national identity and culture to a global audience, and it can be said that consumers who follow media coverage of the Olympics are more likely to have positive feelings towards the host country than those who do not (Li & Kaplanidou, 2011). Furthermore, as indicated by Green et

al. (2010), “the overwhelming majority of people will experience the host destination through media. The use of culture to enhance interest and engender positive images of the host country is advocated not merely by destination marketing organizations, but also by event owners” (p. 92). As previously examined in this study, many research studies on destination image and tourism show that through increased exposure and consumption, experiences and images which are stored by consumers in the form of memories can help to influence future travel intentions. Cities such as New Orleans that offer a highly unique cultural and historical product at their destination rely heavily on strategic placement of these images in order to properly position their tourism brand with consumers. While New Orleans is not necessarily suited to host an Olympic Games, given the frequency of other major sports events held in New Orleans, there are numerous opportunities to create the images which can ultimately influence desires to travel to the city.

Since academic studies have only recently begun to focus on sports event travel or sports event tourism as a dynamic, multifaceted topic, the best ways to study it will likely continue to be argued. This case study of New Orleans as a major sport event host will attempt to set forth several primary reasons why tourism and sports officials are able to keep the city in the forefront as a host for major sports events. Researchers studying sports tourism, along with destination marketing industry professionals may, however, find great value in exploring new ways to analyze the niche market of sports event tourism.

### Public Relations Perspective

The practice of public relations is rooted in the theoretical foundations of many different disciplines, namely mass communication, interpersonal/speech communication, social

psychology, sociology, and economics, but primarily focuses on the creation and development of relationships (Ihlen & van Ruler, 2009). As such, the public relations industry has also primarily focused on image and reputation/brand development for businesses and corporations. As Botan and Taylor (2004) indicate, public relations has evolved over the past several decades into much more than corporate communications, but rather that various publics also contribute to the development of meaning in relationships. This can be further understood through J.E. Gruning's (2001) two-way asymmetrical communication model more typically associated with a persuasive communications perspective but which also relies heavily feedback from on target audiences.

These perspectives, which according to Ihlen & van Ruler (2009) stem from observed responses to marketing and publicity efforts, are arguably based on one of the most critical accounts of the influence of public relations in society: Daniel J. Boorstin's (1962/1992) work *The image: A guide to pseudo-events in America*. Boorstin described images created through staged publicity events which he claimed bore no relationship to reality (Ihlen & van Ruler, 2009) and were merely a function of an increase in commodification and mass consumer culture. As staged publicity events relate to tourism and destination image, "the concepts of commodification and spectacle provide the theoretical basis for understanding the marketing of cities, the globalization of celebrations, and the political economy of tourism" (Gotham, 2002, p16). Furthermore, the marketing of cities through tourism, and specifically event-based tourism, generates the necessary media exposure that further contributes to the formation of images related to a given destination or about a specific event.

## **DATA AND METHODS**

The purpose of this study is to better understand how New Orleans is able to continually serve and set itself apart as a host location for major sports events, the components of which include strategies designed to position and promote New Orleans both as a viable major sport event host and as a desirable tourist destination. Given this goal, the following research questions are asked:

RQ1: What are some of the key drivers of sports event tourism in New Orleans?

RQ2: What are the main strategies used by destination marketers when promoting and publicizing New Orleans as a sports and tourism destination?

RQ3: How can both leisure tourism and sports event tourism activities help to precipitate interest in return visits to New Orleans?

RQ4: How has social media such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter changed the objectives of marketing and public relations campaigns designed to attract tourists to New Orleans?

RQ5: What are some of the long-term impacts or effects that the sports tourism industry can have for the New Orleans area?

This qualitative case study utilized in-depth, semi-structured interviews with professionals who are a part of various different organizations involved in both organizing major sports events and driving tourism to New Orleans (see Appendix A-Interview Questionnaire and List of Interviewees). Through both purposive sampling and network sampling techniques, tourism and sports professionals will be individually interviewed to determine the ways in which they are working to build destination appeal for both the host city and sports event tourists. Data collected from these in-depth interviews will then be analyzed, focusing on specific topics or trends in responses to the questions (see Appendix A-Interview Questionnaire and List of Interviewees).

Since qualitative data are generally continuous and not discreet (Fitch, 1994), it is recommended to utilize audio recordings of the interviews which can then be transcribed for further analysis (Keyton, 2011). In studying destination image and sports event tourism, qualitative methods allow for a greater opportunity to obtain a deeper understanding of the cognitive and affective components of tourism through in-depth interviews and observations (Jones, 1997). While validity is often a challenge with the low sample numbers resulting from in-depth interviews (Jones, 1997), this study will focus on a smaller niche of the general tourism market (sports event tourists), and therefore does not necessarily need to be generalizable to a larger sample of the population.

Interviews with the desired sports and tourism professionals in New Orleans were conducted face-to-face when possible, utilizing a digital voice recorder to capture the audio. Field notes will also be taken and incorporated into the results of this study. Observational field notes of sport event consumers visiting in the city, and particularly in the French Quarter and Central Business District (CBD) areas of New Orleans, for both the Sugar Bowl and the BCS Championship game were taken and consisted of observations of sport event consumers as tourists in New Orleans. When taking field notes, Keyton (2011) notes that it is important to include participants' phrases or comments in the appropriate context to accurately convey the meaning.

This case study focuses on destination image as it relates to the city of New Orleans serving as a major sport event host and tourist destination, and the ways in which sports and tourism professionals work to ensure its continued success. There are instances when these concepts can be evaluated empirically, but the intent in this research is to focus primarily on the destination image and tourism through marketing and public relations efforts conducted by sports

and tourism professionals in New Orleans. Although some behavioral or participatory outcomes will be observed, analyzing those outcomes from an empirical or economic perspective this is not the primary focus of the research. The observation of fans' behaviors at the destination will be done solely to understand how to better approach the development of destination image and tourism marketing strategies as it relates to actual tourism consumption behaviors.

### Interviews and Observation

The primary method of research for this case study was to conduct semi-structured, in-depth interviews with various sports and tourism officials in New Orleans. Interviews were conducted with representatives from the Greater New Orleans Sports Foundation, the New Orleans Convention and Visitors Bureau, the New Orleans Tourism Marketing Corporation, and SMG, the facility manager for the Mercedes-Benz Superdome, the New Orleans Arena, and Champions Square (see Appendix F-Interview Data). The length of interviews was between 30 minutes to 1½ hours, depending on the scheduled availability of the individual being interviewed. Three of the interviews were conducted in person, allowing the researcher to observe non-verbal queues and other expressions and also allowed the researcher to physically observe some of the deliverables from promotional present and past events or promotions associated with tourism marketing strategies. Two interviews were conducted over the telephone which only allowed the researcher to hear certain voice fluctuations and other verbal queues when questions were being answered. One interview was conducted via email, which allowed only for a specific answer to the question which was asked.

All interviews were recorded and later transcribed by the researcher to ensure accuracy of statements for research evaluation. While there was a particular set of questions outlined to ask each interviewee, given the interviewees' role in their given organization, certain questions were

omitted due to lack of relevance. If an interviewee's response required asking a question which wasn't outlined in the original set, but was pertinent to the research, the question was asked.

Responses to the interview questions were then analyzed according to several common themes or topics, answers to research questions, and additional findings.

As an additional component of this research, observational field research was conducted in New Orleans on the weekend prior to the Sugar Bowl, on Sugar Bowl game day, and during the weekend prior to the BCS National Championship game. This research consisted of observing identifiable sports fans in the French Quarter and in the Central Business District (CBD) areas of downtown New Orleans (See Appendix G-Observational Field Notes). Fans were considered to be people dressed in their respective team or university colors or otherwise wearing university logos. The noted observations were their participation in "tourist" activities such as eating at some of the city's notable restaurants, shopping at souvenir stores, and visiting some of the city's notable landmarks in the French Quarter/CBD area.

Over the same two week period that these events took place, the city also hosted a New Orleans Hornets game and a New Orleans Saints playoff game. Fans of those teams were observed interacting with the college football fans, and in some cases, they were fans of more than one team. In the case of the BCS Championship weekend, many LSU and some Alabama fans also attended the New Orleans Hornets game. It was important to observe behaviors in order to better understand how sports fans act as leisure tourists in New Orleans and how groups of highly identifiable individuals added to the overall atmosphere. For destination marketers, it is important to observe tourist behaviors in order to evaluate elements of particular marketing strategies or tactics that may or may not have been successful. This observational research is also useful for evaluating fans' non-verbal queues as well as to determine some of the



perceptions of the city through observing conversations and tourist interactions (no interviews were conducted). Furthermore, when the city is hosting a major sports event that brings two separate fan bases into town, it is important to observe how those individuals interact with each other for marketing purposes as well as for security and stewardship during and after the event.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Sports and tourism professionals in New Orleans, along with state and local leaders, have made great strides in repositioning New Orleans as a prominent sport event host and tourist destination. Although recovery from Hurricane Katrina is still somewhat ongoing, the sport and tourism infrastructure has been almost entirely restored, and in many cases, greatly improved. Facility and infrastructure repairs and renovations were done with thorough planning and foresight in order to ensure that strategic goals for New Orleans' ability to host major events could be achieved. Renovations to the tourism infrastructure were also conducted with achievement of long-term goals of increases in tourism as a primary consideration.

After Katrina, sport and tourism leaders approached the city's recovery with a comprehensive plan and strategy to ensure its continued success into the future. Working with event owners and governmental leaders, the GNOSF, SMG, and Tulane University athletic officials thoroughly examined which events the city is realistically capable of hosting and developed a strategy to pursue those events on a regular basis (J. Cicero, personal communication, January 2012; D. Thornton, personal communication, January 2012). Having funding mechanisms in place and properly re-establishing the event infrastructure was critical because

these events have become more sophisticated and we are constantly evaluated financially by governing bodies so [our] bids must be equal to or more competitive. Notoriety helps us sell the next one down the road. When you're labeled a big event city and have positive publicity, that's a big factor in attracting the next event (J. Cicero, personal communication, January 2012).

A portion of this planning came to fruition when, over a five-week period from December 9, 2011 to January 9, 2012, New Orleans hosted the LHSAA State Football Championships, the R+L Carriers New Orleans Bowl, two regular-season Saints home games

(one being a nationally-televised Monday Night Football broadcast), the Allstate Sugar Bowl, a Saints Wild Card Playoff game, five New Orleans Hornets home games, and the BCS National Championship. The major events were deemed successful from an economic perspective, and although final numbers are not yet available, the impact is expected to be nearly half a billion dollars (K. Schulz, personal communication, January 2012). This can be directly attributed to the city's reputation as a premier host location with an authentic destination experience. For this study, conducting field research and in-depth interviews during and immediately following this period provided unparalleled opportunities for immersion into the analysis of these events and the tourism destination atmosphere.

Throughout the in-depth interview process, several key themes or topics were identified. This shows good collaboration and cohesiveness between and among the stakeholders who are responsible for securing and producing major sports events as well as attracting fans and/or leisure tourists to travel to the city. While each organization represented through the interviews clearly understood their own particular role, they also had a clear understanding of the necessity of working together to benefit their own organizations, the city of New Orleans, the owners of sports events, and the fans that travel as tourists. Each interviewee also stated that one of the primary reasons event owners and organizers continue to return to New Orleans is because of each organization's understanding of how these events benefit all those in the hospitality and tourism industry, and putting forth a collaborative effort while also focusing on what they each do best in order to ensure overall success.

Additional reasons which were continually given as reasons that sports event owners and organizers want to come to New Orleans is because of the city's infrastructure, which can support sports events and tourism, the authenticity of the city, and the city's experience as a

major event host. For the city, economic impact and media exposure were some of the primary benefits which result from hosting major sports events. Furthermore, since many of the restaurants and hotel rooms in the downtown and French Quarter area are within walking distance from the city's primary sports facilities, along with other major venues such as the Morial Convention Center, this was also cited as a major benefit. Many ancillary events such as fan fests, concerts, and pep rallies are held in or near the French Quarter or at the Morial Convention Center, which can also serve as a primary venue for other sports events such as the 2011 AAU Junior Olympics.

#### Facility Infrastructure and Authenticity

The most important factor, however, is the presence of the Mercedes-Benz Superdome and the New Orleans Arena, the primary host facilities for most of the major sports events that take place in New Orleans. The city and immediate surrounding areas also have an inventory of nearly 38,000 hotel rooms, of which approximately 20,000 are located in the downtown and French Quarter areas, contributing to the convenience of the city particularly for sports event tourists (J. Cicero, personal communication, January 2012; D. Thornton, personal communication, January 2012; N. Williams, personal communication, January 2012; K. Schulz, personal communication, January 2012). There are also over 1200 restaurants in the city, giving tourists various options from fine dining establishments to small, inexpensive neighborhood-type eateries (N. Williams, personal communication, January 2012; K. Schulz, personal communication, January 2012). These presence and availability of these facilities for not only major sports events, but also for large corporate meetings and other entertainment events is a primary driver for hosting major sports events. These facilities have the seating capacities,

configurations, and staff available to make sure that major events are handled well and event owners have all of their needs met (J. Cicero, personal communication, January 2012; D. Thornton, personal communication, January 2012).

The ability to maintain this facility infrastructure is also where collaboration between all of the sports, tourism, hospitality, and facility managers in the city of New Orleans, as well as major governmental stakeholders both locally and statewide, comes to the forefront. As Kelly Schulz of the NOCVB indicated,

sporting events are great for any city, but especially for New Orleans where it's been six years, almost seven, since Hurricane Katrina, we have proven to the world that we can host major conventions and meetings and events. To be able to host especially just what we've done in early January and late December, I don't know of any other city that could successfully host the BCS and the Sugar Bowl and New Year's Eve (activities), and the Saints playoff game, and several Hornets games all in a 10-day period, and do it all flawlessly. Turning the Superdome around in the way that they did it and to have complete integration between the tourism community and the city and the police department, it really is impressive, and it shows that no city does it better than New Orleans (K. Schulz, personal communication, January 2012).

Without collaboration from all of those entities, it would be difficult to host many major events continually and with consistency in results. Much of their success and consistency in delivering quality results, however, depends on resource commitment from the entities throughout the entire state.

In addition, the authenticity of New Orleans was cited continuously as primary reason New Orleans is chosen as a host destination. The city's unique history and culture offer opportunities for visitors to have various different experiences than many other destination cities in the United States. The sports industry has a primary role in helping to increase awareness of the city's image as a unique place, and can be a primary driver of return visits to the city. In addition to major events, museums and tours help to highlight the cultural and historical

authenticity of the city. Major events, though, are always a catalyst for driving the tourism industry, but particularly after Hurricane Katrina because

sports has tremendous capacity to fill hotel rooms. So after the storm it became very important to get our leisure message out particularly surrounding events and festivals to really make the statement that New Orleans was still here. Now there's virtually something happening here every day, so events marketing really became the core driver of the leisure message. We still use a consistent brand message across different mediums, really focusing on the fact that you can be different here, and to come and just have fun and let go while you're in New Orleans. You can do the things here that you can't do back in Indianapolis or in Detroit; you can have that indulgent meal or have that decadent dessert; things you just can't do other places (N. Williams, personal communication, January 2012).

Sports events help to drive tourism among members of certain markets which may not otherwise have travelled to New Orleans, and by using these events to showcase the city's authenticity and unique attributes as a tourism destination, this can potentially lead to repeat visitation.

#### Organizational Collaboration, Host Experience, and Media Exposure

Primarily, organizations such as SMG and the GNOSF rely on the city and state to assist with financial support needed to subsidize major events. Additionally, the NOCVB and the NOTMC also rely on resources from the city and state to promote tourism both in New Orleans and throughout the state. The city also relies on cooperation from state and local government to assist with providing law enforcement and first responders in order to ensure the safety of tourists and other event attendees. In order to host major events like the BCS Championship, the Super Bowl, the NCAA Men's Final Four, and the NBA All-Star Game, the city must be easily accessible for major stakeholders, participants, and spectators alike. This requires major infrastructure improvements at the New Orleans International Airport as well as increases in ground transportation services such as taxi cabs, along with some road and highway

improvements for those traveling by car. The commitment by both the city and the state, and sometimes the federal government, to have the financial resources available to continually upgrade the entire infrastructure of New Orleans is a primary reason why major sports events either chose to return to the city, or are awarded to the city by the event owner. Without this continued commitment, the loss of such major events would likely result in reduced numbers of tourists coming into the city, resulting in lower tourism numbers and having direct, negative impacts on the local economy through a loss of jobs.

The infrastructure of hotels, restaurants, and sports venues along with transportation and various other services were greatly impacted by Hurricane Katrina. The extensive media coverage damaged the city's image, and it took several years for tourism and hospitality officials to re-establish a level of confidence among event owners that New Orleans was capable of hosting major events. Although both of the city's major professional franchises had to be temporarily relocated, and many major events like the Sugar Bowl and the Bayou Classic were also forced to find alternate venues that year, the city had recovered enough in early 2006 to host some Mardi Gras festivities. The Saints and the Hornets then returned to play in partially renovated facilities, and the city was able to host the 2007 Sugar Bowl and BCS National Championship. Many hotels and restaurants had not reopened, or were operating at a lower capacity, and though this provided a great challenge for sports, tourism, and hospitality officials in New Orleans, the city was able to retain its host designation for the 2008 NBA All-Star Game because of the city's previous success as a major event host. That event provided an opportunity for more national media attention and corporate travel than the BCS Championship, and as a result, more "decision-makers" could experience the city's recovery firsthand; it truly put New Orleans "back on the map" as a major sports event host (D. Thornton, personal

communication, January 2012; J. Cicero, personal communication, January 2012). This was a crucial turning point for sports, tourism, and hospitality officials who set strategic goals to bring the city back to prominence as a major event host, and also served as a major catalyst for preparing a bid to host the Super Bowl for the first time since 2002.

Through the media, the city was able to demonstrate to a national viewing audience of the 2008 NBA All-Star Game that New Orleans was back, and once again able to host the types of events that the city has such a reputation for. Another primary tourism driver which was mentioned many times throughout the interviews was the authenticity of the city. The same sentiment—that when people travel, they want to have an experience like they’ve never had before—and for both first-time visitors and return visitors, there is always something new or unique to experience that they haven’t necessarily experienced before. These are the images which are so important for the media to project because they present New Orleans as a city unlike any other destination city, where tourists can come and have a unique, authentic experience. From the perspective of the NOTMC, having

national media running b-roll is so important; it gets the media talking. Other teams and destinations really just don’t have that. Like Detroit, great team, great town, but they just don’t have all of the cultural assets that we have here as a leisure destination and so we benefit from that. To all come together as an industry, to mobilize so the fans take the best possible experience away from their time here, something that our marketing dollars just can’t buy is positive word of mouth. People are much more likely to respect and base decisions off of information they’ve heard from friends than from a guidebook or an advertisement. And social media is an amplification of that word of mouth. Someone checks in from New Orleans and talks about the delicious meal they’re having, and all of their friends are so jealous. Those are impressions that we just can’t buy (N. Williams, personal communication, January 2012).

Social media and web marketing has also taken on a primary role in promoting New Orleans as a desirable tourist destination. Both the NOCVB and the NOTMC have a collaborative strategy for social media, which includes Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Flickr



accounts, along with blogs. Both the NOCVB and NOTMC find that more traditional methods of print, television, and radio advertising to more effective in targeting an older adult demographic, while social media has become one of the primary ways to connect with the young adults (N. Williams, personal communication, January 2012; K. Schulz, personal communication, January 2012). They are particularly interested in targeting this group because of their buying power and consumption patterns for sports and entertainment. Younger to middle-aged adults with families are also likely to consider New Orleans as a destination given its value and options for family activities outside of the French Quarter (J. Hundley, personal communication, February 2012).

While some members of this demographic may be more affected by the current economy, they are still seeking an authentic travel experience that is a great value, and this is something New Orleans can provide given its relative ease of access, availability of hotel rooms, and countless restaurant and entertainment options (N. Williams, personal communication, January 2012; K. Schulz, personal communication, January 2012). The array of entertainment options can also become a primary reason for return visits since it is difficult to experience many of the attractions New Orleans has to offer in a short period of time. As the use of technology and social media becomes more commonplace among the target markets for sports and tourism officials, the development of these different platforms will likely increase the levels of customer service provided before, during, and after trips to New Orleans, which can benefit both leisure and business travelers.

## Economic and Long-Term Impact

Consistency and continuity of service was frequently cited by all four interviewees as a primary reason that event owners continue to return to New Orleans when seeking a host location. Part of that consistency and continuity is related to the current and past success as a major event host as measured by economic impact. For New Orleans, hospitality is a billion dollar industry which employs over 70,000 people and draws nearly 8.5 million people to the city on an annual basis (K. Schulz, personal communication, January 2012). The influx of tax revenue from tourism dollars helps to support small businesses, local employment, infrastructure improvements, and the future sustainability of the industry itself.

Further long-term collaboration between all of these agencies is evidenced in the city's strategic plan for tourism, where major sports events are a primary component. Now that the major portion of renovations to the Mercedes-Benz Superdome are complete and the Saints have signed their long-term lease agreement,

it is our goal to get the Men's Final Four back around 2017 or 2018 which also coincides with the city's 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary...then get the Super Bowl back twice between 2013 and 2025. If you get that kind of mega-event it gives you a reason to continue to celebrate and market the city and have outreach you can't buy for business and leisure tourism (J. Cicero, personal communication, January 2012).

Major sports events are important to destination cities for many reasons, but they have played an especially important role in New Orleans post-Katrina. The NOCVB has also worked very closely with the GNOSF and the media to accurately portray how far the city has come in rebuilding its reputation as a major sport event host and tourism destination. For the NOCVB, continuing to host major sports events also factors primarily into their strategic planning activities. Major sports events are

something we definitely want to see on a regular basis. The entire hospitality industry is working towards our strategic master plan which was unveiled in 2010. Right now, in an

average year, we get about 8.5 million visitors and the goal of the strategic plan is to get 13 million visitors by 2018, so there are lots of strategies in that plan to make that happen ( K. Schulz, personal communication, January 2012).

The influx of tourists coming to New Orleans for major events can also potentially have an impact on the entire state. There is an opportunity for “visitor sharing,” (M. Alijani, personal communication, March 2012) or targeting visitors who may be driving through different areas of the state to get to New Orleans. Travelers can be encouraged through marketing efforts by both the NOCVB and other tourism offices to stop in other parts of the state on their way to New Orleans to enjoy some of the other unique attractions the state of Louisiana has to offer. While these stays may be short, it also presents another opportunity to encourage repeat visitation. In addition, from an economic impact perspective, destination marketers should focus on attracting greater numbers of “quality” tourists than simply attempting to draw as many visitors as possible. The quality tourists are those who will have the greatest impact through spending (M. Alijani, personal communication, March 2012). However, a tourist who may not necessarily be considered a quality visitor may eventually fit that category, so it is important for all visitors to have a good experience, not just those who have more of an impact from a revenue perspective.

Organizations such as the GNOSF, SMG, NOCVB, and NOTMC are also dependent on the revenues brought in through the Hotel-Motel tax, among others, to continue to operate and drive the cycle of tourism. However, New Orleans is not suited to host all types of major sports events, and its geography and infrastructure will not support mega-events like an Olympic Games, the World Cup, or Winter X Games, for example (J. Cicero, personal communication, January 2012; D. Thornton, personal communication, January 2012). Although there has been much speculation surrounding potential changes to the structure of the BCS and the bowl games it currently includes in the championship rotation, New Orleans is expected to remain in the mix

as a strong contender to continue to host these games because of the past success along with its ability to generate nearly \$500 million in economic impact. (J. Hundley, persona communication, February 2012). Focusing on the events that New Orleans is suited to host and ensuring that they're done to the best of the city's ability is of paramount importance (J. Cicero, personal communication, January 2012).

Through building a reputation of solid customer service, an authentic, one-of-a-kind experience, and the convenience of the city's amenities, New Orleans can continue to serve as a host and destination for major sports events into the foreseeable future. Organizations like those studied here are fully committed to continuing the process of building and maintaining New Orleans as a premier host city for the long-term.

Hosting is definitely sustainable, but long-term, the creation and maintenance of jobs in the hospitality industry and the additional business that local companies are able to bid on because of these major events is key. Our hope is to have all of these major events every 5-6 years, and these local companies are in turn able to increase their business and their portfolio and reputation. Catering contracts, t-shirts, transportation, frame shops, etc, it's just a trickle-down effect and the events that we bring are lagniappe for [these businesses] (J. Cicero, personal communication, January 2012).

Serving as a premier host destination is one of the primary goals of all of these organizations, and with the economic impact these major sports events generate, New Orleans seems well-poised for successful achievement.

## **CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

Arguably, there is no other city in the world who has so quickly rebuilt its image as a viable and vibrant tourist destination after such a devastating natural disaster (Hurricane Katrina) as New Orleans has. The resiliency of its citizens and the steadfast determination of its leaders, particularly its tourism and sports professionals, has helped to bring the city back to prominence as one of the best major event host locations in the United States. The success of New Orleans as a major sport event host is directly related to not only the facility infrastructure and its reputation as a unique tourism destination, but also the strategic re-branding of the city through effective destination marketing. It is not based solely on the city's success in the past, but rather its commitment to adapting to future requirements and in the importance of having collaborative goals set by sports and tourism officials for the future of New Orleans.

Through these goals, economic impact is frequently stated as a primary driver for hosting major sports events but many analyses fail to address the more intangible benefits of hosting these events (Solberg & Preuss, 2007.) In addition to increased awareness of tourism opportunities, social impacts such as civic pride and community self-worth can also result from serving as a major sport event host (Solberg & Preuss, 2007). These major events are instrumental in bringing people together, and the resulting civic pride links itself to a more cohesive city image through shared beliefs (Wood, 2006). Though it's related more to the members of a local community, this civic pride is an important non-economic aspect of serving as a host because the local community is the foundation of the hospitality infrastructure (see Appendix B-Tourism-Related City Development). Those locals who are responsible for both forming and contributing to the hospitality infrastructure (i.e., local tourism leaders and

government officials along with industry workers) are a critical component in maintaining the positive image New Orleans has as a tourist destination.

For DMOs, appropriately targeting consumers is one of their main challenges, so understanding the consumption patterns of various target markets is imperative. Some sports tourists are more likely to be influenced by the authenticity of New Orleans as tourist destination with a variety of entertainment options rather than just a major sport event location, New Orleans' destination image as viewed through b-roll on television and through various online platforms is another primary driver of tourism activities related to hosting major sports events.

Hosting major sports events on a regular basis, as is the goal for New Orleans, can also have impacts on public policy. In some cases, communities may assess certain fees or taxes to visitors which can be reinvested into the local community. These taxes, which are levied on "...hotel and car rentals, amusement and entertainment attractions, and meals and alcoholic beverages at bars and restaurants...are established by "governments ranging from New Orleans to Nova Scotia to Tokyo" (Brown, 2004). Along with investments from major corporate sponsors of events, taxes generated through the tourism industry provide tangible products for the local community in the form of jobs and infrastructure improvements. Nike was instrumental in funding improvements to a local New Orleans playground, which contributes to restoring recreational sports at a grassroots level. Bed taxes are also used to fund hospitality industry jobs as well as improvements at the Louis Armstrong International Airport (D. Thornton, personal communication, January 2012).

The state of Louisiana is also currently evaluating the establishment of a special fund which would be dedicated to assisting communities hosting various types of sports events. This study, the Major Sports Events Study, is being evaluated by state leaders including Lt. Governor

Jay Dardenne, Doug Thornton, and sports commission leaders from communities throughout the state. The 20-member task force is expected to submit its recommendations in the coming weeks to Louisiana lawmakers who will then evaluate the options for developing the fund ("Task Force," 2012).

As a destination for major sports tourism events, New Orleans sports and tourism officials have taken the steps necessary to ensure its future success. The benefits of successfully hosting major sports events may seem obvious from an economic perspective, but many other benefits associated with hosting these events, such as developing a consistent tourism brand, may not be. From a consumer's perspective, execution of the event (the teams playing the game or attending the game/event itself), is usually considered to be the final outcome. For event owners and organizers, though, the end of the event marks the beginning of the evaluation phase, where impacts beyond the score of the game are assessed. Throughout the entire process of planning, execution, evaluation, and stewardship sports and tourism leaders in New Orleans are able to provide a higher level of service than many other destination cities. This level of service, combined with the availability of facilities, amenities, entertainment options, and a unique, authentic experience, are qualities that ultimately set New Orleans apart from other destination cities as a primary host for major sports events both now and into the future.

For this study, concentrating on New Orleans as a major sports event tourism destination was the primary focus. Using one city for analysis though is one of the studies primary limitations. The results, however, are highly applicable to that particular market, but may not necessarily be generalizable to other locations. Future research studies should compare various major sport event and tourism destination cities to analyze the success of both marketing campaigns and their hospitality infrastructure. Other future studies could also incorporate

research on sports fans from both qualitative and quantitative perspectives utilizing conceptual frameworks and theoretical perspectives such as the Psychological Continuum Model (Funk & James, 2001) and Social Exchange Theory (Roloff, 1981). In addition, professionals from the Hotel/Motel Association, Restaurant Association, and event owners such as the NCAA or NFL should also be included to gain a more comprehensive perspective of the impact of major sports events and how destination cities are evaluated.

Organizations such as the NOTMC and the NOCVB are the primary drivers of marketing and branding of New Orleans as a tourist destination, and unlike other destination cities who may need to specifically target certain market segments or tailor their approach to one or two primary attractions, these groups can focus on one brand message for all consumers. New Orleans is a destination which has countless unique cultural and entertainment offerings that can appeal to both families and individuals, therefore building New Orleans' brand around the notion that "You're Different Here" is something which can appeal to every person in a different way (N. Williams, personal communication, January 2012). Whether they're targeting sports fans, music fans, history buffs, a corporate meeting, or a bachelor party, a consistent message helps to build the destination brand.

Social media and technology have an increasingly important role in building New Orleans' destination image, and the NOVCB and NOTMC officials are committed to continuing to incorporate those platforms into their overall communication strategies. While more traditional methods of marketing and public relations are still effective in targeting certain demographics through advertisements, social media is one of the most effective ways to generating positive word of mouth publicity (N. Williams, personal communication, January 2012). Positive word of mouth publicity is often the best way to generate both new and return



trips to New Orleans, because individuals or groups share their firsthand experiences with others and can influence their intent to travel from a personal perspective.

The established tourism and event infrastructure, combined with a strong image as a unique, dynamic destination keeps New Orleans in the forefront as a major sport event host city and tourism destination. Thousands of consumers continue to be attracted to New Orleans because tourism and hospitality leaders are able to effectively convey an intriguing destination and brand image. Though changes in marketing and communication methods have greatly impacted the ways these messages are delivered, New Orleans has achieved success in utilizing these channels to develop more targeted and personalized tourist attraction and retention strategies. Since New Orleans' success has an impact on the entire state, it is important for both local- and state-level governmental officials to support and promote tourism initiatives both financially and through public policy development. Sports and tourism leaders in New Orleans have embraced the opportunity for change caused by Hurricane Katrina and have also successfully adapted to challenges brought about by the current economic climate. Through efficient and effective collaboration strategies and the development of a solid destination brand image, along with strong leadership and long-term planning by sports and tourism professionals, the city is poised to remain a viable major sport event host and tourism destination location for the foreseeable future.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE AND LIST OF INTERVIEWEES**

(Adapted from Getz, 2008)

1. What is your role in given organization? How does your role/organization contribute to sports event tourism in New Orleans?
2. What role does sport play in making New Orleans a popular or desirable tourist destination?
3. What drives sport event tourism in New Orleans?
4. What sports in particular are most conducive to being played in New Orleans?
5. How do the various DMOs interact/collaborate to promote sports event tourism in New Orleans?
6. What are the primary motives associated with hosting sports tourism events in New Orleans?
7. What are some of the communication methods or strategies currently being used to promote New Orleans as a desirable tourist destination? (WOM, TV, Print, etc.)
8. How have destination marketers utilized the internet and social media to promote New Orleans, and how have these technologies impacted sports event tourism?
9. What strategies are most effective in attracting tourists to New Orleans for sports events?
10. What leadership, planning, and decision-making styles are most effective for promoting New Orleans as a sports event destination? And how does this affect the bid process for bid-based events?
11. Has this organization had to adapt or change its marketing strategies in the current economic climate?
12. What are some of the primary reasons for return visits to New Orleans for either sports events or other leisure travel?
13. What is the long-term value of sports events to the local community? Is sports event tourism sustainable for New Orleans in the long-term?
14. Are there any other major events that could be brought to New Orleans or that New Orleans is interested in hosting? (either for the first time or again)

## List of Interviewees

- Melody Alijani, Director of Research, Louisiana Dept. of Culture, Recreation, & Tourism
- Jay Cicero, President/CEO, Greater New Orleans Sports Foundation
- Jeff Hundley, COO, Allstate Sugar Bowl
- Kelly Schulz, Vice President of Communications and Public Relations, Greater New Orleans Convention & Visitors Bureau
- Doug Thornton, SMG (Louisiana Superdome/New Orleans Arena/Champions Square)
- Nathan Williams, Interactive Director, New Orleans Tourism Marketing Corporation



**APPENDIX B**  
**TOURISM-RELATED CITY DEVELOPMENT**

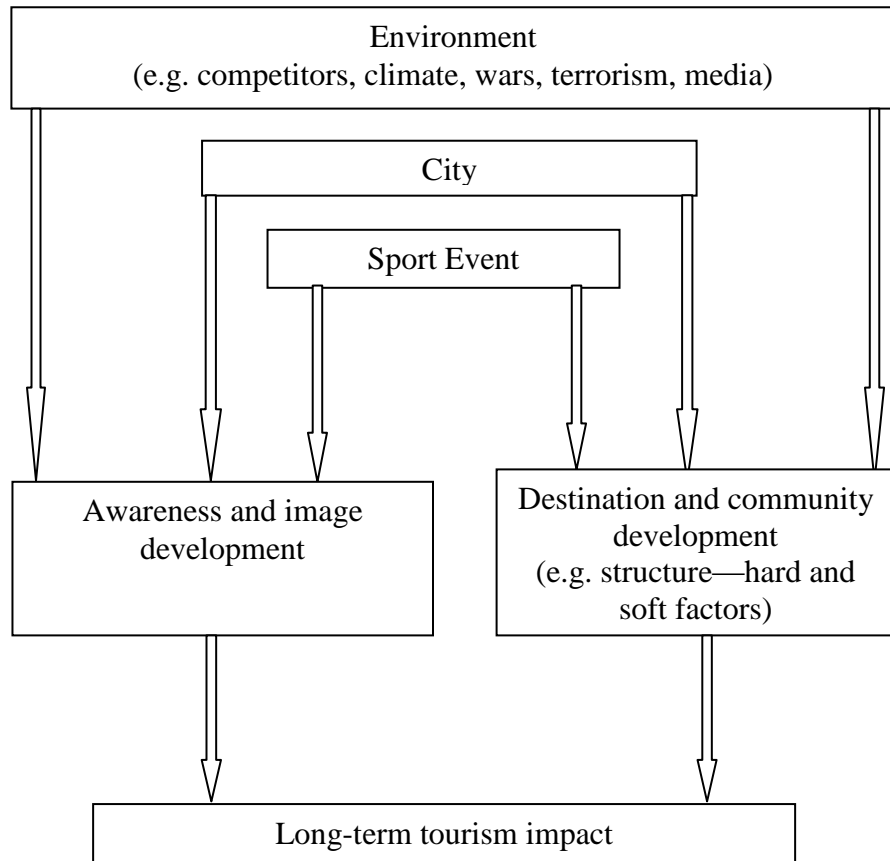


Figure 1: Factors influencing the outcome of tourism-related city development (Solberg & Preuss, 2007)

**APPENDIX C**  
**STRATEGIC ROLES OF THE CVB**  
(Wang, 2008)

**Table 1: A summary of strategic roles of CVBs in destination marketing: examples from previous research**

<i>Strategic roles</i>	<i>Main concepts</i>	<i>Authors' references</i>
Destination/community marketer/promoter	Marketing and promoting the tourism products of the entire destination to large/small meeting and pleasure travel groups as well as independent travelers	Bramwell & Rawding; <sup>29</sup> Dore & Crouch; <sup>30</sup> Kelly & Nankervis; <sup>31</sup> Palmer & Bejou; <sup>32</sup> Ritchie & Crouch. <sup>33</sup>
Destination image/brand developer	Develop a holistic image and a viable brand of the destination; Position the destination as attractive in the marketplace for meetings and visitors	Bramwell & Rawding; <sup>34</sup> Gartrell; <sup>35-6</sup> Heath & Wall; <sup>37</sup> Morgan & Pritchard; <sup>38</sup> WTO. <sup>39</sup>
Industry coordinator	Coordinate the constituent elements of the industry and public sectors; Provide a clear focus and encourage less industry fragmentation to share the growing benefits of tourism	Gartrell; <sup>40</sup> Gunn; <sup>41</sup> Heath & Wall; <sup>42</sup> Laws; <sup>43</sup> Morrison et al.; <sup>44</sup> Presenza et al.. <sup>45</sup>
Advocate/supporter/facilitator of tourism projects	Promote tourism industry in local community; Raise awareness level of tourism business; Emphasize the economic impact of the tourism industry; Provide leadership for the tourism industry	Gartrell; <sup>46-7</sup> Heath & Wall; <sup>48</sup> Laws. <sup>49</sup>
Economic driver	Generate new income, employment, and taxes contributing to a more diversified local economy	Heath & Wall; <sup>50</sup> Morrison et al. <sup>51</sup>
Quasi-public representative	Act as semi-government organization to add legitimacy for the industry and protect individual and group visitors	Gartrell; <sup>52</sup> Morrison et al. <sup>53</sup>
Builder of community pride	Enhance quality of life and act as the chief 'flag carrier' for residents and visitors alike	Morrison et al. <sup>54</sup>
Partnership/alliance builder	Promote cooperation and the widest possible harmonization of objectives within the destination; Represent both buyers and sellers	Bolson; <sup>55</sup> Morrison et al.; <sup>56</sup> Wang & Fesenmaier. <sup>57</sup>
Destination planner/manager	Plan and manage the destination in a manner that is sensitive to the needs of disparate tourism stakeholders; Represent the interests of stakeholders	Bramwell & Rawding; <sup>58</sup> Getz et al.; <sup>59</sup> Gunn; <sup>60</sup> Heath & Wall; <sup>61</sup> Fyall & Garrod; <sup>62</sup> Kelly & Nankervis; <sup>63</sup> Middleton; <sup>64</sup> Kelly & Nankervis; <sup>65</sup> WTO. <sup>66</sup>
Destination product developer	Develop the destination as a 'one-stop shopping center' for visitors; Direct and control destination product development by involving in destination planning processes at different stages; Stimulate urban regeneration through tourism	Getz et al.; <sup>67</sup> Morrison et al.; <sup>68</sup> Ritchie & Crouch. <sup>69</sup>

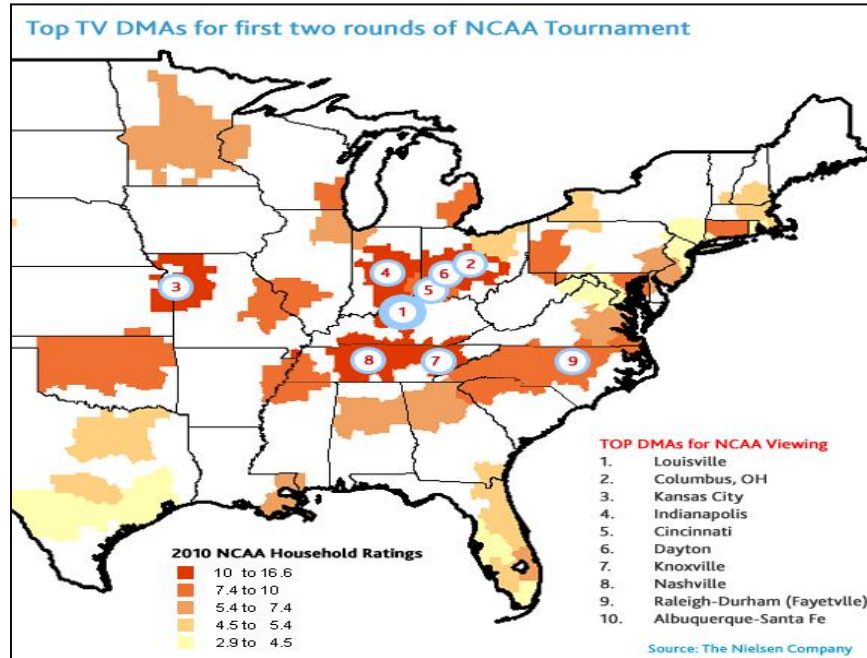
## APPENDIX D

### MAJOR GNOSF EVENTS

Major GNOSF Events, 1991-2013 (gnosports.com)

YEAR	EVENT
1991	NCAA Women's Final Four
1992	Olympic Track & Field Trials
1993	NCAA Track & Field Champ.
1994	National Gymnastics Champ.
1996	SEC Men's Basketball Championship
1996	AAU Junior Olympic Games
1996	Olympic Boxing Exhibition
1997	Super Bowl XXXI
1998	USA Track & Field Natl. Championship
1999	Bassmaster's Classic
1999	NCAA Men's Basketball 1st/2nd Round
2000	Reese's Gymnastics Cup
2000	USA Weightlifting Olympic Trials
2001	NCAA Men's Basketball, 1st/2nd Round
2001	Bassmaster's Classic
2001	Inaugural New Orleans Bowl
2002	Super Bowl XXXVI
2002	NCAA Women's Volleyball Championship
2003	SEC Men's Basketball Championship
2003	NCAA Men's Final Four
2003	Bassmaster's Classic
2004	HBCU All Star Classic
2004	NCAA Women's Final Four
2005	AAU Junior Olympic Games
2006	R+L Carriers New Orleans Bowl
2007	NCAA Men's Basketball 1st and 2nd Rounds
2007	Arena Football League Arena Bowl XXI
2008	<u>NBA All Star Game and Weekend</u>
2008	<u>NCAA Women's Basketball</u>
2008	<u>ArenaBowl XXII</u>
2008	<u>R+L Carriers New Orleans Bowl</u>
2009	<u>R+L Carriers New Orleans Bowl</u>
2010	NCAA Men's Basketball 1st & 2nd Rounds
2010	<u>IronMan 70.3</u>
2010	<u>R+L Carriers New Orleans Bowl</u>
2011	Bassmaster's Classic
2011	NCAA Men's Basketball New Orleans Regional
2011	<u>AAU Junior Olympic Games</u>
2012	SEC Men's Basketball Championship
2012	<u>NCAA Men's Final Four,</u>
2013	Super Bowl XLVII
2013	NCAA Women's Final Four

## APPENDIX E NIELSEN STATISTICS



NIELSEN'S NFL MEDIA EXPOSURE RANKINGS						
RANK	TEAM	LOCAL TV RANK	NATIONAL TV RANK	WEBSITE/UNIQUE AUDIENCE RANK	ONLINE BUZZ VOLUME RANK	OVERALL INDEX
1	Dallas Cowboys	8	1	1	2	100
2	Pittsburgh Steelers	2	2	2	8	81
3	New York Giants	30	4	6	1	70
4 (t)	Chicago Bears	16	6	3	5	67
4 (t)	Green Bay Packers	5	3	7	11	67
4 (t)	Minnesota Vikings	4	5	9	12	67
7	Philadelphia Eagles	12	8	4	6	66
8 (t)	Indianapolis Colts	6	7	8	14	62
8 (t)	New Orleans Saints	1	13	13	10	62
10	New England Patriots	14	10	5	13	58
Source: The Nielsen Company						
Note: Time period of data reflects the 2009-10 NFL regular season						

TOP 10 LOCAL NCAA FOOTBALL MARKETS (Nielsen, 2010)		
MARKET	HH RATING	# of HH(000s)
Birmingham (Ann and Tusc)	13.4	99
Columbus, OH	10.8	98
Oklahoma City	9.6	67
Austin	8.6	58
Knoxville	8.6	47
Dayton	7.9	38
Tulsa	7.9	41
Jacksonville	7.6	51
New Orleans	7.6	48
Atlanta	7.1	170

TOP 10 LOCAL PRO FOOTBALL MARKETS		
TEAM	HH RATING	# of HH (000s)
New Orleans Saints	41.6	262
Pittsburgh Steelers	40.6	469
Cincinnati Bengals	36.5	335
Minnesota Vikings	34.3	594
Green Bay Packers	32.8	296
Indianapolis Colts	30.3	339
Kansas City Chiefs	29.9	281
Dallas Cowboys	29.0	736
Denver Broncos	27.5	423
Tennessee Titans	27.4	279
Source: The Nielsen Company, 2010 Ratings based on average audience for local team telecasts		

## **APPENDIX F**

### **INTERVIEW DATA**

#### **Interview #1**

#### **Jay Cicero, President-Greater New Orleans Sports Foundation (GNOSF)**

##### **What is your role here and how does the organization contribute to sports tourism in New Orleans?**

I'm the President of GNOSF which is the go-to organization in the city and the state (representing New Orleans) for special sporting events, mainly ones that don't come every year, that go through a bid process and require the management of them after they are awarded. We have a full service marketing and sales and operations and administration department and a sales and communication department that flushes out some of the events that are out there. We use the whole staff to put together the availability of facilities, we work closely with the CVB for hotels, but we are completely separate from them. The main factors for us are facilities, hotels, the availability of those facilities, and then if there is availability, we will do a projected budget. If the projected revenues will come close to meeting the budget and the facilities are available, then we work towards putting together a competitive, aggressive bid. If New Orleans is awarded the bid, they sign the contracts with governing body or the owner of the bid. Then the GNOSF does all of the fundraising both locally, regionally, and nationally depending on the event. Some only require local or regional funding support but many require more. For example, the budget for the 2013 Super Bowl is \$12 mil. The overall budget for sports foundation is year-round, but budgets for special events are over and above normal operating budget.

After we determine whether or not we can handle the budget, then we'll go through the bid specs to determine what revenue opportunities and expenses we have. The budget in Indy this year is \$25M, Dallas last year was \$39M, and NY is going to be in the range of \$60M. A lot of that is because we have the staff and infrastructure at the GNOSF to assist with getting those types of events. Other cities such as Indianapolis, for example, have to establish a whole organization and hire staff for a few years on a temporary basis to get the event done. We try to book "mega-events" as far out as possible to allow optimal efficiency in planning and staffing because we can bring a whole lot more resources to the table collectively by having continuity in staff.

The only big annual event on the GNOSF calendar is the New Orleans Bowl, but having the other major events in New Orleans in such a short period of time allows staff to learn how to efficiently manage all of these types of events. One of the biggest obligations in the bid is providing volunteers. For the Super Bowl, 8,000 volunteers are needed; several thousand are needed for the Final Four as well. It is their job (the GNOSF staff) to recruit, assign, manage, motivate, supervise, feed, and park all of the event volunteers. The type of event and time of event is a big factor which determines how many volunteers show up. But it's still just a small piece of the much larger scope of resources needed to put on an event. If they were only doing the Super Bowl, they would still have to hire the same number of people and have the same expense for the full time staff but having the other events allows the staff to be better prepared.

**What role does sport play in making New Orleans a desirable tourist destination?**

Sports events and the publicity surrounding them are some of the most vital ways to get your message out to mass audiences. The broadcasters will rarely talk about something negative because they are partners with the organizations and the event cities so it gives an opportunity to promote the great things about the city in addition to the economic impact. You really can't put a dollar on the value of the media exposure generated from broadcasts of major events. The Final Four will not have the atmosphere of the BCS (referring to the Mardi Gras-like atmosphere near the Superdome on game day) but it is on the same level from a perspective of scope. The corporate travel has increased there, and Super Bowl is about 60% corporate. It's a very high-end event from a travel perspective, and the amount of money spent at a Super Bowl is exponentially higher because of all of the corporate travel involved.

Another factor is the reputation of the city, along with the proximity of the Superdome to the 20,000 downtown hotel rooms, the French Quarter and countless restaurants along with the Convention Center all being in a one-mile radius of each other. Food, music, nightlife, the experience of New Orleans is what we sell. The events have become more sophisticated and we are constantly evaluated financially by governing bodies, so bids must be equal to or more competitive [than other cities]. Having world-class facilities in the Dome and the Arena is another major factor in attracting events, along with the two professional teams. Having the cooperation all of these entities when doing bids for these major events is imperative, especially for the Super Bowl and NBA All-Star game. So all of the experience factors from hosting these events in the past must now be in line with a competitive financial bid. Our bid for the Super Bowl beat out two other major cities, so it was financially more attractive to the NFL even though the budget is lower.

**What cities do you think are New Orleans' greatest competition for sports events?**

Dallas, Houston, Phoenix, San Diego, Atlanta, San Antonio, Indianapolis-- those are your major competitors. Every once in a while a city like Minneapolis will compete if they have a facility that is suitable.

**How do the various DMOs collaborate to promote sports tourism?**

The CVB, Dome, Convention Center, City, State, Tulane, Sugar Bowl, we all collaborate very well on the major events. That is a new model but with Tulane being the host institution [for the NCAA events] it's necessary. This model is new but it's working well so far and it will be the model in the future. Makes us tough to beat.

**What are the primary motivations for hosting major sports events?**

Economic impact and exposure are the two major motivational factors. Notoriety helps us sell the next one down the road. When you're labeled a big event city and have positive publicity, that's a big factor for attracting the next big event. But it's because we have the ability to do it from our past track record.

All of these sports events are trumped really by Mardi Gras, which sets the stage for New Orleans being a big event city. We had a hard time after the storm, but the 2008 NBA All-Star Game is what really put New Orleans back on the map as far as being able to host big events. While Saints game in 2006 was a huge game, it was still just a Saints game and mainly for

locals. The other meetings and events associated with the NBA All-Star Game really generated a lot of positive media exposure for the city and was a major milestone in the city's overall recovery.

**What are the primary marketing and communications strategies currently used by GNOSF?**

Our marketing strategies here are basically public outreach—membership is more of a Chamber of Commerce type deal with the New Orleans Bowl since it is the only annual major event. We do some solicitation of sponsors for the organization, but everything is mainly done on the basis of relationship building, site visiting other events and visiting with the representatives of the governing body to ensure our staff and organization is capable of handling the event. When they call the NCAA or AAU, etc, we are hoping they will say they were provided with a high level of customer service and professionalism and that's really what makes these events and organizations want to come back to the city—because we can handle it and because they have positive experiences here. We have to hold their hands sometimes through every idea they have or every permit they need and whether or not their ideas are feasible here. So we offer suggestions based on previous experiences to help maximize the trust and building relationships moving forward. That's what really helps you to get more events.

**How has technology impacted the GNOSF and its events?**

Majority of our exposure through technology has benefitted the organization more so than the events, specifically with the recruitment of volunteers through social media. The level of activity and technology you can use to reach people is amazing. You no longer have to rely on making phone calls or writing letters or having a rally somewhere to try and get people. The outreach through Twitter and the internet and the software available for volunteer management is incredible. We visited a lot of other cities to see what they were doing to compare what best fit our needs or didn't fit what we were trying to do, and we actually went with something different than what most other cities were doing. In 1995, volunteer recruitment for AAU (Junior Olympics) was tough and turnout was low because getting 1800 people the old fashioned way was hard. This time around, reaching everyone through technology was so much better, and made it so much easier to communicate changes to people. That communication is vital especially when you're dealing with outdoor events in the summer and it rains. Being able to text or email changes to people was so great for AAU this summer, because a lot of changes needed to be made as they went.

To that, grassroots level volunteering always helps to create more of an awareness of our organization since we're not really a normal business. Volunteerism is definitely one of the best ways to increase awareness and do outreach for the organization. Attrition was only about 5% for AAU which was great. It's relatively easy to get people for the Final Four; tough to get 8000 people for the Super Bowl just because of the sheer number, but it's not tough to get them interested. AAU was so undefined that it was hard to get people interested. Volunteerism, membership programs, public speaking, and constantly trying to push the mission is vital for the organization and the city.



**What are the most effective leadership, planning, and decision-making styles in this industry?**

It's all in building trust, problem solving, client/customer service, constantly communicating with owners of events to help them resolve questions, issues, etc. and once you start doing it, they rely on you so much more and you end up saving them so much time and effort and sometimes money depending on what they're asking for. With us, there's no need for NFL people to run around looking at hotels when you have a resource to know what will work and what doesn't work based on knowledge of market. Leadership based on providing customer and client service is what we like to promote. Resolving of problems which every event has; trying to predict what those problems will be based on personalities or the nature of the event itself. By being proactive, you can know better how much resources you have to throw at a certain issue.

**Do most events or event organizers come to you, or does the GNOSF seek out events?**

There aren't many events that come to us, but there are some small to medium size events that come to us because a local club or several clubs come together to host a regional event and they come to us asking what we can do to help them. We take that opportunity to explain our mission and what we can do for smaller events. For people who may not have heard of us, that also helps us build a grassroots base of support for the larger events. We don't necessarily know everything about every sport, but we know the business side of it so that's what we do. But if we host a gym meet, we need those groups to help with volunteers and equipment, etc.

**What sports are most conducive to being played in the Greater New Orleans area?**

Sports must obviously be conducive to the area. Major events are obvious with football and basketball. Regional and grassroots baseball events which are driven by the presence of facilities, and good grassroots basketball facilities as well. Flag football and soccer work because of fields, and we have good local soccer folks. Don't have the inventory of soccer fields that some other cities do, like Baton Rouge for example, but those infrastructure things are key.

**What about sports like volleyball and wrestling?**

Volleyball and wrestling? There's great wrestling in the city and state, but no opportunities on the collegiate level. We would love to one day host a collegiate wrestling championship because of the great grassroots support, but we don't have a host institution. We have the floor space from the facility perspective, but not necessarily floor space and seating capacity together at the times we need it. The N.O. Arena would be ideal, but with the Hornets, the scheduling is difficult because of knowing what their schedule would be so far out in advance.

**So is scheduling the primary consideration when looking at a bid?**

Scheduling of the venue if there's a venue available and hotel availability are the first two factors to consider when looking at a bid. We have to consider all of the big special events in town like Mardi Gras and Jazz Fest and Essence Fest, French Quarter Fest; that makes it impossible for us to book the hotel rooms needed or they might also be cost prohibitive. So we have to look at dates first and consider the scope of the event. Then we go to the facility and ask if they can manage and actually want to host the event before completing the bid.

**How have the GNOSF and other DMOs adapted to the current economy?**

The current economic climate for New Orleans is different than the rest of the country—the city and state have done a little bit better than the rest of the country because of the recovery effort from the hurricane. We've been more aggressive because of the need to resurrect the tourism and hospitality industry in the city since it was so needed for the recovery and to put New Orleans back on the map. It was maybe the best time to do things because we could offer lower travel rates, etc because of the availability of recovery dollars to actively market and advertise the city as a destination for events and for leisure travel, which has grown and been very steady over the past several years.

**In your opinion, what are the primary reasons for return visits from sports tourists?**

It all goes back to customer service and having a successful event. They may go to another city afterwards, but what a city like Las Vegas or Louisville can provide is great but it still doesn't compete with the authentic experience in New Orleans. The people who want to attend your event are going to be so excited to come here. When you're event goes to Dallas, you might get some people to go because it's a business oriented city, but when you come here people are so excited because it's just a special event town. People are yelling back and forth to each other from their hotels [cheering] because they're just so excited to be here. But the customer service, going above and beyond their expectations, taking care of business but still having fun, too, is important.

**What is the value and sustainability of sports event tourism to New Orleans?**

Hosting is definitely sustainable, but long-term, the creation and maintenance of jobs in the hospitality industry and the additional business that local companies are able to bid on because of these major events is key. Our hope is to have all of these major events every 5-6 years, and these local companies are in turn able to increase their business and their portfolio and reputation. Catering contracts, t-shirts, transportation, frame shops, etc, it's just a trickle-down effect and the events that we bring are lagniappe for them. Some of the big national companies will also use local subcontractors to execute a national contract, for example, with the BCS game to do the décor. They understand the facilities and these big companies will send it to the local printer and it allows them to really build their reputation.

**What other major sports events does the GNOSF want to target in the future?**

Now that the Superdome is completely renovated and the Saints are in a long-term lease agreement through 2025, our goal is to get the Men's Final Four back around 2017 or '18 which also coincides with the city's 300th anniversary. Then to get the Super Bowl back twice between 2013 and 2025. Cities aren't allowed to host the Super Bowl and Final Four in the same year, but if you get that kind of mega-event, it gives you a reason to continue to celebrate and market the city and have outreach that you can't buy for businesses and leisure tourism.

**Talk about the MSES (Major Sport Event Study) and its implications for New Orleans**

This plays dramatically into the planning of major events. We'll need approximately \$6M from the state to host the Super Bowl and the state has never left us high and dry, but they've got to find the right mechanism where we can be competitive on the bid side and fund the major events which is of the utmost importance. So that's part of the long and short range goals, to get those

large events out as far as possible and having that mechanism in place for the public fund support. Not every event needs the fund support, but many of them do. So finding the right mix of events and the mechanism to fund them properly and then selling them to the public is key. There are not too many larger events that we can go after other than the Super Bowl. For global events like the Olympics or World Cup, we would have to have a new airport, significant infrastructure changes/improvements like high speed rails, a large outdoor track that would become dormant after, basically, and all of the facilities would have to be created or renovated and would then be underutilized in the future. The timeline for getting an Olympics is about 8 years and to get that to happen here would be next to impossible. Even if you took a regional approach, it still wouldn't work.

Some things we would really like to see in the near future are Wrestling, ESPN X-Games, another NBA All-Star game if the Hornets can get their business together, and maybe Olympic trials in 2016.

**How do you think the proposed changes to the BCS would affect New Orleans' ability to host the Sugar Bowl and/or the BCS Championship?**

I'm not sure about how proposed changes in the structure of the BCS would affect our ability to host those games, but everyone is obviously thinking about Dallas and to remain in the mix you're going to have to be very aggressive and we have a lot of assets here but it's hard for the BCS to overlook a city like Dallas and an owner that is pushing for it. But the Sugar Bowl and the city will certainly do everything possible to stay in the mix.

**Interview #2**

**Doug Thornton, Senior Vice President-Stadiums & Arenas, SMG**

**What is your role at SMG/Superdome/Arena and how does the organization contribute to sports event tourism in New Orleans?**

As the facility manager, I ensure that our facilities are first class, competitive, and offer the right amenities to the sports properties that use them so that we can remain attractive as a destination. That's probably my primary role here. In addition to that, my role is to develop this part of downtown New Orleans (where the Super Dome, Arena, and Champions Square is located) into a vibrant sports and entertainment district, which is something that we've been developing for quite some time. Those are the two primary things.

I also participate in all of the bid processes and I'm involved in all of the bids that we produce for all of the events we try to attract. We're at the center of that and I'm usually directly involved in all of that.

**What is the long-term value of sports event tourism to New Orleans?**

Several: the legacy of the infrastructure that is created when there's a big event here. There are improvements that go on long beyond the event. Obviously the economic impact; it's not

immediate but it has a more residual long-term effect on the economy and jobs, and then you have the national brand image of New Orleans and how that's promoted.

**How has SMG adapted its marketing and PR efforts to the current economic climate?**

It's not about marketing so much when you're attracting sports events. It's about performance and your city's ability to perform and execute. This is not a situation where you go out—it may seem that we're *selling* the city, but you've got people on the other side who are very sophisticated users, and there are certain requirements that need to be met as part of a bid document or solicitation, so I'm not sure we've changed our marketing strategy. What I would say is we've made significant investments in our infrastructure and significant investments in our staff and the services they can provide, and the people in the hospitality industry as a whole. These are things that are beneficial to us as a whole when we go out a pitch for an event like a Super Bowl. But there are just certain requirements that you have to meet—you have to have 20,000 hotel rooms, you have to have an airport that has decent air service; you have to have a stadium with 72,000 seats and all of the amenities that go along with that. So you can try to sell all you want but they're not coming unless you have the infrastructure to house, care for, and entertain those people while they're here. So it's all those things put together. It's having the facilities and the infrastructure; it's training the people in the service industry to take care of the people while they're here. It's transportation once they're here; having a decent cab service. Obviously the French Quarter is the anchor and that's one of the main reasons why they're here, it's the attractiveness of the quarter, the 20,000 hotel rooms that are in walking distance of everything downtown. That's why they're here.

**What are your primary motives as a facility manager for attracting major sports tourism events?**

This is an economic generator. The Superdome is a demand generator for the city and for the state so that's how we utilize it. Our role here is to produce events that will have a positive economic benefit for the region, so that's how we approach it and that's how we use the Dome. At the same time, we have to pay the bills, so we have to negotiate equitable rent deals, we have to provide for cost reimbursement when we have an agreement with a third party; we have to manage our revenue streams so all of those things are important, but the number one goal of the Superdome is to be a demand generator for the city. So when you have a BCS Championship or a Super Bowl or a Final Four, it creates demand. You could not have an event without the demand.

**What produces greater demand for sports event tourism? Leisure travel appeal or appeal generated from images during broadcasts?**

No, the demand is generated because we have a destination that people want to come to. New Orleans is its own brand. We have the French Quarter that's 300 years old; it has a legacy. We have a Superdome here that has hosted prominent events over the last 36 years, and that's why I say it's a demand generator. People want to come. Sports organizers are attracted to New Orleans because of the infrastructure that we have.

**What are some other major events to target that haven't already been here?**

Tough question. We've hosted just about every major event we could host except for World Cup Soccer, and I don't think we'll ever host that because we don't have a natural grass pitch. I don't

think we'll ever be able to host an Olympics in New Orleans simply because the infrastructure is beyond our reach so that's probably not realistic. We're going to host Wrestlemania in 2014; that's a big deal. So I'd say the only world-class events that we haven't hosted are the World Cup and the Olympics. Super Bowl, probably the biggest single event in the world; Final Four, biggest collegiate event in the country; BCS Championship, largest single college event in the country; Republican National Convention, 1988; Papal visit, 1986; largest crowd ever for an indoor concert in 1981 where we had 91,000 people here with the Rolling Stones, so we've done quite a few things here.

**What are the most effective leadership and planning styles for this industry—and what are the greatest challenges?**

Biggest challenge is always the financial resources. New Orleans is not a wealthy city when compared to other big cities like New York, Dallas, Atlanta, Chicago, and we don't have the Fortune-500 base. It's always a challenge to come up with the financial resources necessary. When you put in a bid for a major event, it requires a great deal of investment. The requirements of the bid oftentimes forces the LOC (Local Organizing Committee) to provide all kinds of cost reimbursement, whether it's free facility rent, covering the expenses there, or covering the cost of the hotels, transportation, entertainment, parties, etc., so it could be in the millions. So the biggest challenge we face is not having a special event fund or a special marketing fund if you will so we're always out there trying to raise money from state and local governments and that becomes a challenge when you're competing against other projects like hospitals, roads, and bridges at the state level, and the same at the city level. So that's a big challenge. But we manage, and the other side of that is new Orleans is a much lower cost city when it comes to doing business here so it, for example, the Super Bowl in Dallas, their operating budget for their LOC was \$18M; ours is going to be \$6M. That's probably the biggest challenge is coming up with the financial resources for the fulfillment of these bids.

**MSES—Approach and Impact**

The Major Sport Event Study is something that we've long advocated and something that I've been behind for a long, long time. It's something that is needed if you're going to be competitive with other cities who have more money than you because typically what they do is throw money at the sports organizers and offer all these lavish things and that's an issue for us here, but I'm certainly an advocate for it. How it gets structured, I don't know. But it would benefit the Superdome because I think we would be able to compete for more business. Amateur, professional, whatever sporting events that are out there to be bid upon.

**With the major sports events, what is the grassroots impact for the city?**

Most of the big sports organizers, whether it's the NCAA or the NFL, will come in and do community-based activities whether it's build a playground or involve kids in the event in some kind of way, so there's always some type of legacy project that goes on long after the event is over. The NFL GET (?) center was a good example of that in 1997 when we hosted Super Bowl XXXI. Nike just built a playground at Joe Brown Park, they were brought in here by the Sugar Bowl Host Committee; they were part of the BCS championship, too. So without these big events you wouldn't have those big companies coming in here and leaving money behind. So there's usually a legacy project or a residual benefit to the youth of the city.

**Do these large events alter the facility's marketing approach?**

Those events are so challenging and they only come around so often, and so it's the infrastructure that really makes the difference--that plus the money that we talked about through the special event fund and the costs that you will cover. But certainly after you've hosted a big event like the BCS Championship or the Super Bowl, New Orleans, the profile of New Orleans gets elevated nationally and internationally and the profile of the Superdome will be elevated as well. So, will it help us get future business? Yes. Probably corporate business; we do a lot of that type of business that otherwise probably wouldn't come here but for the brand image of the Mercedes Benz Superdome (referring to a party that software company SAP had in the building last week for over 3,000 people). Everybody wants to come here and have a party on the turf or have a party in the building where the National Championship was played, so that's a plus.

**Does SMG have an influence on other DMOs in the city when trying to attract major sports events?**

Very involved—I'm on the Board of the CVB, the Board of the Sports Foundation, involved with the NOTMC and I work closely with the LT. Gov.'s office, so I'm very, very involved in promoting and retaining sports in this community. We're deeply engaged—we're one of the key players because without the facility, you can't make a bid. So we're at the heart of that.

**In your opinion, what event put New Orleans back on the map after Katrina?**

Being a bit biased, I would say that the re-opening of the Dome certainly made a huge impact just to let everyone know that we were still here and we weren't going away. But from a national perspective, something that drew national media attention and had national notoriety, I'd have to say the 2008 NBA All-Star Game. After the debacle in Las Vegas, the NBA threatened to pull the game from the city because the hotels weren't back in business and the restaurants weren't opening up fast enough, so I had to do a lot of convincing to the NBA that the city was capable of pulling off the event; that the event would be a success. Even more so than the 2007 BCS Championship, I'd say that's the one single event that really put New Orleans back on the map from the perspective of being able to successfully host major events.

**Interview #3****Nathan Williams, Interactive Director-New Orleans Tourism Marketing Corporation (NOTMC)****What is your role at the NOTMC and how does your organization contribute to sports event tourism in New Orleans?**

NOTMC is the official leisure marketing agency for the city. Basically, we're like a little advertising agency for the city of New Orleans. That's all we do is focus on bringing people to New Orleans. We work hand in hand with the CVB, but they really pick up once the people are here. Our goal really is to attract the travelers. As the interactive director, it is my job to work with anything that involves screens, or pixels, or mobile phones and the like. NOTMC is funded through a bed tax, and a variety of other sources such as Harrah's casino, but mainly from the bed tax that goes into a city fund that is ultimately turned back over to us for marketing.

NOTMC does television, national television, cable, we do consumer print such as lifestyle magazines, things that sort of align well with the brand indicators of New Orleans—food, music, fun, architecture, a lot of those cultural activities. We used to do radio in years past, which was very tactical, if there was a sporting event or a festival that needed a little boost, we might do something locally with radio but by and large radio has been a very small, tactical piece of our overall plan. We also do alternative weeklies, things like the Gambit, or regional weeklies that you might see in the larger gulf south. But whether traditional or in my area which is online, events marketing is a big focus of what we do.

Since Katrina, in the months and years right after Katrina, events marketing became very important to us. And by extension, sports marketing, because sports has tremendous capacity to fill hotel rooms. So after the storm it became very important to get our leisure message out particularly surrounding events and festivals to really make the statement that New Orleans was still here. Now there's virtually something happening here every day, so events marketing really became the core driver of the leisure message. We still use a consistent brand message across different mediums, really focusing on the fact that you can be different here, and to come and just have fun and let go while you're in New Orleans. You can do the things here that you can't do back in Indianapolis or in Detroit; you can have that indulgent meal or have that decadent dessert; things you just can't do other places. But what we usually do is pair those targeted, branded messages with an event calendar that shows all the stuff that is going on so people don't forget. It was very important after the storm and it has proven to continue to be a successful vehicle in showing the city is still alive and vibrant, really happening.

Online, what we do is we have a monthly newsletter which was the first email marketing initiative the city had ever taken on back in 2001 when I was still on the agency side. And it's all about promoting events. Large events, small events, sports is always there. We try to balance the content of this monthly editorial vehicle so we have cultural arts represented, if the Saints are doing well they always show up, if football season is over, the Hornets will get in there, also arena football has now come back to us which is so much fun and we'll pick up some marketing for that. But there's always sports featured in our editorial because we like to make sure that there's something for everyone every single month. That subscription base is over 400,000 people just in our house list so we reach almost half a million people with just sending that out to our internal list. We wanted to infuse our list with a lot of new leads so we actually did a lead generation program which has brought us an additional 250,000 names to our list over the last two years. And sports is always a component.

**Is this list composed of leisure travelers only?**

It is exclusively leisure travelers; individuals. We're trying to drive leisure visits outside of what a group might bring to New Orleans, but a lot of times, those sports fans are also leisure travelers who love the food, the music, the atmosphere, so we like to keep a broad reach and send out a broad message.

**From your perspective, what role does sport play in making New Orleans a desirable tourist destination?**

It's huge. If you think of the iconography of New Orleans, the Superdome is really one of those primary images associated with New Orleans. It's almost up there with the (St. Louis)

Cathedral. So with the really great performances of our home teams, that has really kept the awareness of the national audience and helps to reinforce that New Orleans really is a sports town.

We recently started a pilot program to capture fans that were coming in for big games. We wanted to make sure that even though they came for the sports, we still go them and encourage them to come back again. This is called the bounce back program. The one we did for the sports fans was “New Orleans is a city for Comebacks, and we hope you come back!” And so everybody got this. It’s a nice little clutter buster, and we were trying to capture those sports fans so we could remark to them later especially in the summer when occupancy kind of dips. So they can fill out the form or scan the little tag and they were entered to win two amazing prizes—4 nights at the Windsor Court, airfare, food, two positions in Orpheus with all the throws included for free—so this was a really good deal. So although what I’m showing you now is the Mardi Gras version, this is something we put in the sports fans’ hands to say thanks first, but don’t forget to consider us again later. We were really trying to capitalize on a full city and the chance that some of those sports fans had never been here before. We distributed these to them to through their hotels when they checked out. This really is a PR driven message—even if we didn’t convert every single person who got this, it really was first and foremost a way to say thank you.

**Do you think sports event tourism is its own driver—something that sells itself?**

It really does to a large extent drive itself. But what we can do as leisure marketers is try to amplify the message or try to extend that awareness. In many cases, which is maybe the inverse of what you’re thinking, these sporting events in New Orleans allows us to get our leisure message into markets that we may not be able to afford otherwise. For example, the Chicago (bears) playoff game versus the Saints here in New Orleans a couple years ago, really on a PR basis, we identified the primary sports talk radio station of Chicago, flew their guys down, put them up in a hotel on Bourbon, and had them do their morning show live there every day for a week leading up to the game. So even though the game didn’t turn out as well as they (Chicago) would’ve hoped, they had a great time in New Orleans and that air time was really just invaluable and something we wouldn’t have ever been able to pay for. It really gave us a great platform to speak to a new audience. So really for us as leisure marketers, sports really helps us to amplify our message as opposed to the other way around. The folks that are committed fans, they’re going to come. We have tremendous adoption from the locals for Saints season tickets, even though we struggle a little more with the Hornets, but that has I think to do with reasons that are beyond basketball.

**What are some of the primary marketing and communication strategies the NOTMC is currently using?**

Events marketing is probably first and foremost method or strategy to promote the city. That falls a little more on the tactical side but again it’s a great way to get out that brand and that imagery that you’re different here. People having fun, wearing Mardi Gras masks, etc. Nationwide almost year-round from April through August, we have a national TV schedule, so we are getting those impressions out there through television. Then later we focus more on regional markets with TV to promote Christmas New Orleans Style, which again in November and December, occupancy in the hotels tends to dip slightly, so with the regional TV ads we try



to focus on the drivable markets to promote shopping and Reveillon dinners, stuff like that. So most of the TV is national most of the year, with just the tail end of it being local. With the national print, again, it's lifestyle and travel magazines that fit with the brand image and gets us out there to a large market. But it's almost always a full page ad and we look for them to negotiate added value with a 1/3 strip on the opposite page which shows a calendar of events of festivals, and trade shows, and just all of the events that are going on. Brand and then a tactical strip. Even if they don't come for any of those events, it's just a way to show that New Orleans is always "happening."

### **What are some of your primary internet and social media uses and strategies?**

This has tremendously impacted the sports market. We work with a tremendous agency partner who provides the folks that are really the "boots on the ground" doing the listening. But with channels like Facebook—it's one thing to be talking about you, or even asking them what they think. Because New Orleans really is considered a sports town, we have a variety of different channels we use. Facebook is really huge for us. But we really have three different identities—the CVB identity, they tend to be a bit more membership driven, the new Orleans Online identity, which tends to be a bit more leisure (30- 40,000 adoption), and a smaller platform for our GoNOLA channel, which is our blog and it's a little more off-beat and casual and can be used to inspire some passion or do some smack talk for the sports fans. And all of those channels can feed into the larger Facebook channels.

Twitter, we try to take a light, fun touch with twitter. It reaches a different demographic, and feedback isn't always as apparent as on Facebook. Pictures on Facebook just always explode from a feedback perspective much more. We use hashtags to make sure that when people are in town or in the weeks before they come to town, that we're planting that seed to make sure we're in this larger group of folks that are focusing on this issue. Regardless of who the teams are, whether it's the Saints and their opponent, or its two teams that we're hosting, we use Twitter very much to thank these people for coming and to retweet the positive messages or the new things they've discovered while they were here. So while a little bit different than Facebook, Twitter is a great way to sort of lasso these folks who are basically having these real-time conversations about their experiences in New Orleans. Facebook is a little more passive, but it has been good for us.

The YouTube channel has been done through GoNOLA for about the last year and a half since, like I said, we can be a bit more casual. We launched GoNOLA TV a few weeks after we launched GoNOLA and produced two unique New Orleans videos per week. They were only a minute long, and we just used them to give people a little insight into what's going on, but the production schedule was enormous. Friday night Fights for example. They take place once a month in Carrolton and are great for bringing in things like bachelor parties. We've done pieces for example on VooDoo football, which that piece has great energy, so we like to promote the VooDoo and that unique arena football experience. We've also done pieces on the Hornets and the Zephyrs, especially since the Zephyrs games are a good, fun, inexpensive, family event.

### **How is traffic driven to the website and/or social media channels?**

Travelers first decide they're going to go somewhere and they almost always do a Google search first. Then we have to make sure we get them over to our website. So, we have to make sure

we're doing everything right to show up at the top of the Google search. Then at each point along the decision-making process continuum, we try to intercept the traveler. Every time they visit one of the sites (properties), we try to get them either into the email database or to friend us or follow us on Facebook or Twitter so we can participate in the conversation as they go through this decision making process. We use banner ads to retarget, again, making sure we're very visible in the Google search. We try to use the web to not only get them into New Orleans, but to get them to other events and attractions like the museums, restaurants, neighborhoods, etc. once they're here.

**I noticed that in the print guidebook, there were no Sugar Bowl or BCS logo representations, or any “Welcome Sports Fans” type of ads. Why not?**

The guidebook is a tremendous vehicle, but doesn't reach everyone. It tends to go out to an older demographic because new Orleans does really well with the boomer generation and we're always in their consideration set, so it's a great tool for them. They may or may not be coming for sports events. Social media and the online stuff, WOM through Facebook, those are all things that help us to get to that slightly younger demographic, which is where we want to grow.

**So is the social media approach more effective for targeting the younger demographic?**

YES. Peter Yesawich, a travel marketing researcher, is constantly measuring which vehicles are most effective for different demographics, and so we know. The guidebook is something that, especially when it's big and beautiful like this, is something that people want to have in their home. It's actually the size of a national geographic, so it's really targeted to a different demographic. But you're right, I'm looking through here and sports really isn't covered. But, it's not our fault! We actually used to do two separate guidebooks, and as an economic development driver for the city, we have to make sure to promote everyone. Our old Good Times guide used to have a sports section. But for Christmas New Orleans style, there is more of a sports section in there. Since the CVB produces it, we don't have as much feedback on it anymore.

One of our current projects is with GNOSF to build the website for next year's Super Bowl. We're also creating a miniature guidebook for the Super Bowl that tells the story of New Orleans through the eyes of the sports fan. We're working on six or seven pieces to tell the story from the sports fans' perspective. But for the Super Bowl, you have to deal with things a little bit differently than just the typical leisure trip. But so we try to address these things with all these different types of audiences. But we're helping them with the website but we're also helping them put together the guidebook for when folks get to town. It's the New Orleans Super Bowl guidebook which we're underwriting for them at least in terms of cost. So many reporters are going to be coming to town, and the New Orleans delegation wants to be there in Indy now to get everyone excited about coming to New Orleans next year, so we created a press guidebook with all of the places they need to know like the Superdome, like the official hotels, the Convention Center, the media center and where it's going to be, so it was a book of maps basically. But we wanted to put some “New Orleans” in it. So like on one page, here's all of the info about the command center—where the printers are, where the WIFI is, etc., but then on the other page, here's Chef John Besh's Creole gumbo with beautiful pictures of the food along with recipes. So we're taking care of the business so to speak, but also creating a lasting impression of New

Orleans. Also gives it a little “stickiness” since people will actually probably want to try a lot of these recipes.

**How has the NOTMC had to change its strategies to adapt to the current economy?**

From an ad agency background, the conventional wisdom is that the best time to market is when people aren't marketing. I think our branding strategy of "You're Different Here" has sort of positioned us as a place that is a good value but also a fun getaway where you can kind of forget about all the other stuff. I don't have any hard research off the top of my head, but we were tracking it for about six months before Sept. 2008, which really was the crash. So all of the information that we were reading was pointing to or suggesting that it was coming. So we took a hit, but New Orleans has taken a couple of hits over the past few years with Katrina and the Deepwater Horizon (oil spill), so we know about these kinds of things. We know we need to just keep our message focused and keep it out in the marketplace. We were a little more focused on the value proposition over the past few years, and people are always looking for deals. But value has been an important part of our message just to carry us through.

**Do you think major sports event precipitate leisure tourism or is it more the broadcast image?**

National media running b-roll is so important. It gets the media talking. Other teams and destinations really just don't have that. Like Detroit, great team, great town, but they just don't have all of the cultural assets that we have here as a leisure destination and so we benefit from that. I hope that from our partnership with the CVB and everyone that works at the Sports Foundation and at the Superdome, that whole team works so hard together as a marketing unit that we want to make sure that the fans have a great time in New Orleans, and I think the city's administration really puts a big emphasis on that, too. If it took 7000 additional policeman in the FQ, then that was what happened. And you know what, no really bad incidents occurred, which is always a risk in a place like New Orleans. So to all come together as an industry, to mobilize so the fans take the best possible experience away from their time here, something that our marketing dollars just can't buy is positive word of mouth. People are much more likely to respect and base decisions off of information they've heard from friends than from a guidebook or an advertisement. And social media is an amplification of WOM. Someone checks in from New Orleans and talks about the delicious meal they're having, and all of their friends are so jealous. Those are impressions that we just can't buy.

**What is the long-term value of sports event tourism to the local community?**

Tremendous. It's almost something that you can put in the bank. And it's because I know that I can depend on the Sports Foundation to get those events here. A lot of sports foundations in other markets aren't full time operations, so there's a lack of continuity there. With them really aggressively pursuing those leads, taking care of the customers, managing those relationships, growing those relationships, that's tremendous for us because we can piggy back on that knowing they're going to continue to bring those events here. We hope there folks that come go to the museums and the other places like that, or even add a day or two to their trip. So it's much more than just room nights and the money that comes to us directly from the bed tax. The more often they work to bring these events, the harder we can work to fill up these room nights.

**What are some of the long-term planning efforts that are currently underway?**

2018—looking ahead with a growth strategy for New Orleans to create a tourism master plan, and part of that is the city's 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary. So to have events of that magnitude to help us tell that story of 300 years of history is just amazing. We're doing an amazing promotional plan with the Super Bowl, and throughout the year with the social media and the newsletter and the blogs, we're giving away two tickets to the game. Since it's not like any other sports event, we thought this was a great opportunity to grow our database and it keeps that momentum and awareness up of the fact that the Super Bowl is coming.

**Interview #4**

**Kelly Schulz, VP-Communications and Public Relations, New Orleans Convention & Visitors Bureau (NOCVB)**

**What is your role at the New Orleans Convention and Visitors Bureau, and how does your organization contribute to sports event tourism in New Orleans?**

The Convention & Visitors Bureau is a sales and marketing organization, and we work very closely with everyone you just talked about (GNOSF, SMG, NOTMC), and we were established in 1960. We're more than 50 years old, and our job is to get visitors to come to New Orleans. And whether that is for a leisure weekend, or for a wedding, or a sporting event, we market the city as a destination for travelers from around the world. And we work very closely with the Superdome and the Sports Foundation and the Marketing Corp. to promote New Orleans as a site for sporting events. Our team is involved in, for example, well we have a sales team of people here who are involved in the logistics of booking an event or a meeting here in New Orleans, so our team works with the Sports Foundation for example on hotel room blocks for the Super Bowl or how many rooms need to be reserved for the Final Four or for some other sports event that is coming into the city. My job is in the PR and Communications area, and I oversee a team of five people and a couple of agency partners and it's our job to primarily work with the media and to manage and protect the reputation of New Orleans as a destination and to work with the national and international media on stories they might be doing about New Orleans. And lately, we've had a lot of really good opportunities to talk about what these sporting events really mean from a tourism perspective. So we're right in the middle of all that. As the Convention and Visitor's Bureau, the media will come to us, and we sort of, well, we don't become the story, but the way we handle things becomes the story. Our PR efforts in many cases, especially during Katrina and in the aftermath of the oil spill, have become part of the story.

**What role does sport play in the tourism industry in New Orleans?**

The tourism industry for us is very important; it's a \$5 billion industry, and it employs 74,000 local people, so it's very much an economic driver. Sporting events are usually very high profile and they bring lots of attention, and the tourism industry is very much based on image and perception. So, sporting events are great for any city, but especially for New Orleans where it's been six years, almost seven, since Hurricane Katrina, and we have proven to the world that we can host major conventions and meetings and events. But for a while there, there was lots of uncertainty about "was New Orleans ready." We got all of the big "are you ready" questions. So for us to be able to host, especially just what we've done in early January and late December, I don't know of any other city that could successfully host the BCS and the Sugar Bowl and New

Year's Eve, and the Saints playoff game, and several Hornets games all in a 10-day period, and do it all flawlessly. Turning the Superdome around in the way that they did it and to have complete integration between the tourism community and the city and the police department, it really is impressive, and it shows that no city does it better than New Orleans, so that's the kind of thing that if we're trying to convince someone that has a 1,000-person convention, if we're trying to show them that no city is going to host your meeting better, we can point to these types of high-profile major sporting events and show them that if New Orleans wasn't ready or if New Orleans wasn't a good host, we wouldn't be having this unbelievable run of sporting events that we're in the middle of right now.

**So it really is the success in having the previous experience that is a primary driver for return or even first-time business?**

Yeah, it's something that we can use as a case study for other event organizers, we can use it to show momentum and show that the city is really hot right now and it's a draw for lots of visitors and major events. You can't underestimate what we call the "publicity value" or the "perception value" of something like that, especially when tourism is based on image and perception, and we saw this in Katrina that there were so many misperceptions and so much that people really didn't understand. For people to see that "wow, the Super Bowl is in New Orleans" or "wow, I just saw the BCS played in New Orleans.. wow the Sugar Bowl's there..." for them to say that and for them to then think New Orleans must be a really hot destination, on the leisure side, that makes you want to go there. Or it might, on the convention and meetings side, let us use these successes as a case study to show the business side of looking at the logistics and look at the expert handling of the logistics, and here's why no city does it better than New Orleans.

**What are some of the primary marketing and PR strategies currently being used by the NOCVB?**

A lot of what we do is just working with the media. Some of that proactive and some of that is reactive. For example, we dealt with everything from local news stations coming to us going what does all this mean, so we spent a lot of time on camera talking about what all of this really means to the city and helping the locals understand what tourism really means to them. Even if they're unemployed in the tourism industry here, it really does affect you and your family in a positive way. The second thing is we dealt with a lot of the big networks like ABC, NBC, and ESPN, all of the major news networks that were coming here to broadcast from New Orleans for five or 10 days. We assisted them with things like where to put their satellite truck and or telling them about a good place to eat, and just being a resource and showing hospitality and having a PR professional to help the media. That's another way we help them- we made sure we were constantly using social media to welcome visitors from the games but also to tweet out about what was happening in New Orleans. Everywhere else, it was just kind of a normal week, but in New Orleans, it's the start of Carnival season, and major events are happening all on the same day, so we use that as a marketing tool to communicate the momentum and the magnitude of what was happening in the city.

**How integral are the website and social media and other online platforms to the NOCVB's communications strategies?**

It's very much a part of our communication strategy. In fact, my team here is responsible for updating a majority of website content on a daily basis, doing the home page and the media section, and several others, we're also responsible for the organization's social media program, so we work with a local company called FSC Interactive, the New Orleans company we hired, and they have a whole strategy for us for the entire year on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Flickr. And we actually partner with the NOTMC who is also using FSC for their social media, so we have kind of a unified effort. It doesn't really make any sense to have two Facebook pages for the destination, or two different messages in the social media for the same city, so we've really unified those efforts and it's something we focus on just as equally as everything else.

**What strategies are most effective in attracting visitors for major sports events, or are they something that sells themselves?**

Fortunately, when it comes to sports tourism, you have the loyalty of the fans, and the enthusiasm, and the fans who are most likely going to travel wherever their team is going, and we're a professional marketing organization and a professional sales organization, and we're really proud of the work we do here, but one thing that just works every time is just good old-fashioned word of mouth with visitors coming here and having a good time and then going back home and telling their friends about it. So if I come here and I say New Orleans is a great place to visit, people might think "oh whatever, she's paid to say that." But if you or someone you know comes to visit, and they're not affiliated with the tourism industry and they go back and say they had a really great time there and we ate some things we've never eaten before and we met really nice people or we went to a Jazz club or whatever, making sure the visitors are happy so they go back and spread the word is a really big part of this too.

**Has the NOCVB had to make adjustments in strategies or operations due to the current economy?**

Of course, yes. I think every destination has had to deal with that. One of the things we've promoted is the value of New Orleans. We talk about how you can come here, and how there's over 1200 restaurants, so we talk about how you can go to one of the really fine dining establishments or you can go to a hole-in-the-wall restaurant and get a cup of gumbo or a po-boy for \$8 and it's like the best thing you've ever eaten. So we tailor our message to whoever we're talking to, because there is an audience who hasn't been affected by the recession and they can come and drop \$100,000 on a piece of antique furniture [in a store] on Magazine St., or you have a family who may come and want to have an economical family vacation, so we tell them to use the streetcar or take their family out by the River where there are a lot of things you can do that are free that are fun and authentic, or tours that you can take that are educational and things like that. So we kind of deal with every type of traveler, and we customize our message accordingly.

**What are some of the primary reasons sports fans will return to New Orleans?**

I think the first thing is just that New Orleans is a very authentic place; there's no other place like it. And we always say that the whole point of travel is to experience something different, and when you come to New Orleans, it really is a different place. There's different food here, there's different music, there's a different atmosphere, different architecture. It's a very European city;

it doesn't feel like some of the other "typical" American cities that business travelers tell us that they experience on a regular basis, like waking up in a different city and wondering where you are because it all looks the same. So that's one thing, is the authenticity of the city. Another thing, especially if you're coming here for a sporting event, the city is a very walk-able city. So you can stay in one of 38,000 hotel rooms and about 20,000 of them are within about a mile or two of the Convention Center and Superdome. So just being able to walk everywhere and everything being really compact, and your hotel and restaurants and the Dome or the Arena, wherever you're going is really just convenient. You're not having to drive in a shuttle bus for 30 minutes to get from one place to another, and that just makes it easier on the traveler.

**What is the long-term value of sports event tourism to the local community?**

It brings a lot of money into the city, so one thing is the tax dollars that are flowing into the city from the increase in visitors, and the other thing is, there's a lot of infrastructure improvements that are going on. For example, in anticipation of the Super Bowl in 2013, the airport is undergoing millions of dollars in renovations to be completed in time for the Super Bowl, and that's something that locals are going to benefit from too since so many of us use the airport, too. There are tons of projects like that going on all over the city that are meant for a major event, but that will be a benefit to all of the citizens.

**Is sports event tourism sustainable for New Orleans, or is this just an anomaly with all of these major events in such a relatively short period of time?**

It's something we definitely want to see on a regular basis. The entire hospitality industry is working towards our strategic master plan which was unveiled in 2010. Right now, in an average year, we get about 8.5 million visitors and the goal of the strategic plan is to get 13 million visitors by 2018, so there are lots of strategies in that plan to help to make that happen. One of them is actually to get more funding for marketing to be able to promote New Orleans more because tourism is based on marketing and marketing takes money. So that's one of the examples of how we're working towards this larger goal, because going from 8 million to 13 million is just over 5 years is a pretty big task so there are lots of things we have to get done to make that happen.

**What are some other major sports events that the city is looking to host—like trying to bring the Super Bowl and Final Four to bookend the city's 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, and how does this impact marketing efforts? (What type of excitement does that bring?)**

It's like what we've experienced this week, constantly having a good news story to put out in the media and talking about how tourism is driving the economy and to get visitor testimonials from people that are coming here and sharing that with other potential visitors. 2018 is the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary and that's the year that we're trying to accomplish all of these things in our strategic plan, so it's definitely something we want to do long-term and it's always going to be a good story and a good marketing opportunity for the city.

## **Interview #5**

**Jeff Hundley, Chief Operating Office, Allstate Sugar Bowl**  
(Conducted via email)

**With the future of the structure of the BCS in question, do you think New Orleans will remain a viable host for the Sugar Bowl and/or the BCS National Championship if the rumored/proposed changes occur?**

While the future of the BCS and college football's postseason is somewhat tentative at this time, the Sugar Bowl Committee very much figures to play an important role in whatever system is eventually selected. The Bowl's 78-year history of excellence in staging major college football events is well-chronicled and includes some of the greatest moments in the history of the sport. In addition to the unsurpassed hospitality delivered annually by the Members of the Sugar Bowl Committee, both New Orleans and Louisiana boast a number of virtues that make us the ideal host for college football:

- Unique culture
- World-class cuisine
- Outstanding facilities (Superdome has undergone \$300+ million in renovations since Katrina)
- The World-Famous French Quarter
- New Orleans is a compact "walking city"
- 30,000+ hotel rooms
- Family-friendly (Audubon Zoo, Aquarium and Insectarium; children's museum; I-MAX Theater, etc.)

All of these built-in advantages have worked together to serve as a tremendous economic catalyst for the area (over \$2 billion in economic impact over the past 10 years, including \$493 million with this year's Sugar Bowl and BCS National Championship Games). Furthermore, our efforts have provided generations of student-athletes, coaches, administrators and fans with memories that will last a lifetime. More importantly, the organization has a proven track record of adapting to time and circumstance to meet the needs of college football. At this point, there is no reason to believe the Sugar Bowl will not continue as a key player in postseason college football.

## **Interview # 6**

**Melody Alijani, Director of Research, Louisiana Office of Culture, Tourism, & Recreation**

**What is the importance of tourism in New Orleans for the rest of the state, particularly with some of the major sports events being held there?**

The rest of the state benefits from a lot of taxes [revenues] but what people sometimes don't put a lot of emphasis on is the fact that a lot of people drive to New Orleans, and oftentimes they're driving through the whole state so, there's an opportunity there for those people to stop and spend money in other parishes. So they can have different experiences and eat different food



along the way to New Orleans, so I think that's one of the biggest impressions New Orleans can have on the rest of the state. The NOCVB will try and do a lot of what I call "visitor sharing" which is essentially directing people to go see a plantation home or rent a car and visit sites in surrounding parishes, so that also helps to create a larger impact on the entire state. In addition, the media exposure the events create for the state is priceless. Just the amount of ears that hear what's going on is important for the state and it helps improve Louisiana's image. One of the things that's most important is perception. How people perceive New Orleans is how they perceive the entire state. We've tried everything to try to get people to disassociate those two things, and it will never happen. It's sort of like Nevada and Las Vegas. So if New Orleans is not doing well and people are hearing a lot about the crime, when we ask about the state, crime and safety is always the number one thing that people think of throughout the entire state. When Katrina happened, we asked people about the entire state and they had the perception that there was water in Shreveport. So people are not geographically wise enough to know where New Orleans is in relation to other cities in the state, so when New Orleans gets exposure, people will have that perception of the entire state. Louisiana and New Orleans are attached at the hip from a perception perspective and a geographical imagery basis, so when one goes in a certain direction (positive or negative), the other goes as well.

**Do you think that getting through these major events (the Sugar Bowl, the BCS, and Mardi Gras) without major incidences of crime helps to improve the perception of New Orleans, or does the crime that happens on a daily basis still have a greater impact?**

In my opinion, it helps, but it still doesn't make a big difference overall. It's one of those things where they [visitors] know that crime is happening but they come anyway because crimes aren't necessarily happening where the visitors are. It's really no different than other big cities like Boston or Los Angeles, where everyone knows there are just certain places you shouldn't go. So I think it helps a great deal, but it certainly doesn't compensate a great deal. When people are planning a trip, it really only happens within a three week time period. They'll see things on TV months in advance, but they might not necessarily think about it until three weeks or a month in advance, and that's when they go online and Google New Orleans. So when the first thing that comes up on nola.com is a murder, anything positive is overshadowed. The booking period is so important, and that's where the internet and social media are really important—that constant PR machine has to keep it going. The BCS Championship and events like that are really important, but what's so challenging about tourism is keeping that energy going beyond that.

**Do you think that there's resentment from other cities throughout the state that most major events are held in New Orleans?**

I believe that all tourism people understand the concept of inventory. The facilities and inventory capacity have to meet the needs of the group. Anything that's good for New Orleans is good for the state, so I think people make it out to be a bigger deal than it is. Everyone does what they're really good at—that's the foundation of tourism. There is no Superdome anywhere else [in the state] and that's just the way it is.

If you don't have the hotel rooms and the inventory to generate the tax base, then that's just the way it is and your community can't host that event. On the other hand, the ways to develop the

tourism base and inventory is to bring in the events that can help to increase the revenues, so that's the other side of it. But just because New Orleans is good at the big events, doesn't mean that they're good at the smaller events. It's really a matter of focusing on what a particular community can do well and marketing that niche the best way they can. There is something for anyone.

Something else that doesn't get mentioned a lot is the difference between quality and quantity of visitors. Quality visitors are those who will stay in the downtown hotels, eat out, and enjoy various entertainment options. Visitors who are coming down and staying four to a *car* aren't providing much value. It's not just sheer numbers or heads-in-beds that matter. And smaller events don't necessarily mean less money, it's just a smaller event. But the further away they are coming from, the more money they will typically spend. It's all about finding that sweet spot.

## **APPENDIX G**

### **OBSERVATIONAL FIELD NOTES**

**Monday, January 2, 2012**  
**Sugar Bowl Field Research**  
**Michigan Wolverines vs. Virginia Tech Hokies**

We arrived in downtown New Orleans at around 10 a.m. at the New Orleans Riverside Hilton. The Canal St. corridor and area around Harrah's Casino were still relatively quiet, with not too many people walking around. There were banners along the streetlights with Sugar Bowl logos and "Welcome Sports Fans" banners were displayed in the windows and on balconies of many businesses. The weather conditions were a bit cool by local standards, in the upper 40s with a strong north wind, but several Michigan fans were seen wearing shorts.

We started out at the Hilton Riverside, the official team hotel for Virginia Tech (VT). The lobby and upstairs check-in area were decorated in VT colors (maroon and orange) and with both Sugar Bowl and VT insignia. There were many maps and tour brochures available at the concierge station which is located on the ground level of the hotel near the main entrance. The official Sugar Bowl Fan Guide and the official New Orleans Visitor's Guide were also available. All of the tour guides and maps were free of charge. Further down on the ground level of the hotel, towards the ballrooms, there was an official VT Welcome desk and an official Sugar Bowl/VT merchandise stand. Alumni, fans, and supporters could easily access team merchandise here, as well as learn about and/or sign up to participate in tours and community service projects coordinated by the VT Alumni Association. The atmosphere in the hotel was overall very welcoming and the staff was very hospitable. One of the hotel's bistro-type restaurants also offered a special late-night "tailgate" menu that would be offered during hours which would accommodate fans who were returning from the game.

After leaving the hotel, we walked towards Jackson Square and the French Quarter, which was only a few blocks away. The official fan fest, the Allstate Fan Fest, is located right next to Jax Brewery, on the edge of the French Quarter along the Mississippi River. The Fan Fest was not yet open, but we were able to quickly determine from both signage at the site along with information in the official fan guide the time that it would be open. We did observe workers setting up different booths and interactive games along with technicians performing check of the sound and video systems.

From there, we walked a few more blocks to Royal St., in the heart of the French Quarter, where Sugar Bowl organizers were hosting a small parade and Second Line to officially welcome fans, teams, and university & conference officials to New Orleans. One of the city's most well-known high school marching bands, the St. Aug "Marching 100" performed along with a traditional New Orleans brass band more typically seen in a second-line. Horse-drawn buggies also carried representatives from each university and their respective athletic conference (the ACC and the Big Ten) in the parade. This provided a very unique and authentic introduction and welcome to the city for both participants and spectators.

Then we walked a few blocks back towards the river to have lunch at a popular casual restaurant, Café Maspero, which is known for its po-boy sandwiches and other local favorites such as red beans and rice. The service there was very poor and our waitress was quite rude, so we opted to leave our table without having been served, or even offered any drinks or water. While we were waiting for our service, I did not observe any Sugar Bowl fans in the restaurant. Since there are so many good restaurant options within one or two blocks, we were confident we could find a better option. We walked approximately one block to Crescent City Brewhouse, another well-known casual dining restaurant. We were seated immediately and our drink order was taken within minutes. There were also several tables of both Michigan (UM) and VT fans there who seemed to be enjoying their meals and the company of friends and family. I overheard several fans asking about many of the dishes on the menu, such as the fried shrimp po-boy which is served “dressed,” or crawfish etouffee which is made from a roux, or about the ingredients which make up andouille sausage. They also had questions about several of the local beers and cocktails on the menu. The “drinks-to-go” window which faces Decatur St. was also a topic of conversation. Fans also looked around to other tables to see what other patrons were eating. Our meal here was great, as was the service. No of the Sugar Bowl fans who were seated around our table seemed to have any complaints about the food or the service, either.

By the time we finished lunch, the Fan Fest was open and VT fans were gathering for their official pep rally. The VT marching band, cheerleaders, and mascot arrived by bus to the Fan Fest and led their fans in cheers from the stage. The fans were very spirited and seemed to be well-represented in terms of quantity of fans present. There was also an official pep rally for UM fans, but schedule constraints prevented me from observing this. The Fan Fest closes each of its two days of operation with a concert featuring either a local artist or more mainstream artist. This year’s Sugar Bowl Fan Fest featured local musician Trombone Shorty on January 1 and Kelly Clarkson on January 2. Unfortunately, I was not able to attend either concert, but they do attract both fans and locals alike. We did observe many more fans walking around in the French Quarter area as the day progressed, but they seemed to primarily interact only with the people in their group although you would occasionally hear a cheer of either “Go Big Blue” or “Go Hokies.” In addition, as we walked around more, UM fans seemingly outnumbered VT fans.

**Tuesday, January 3, 2012**  
**Sugar Bowl Game Day**  
**Michigan Wolverines vs. Virginia Tech Hokies**

The atmosphere was much more subdued in the French Quarter today than yesterday. I continued to seemingly see many more UM fans than VT fans. Since I did not have tickets to the game, I was anticipating whether or not I would be able to determine which fan base had more fans at the game from the broadcast images of the seating area. Given the proximity of VT to New Orleans, I expected to see more VT fans than UM fans. However, UM has a very strong fan base both in Michigan and across the country, and it is their first appearance in a major bowl game in several years, factors which I initially overlooked. I chose to walk around in the French Market area of the city today, which is at the edge of the French Quarter just past the iconic St. Louis Cathedral and Café du Monde, the famous beignet eatery. I wanted to observe fans who

were shopping in some of the unique stores in this area to see what they were buying. Interestingly, I observed many fans buying food items such as pralines, beignet mix and New Orleans-style coffee with chicory, along with porcelain Mardi Gras masks, instead of the more readily available tourist “trinkets” such as t-shirts and Mardi Gras beads.

Since more of the fans seemed to be concentrated in the Jackson Square area of the French Quarter, I stopped to have lunch at the River’s Edge Restaurant & Bar, located directly across the street from Café du Monde on Decatur St. There were fans of both UM and VT eating here, many opting to have a Bloody Mary with their meal, a typical drink to have following a long night of indulgence. It was about 12:30 p.m. when I arrived, and since this restaurant offers a full menu including breakfast all the time, many tables had both breakfast and lunch dishes. Some fans were talking about their experience in New Orleans, but many of them were now talking about the game and what they expected or hoped to see. There was one television facing the area of the restaurant where I was seated, and although it was tuned to ESPN with the captioning on, no one seemed to be too interested in watching. They were more interested in talking among themselves. The group of VT fans next to me had several additional people meet them at various times, and they were very engaged in talking about their expectations of the team’s performance.

Upon finishing lunch, I walked along the “moonwalk” on the riverfront towards the Audubon Aquarium of the Americas and the IMAX Theatre. There were very few fans in this area. Another primary observation I made during this experience was the lack of small or even high-school aged children with the fans. The VT fans seated at the table next to me during lunch were discussing with their friends who they had left their kids with (such as grandparents) since they wanted this to be an adult trip, so while New Orleans does have many kid- and family-friendly activities, those who I overheard did not want to bring their children along on this trip.

After leaving the riverfront area, I walked a few blocks down to the Marriott Hotel on Canal St., which was the official hotel for the Michigan Wolverines. The atmosphere in their hotel was much more subdued, with fans primarily gathered in the bar area where the broadcast of ESPN’s Sugar Bowl pre-game coverage was airing live on a large projection screen. This hotel also had a similar souvenir stand set-up that the Hilton Riverside had for VT, but I did not see anything else in particular directing UM fans to take tours of the city or participate in Alumni Association activities. The hotel was also similarly decorated with UM colors and Sugar Bowl logos/signage.

Since it was getting a bit closer to kick-off, I decided to walk from the Marriott over to the Superdome area to observe the tailgating atmosphere. Since the Superdome is in the New Orleans CBD, it is difficult to find parking or large areas to tailgate when these events occur on a weekday because many of the lots in the area are contracted to local companies for their employees. There were a few groups of fans tailgating, but the area around the Dome was mostly quiet and subdued. There is an area adjacent to the Superdome called Champions Square, and this area is used for pre-game activities prior to Saints home games. Champions Square also hosted a viewing party for the LSU-Alabama game in Tuscaloosa as well as for the SEC Championship game in Atlanta where LSU played the University of Georgia. This area has food and beverage vendors, some interactive games, and has a large stage for bands and other live

music performances. There were activities scheduled at Champions Square for the Sugar Bowl, including live bands, and a pep rally featuring each team's band and cheerleaders just prior to the time the Superdome gates opened. It was at this time that I realized just how many more UM fans were in New Orleans than VT. Both of the pep rallies were very spirited, but Michigan's fans were there in much greater numbers. Since I did not have tickets to the game, I left after both pep rallies finished and headed home to watch the game on television. Since many of the UM and VT fans likely traveled to New Orleans by air, there was not much traffic leaving the city heading west, or coming into the city from the west. There was minor congestion right around the Superdome, but I was able to make it back to my parents' house in Kenner just in time for kickoff. As I watched the game, the camera shots of the inside of the Superdome seemed to confirm the larger numbers of UM fans that were there to watch and support their team.

**Saturday, January 7, 2012**

**BCS Championship Weekend – LSU Tigers vs. Alabama Crimson Tide**  
**NFL Playoff Game – New Orleans Saints vs. Detroit Lions**

We arrived in downtown New Orleans in the early afternoon, and the large crowds of football fans were immediately visible. Saints, LSU and Alabama colors filled the streets as fans proudly wore anything with their respective team colors. Many fans, especially of LSU and the Saints, wore various combinations of their teams' colors. Bars and restaurants in the French Quarter area were very crowded, as long lines to be seated stretched out of the doors and sometimes down the street. The line to get into ACME Oyster House in the French Quarter wrapped around the building and stretch for nearly a block and a half. Since many places were so crowded, we opted to head straight to Bourbon St. to check out the atmosphere. It was indeed very spirited. We decided to see if we could get into one of the French Quarter's most well-known locations, Pat O'Brien's. We were able to get in and get a table right away, although the bar area was very crowded. On event days, Pat O's separates the two areas so people coming into the restaurant area from the bar don't have access to those tables. We ordered our meal and spent the entire time just watching all of the people interact. Since so many of the fans were locals (following both the Saints and LSU), they began to make their way over towards the Superdome just as we finished eating. We also then realized how many Alabama fans began filling the bar. Since we decided to wear our team colors this time (LSU and Saints), we decided to follow our crowd.

We again walked from the French Quarter through the CBD and over to the Superdome area, where Saints tailgaters were out in full force. Throughout all of the day's activities, we only saw a small handful of Detroit fans in the city, but many of the hotel rooms in the area had already been booked by BCS fans before the NFL playoff matchups were known. The official start to the Carnival season was also just one day prior, so the city was in full celebration mode. We made our way over to Champions Square where the atmosphere was great and many fans were eating, drinking, and dancing to the live band. Again, since we did not have tickets to the game, we headed home just before kick-off to watch the game on TV, since the restaurants downtown were still so crowded.

**Sunday, January 8, 2012**  
**BCS Weekend – LSU vs. Alabama**

We arrived downtown in the late morning, so we would have enough time to get a decent parking spot and go to the Fan Fest for the LSU pep rally. There were so many people downtown, I don't know that it would've mattered what time we got down arrived; there was not a parking spot to be had unless you wanted to pay a \$50 dollar event rate at Harrah's Casino. Instead of parking we were dropped off so we could get over to the pep rally. The Fan Fest was jam-packed with LSU fans that were also waiting for the school's band and cheerleaders to arrive. We later found out that the closest free, on-street parking spot that could be found was about three blocks from the Superdome. There were many activities taking place for fans on this day, which were publicized by the local media as well as through various alumni organizations and fan groups. LSU's Les Miles was also holding his Coach's radio show from the Sheraton Hotel on this night, so there were many fans who went down to the French Quarter to participate in a day's worth of activities. We visited both team hotels again, which were the same hotels that the Sugar Bowl teams used. LSU was at the Hilton Riverside and Alabama was at the Marriott. Both hotels were buzzing with fans and guests alike, all talking about what Monday's game would bring, and all betting that their team was guaranteed to win. Fans were good-spirited, but they displayed a lot of team pride. Fans would yell "Go Tigers" or "Roll Tide" to other fans of their own team or to the fans of the other team. There were so many bands and concerts at bars and various other places throughout the CBD and French Quarter, that there were many opportunities for fans to enjoy the city and interact between and among each other. After enjoying a free concert with local musicians outside of Harrah's Casino, we decided to call it a day in order to prepare for game day.

**Monday, January 9, 2012**  
**BCS Championship Game Day – LSU vs. Alabama**

The streets surrounding the Superdome were literally packed with people. There were people tailgating and walking the streets all around the Superdome. The scene was reminiscent of Mardi Gras day where people simply take over the landscape, filling the sidewalks, streets, and parking lots. There was music, food, and revelry everywhere you looked, but fans were not all quite as good-spirited and congenial as they were during the days leading up to the game. There is simply no other way to describe it—the crowds were massive. It was difficult to tell whether or not one particular team had more fans, since both fan bases were in such close proximity to the city. Many of the fans also likely did not have tickets to the game, since it was one of the hardest BCS tickets to get if you either didn't get tickets through one of the two universities or had some other connections. Every bar and restaurant in the area around the Dome was packed, and many were offering some sort of "curbside" beverage sales. Parking lots normally filled with the cars of people working downtown were taken over by RV's and tents where tailgate parties were being held. Since I was attending the game in an official working capacity for the LSU Athletic Department, I was not able to attend the pre-game pep rallies at Champions Square. Once inside the Superdome, the fans seemed to have almost equal numbers, but Alabama fans may have actually had a slight advantage. The final score of the game also likely had a big impact on the post-game atmosphere in the city. Nevertheless, it was truly an experience and something likely only to be seen in New Orleans.

## **VITA**

Kristen Chighizola is a native of New Orleans, Louisiana. After graduating from Mount Carmel Academy in May 2000, she began her collegiate academic pursuits at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where she developed a passion for college athletics. Upon completion of her Bachelor of Science degree in May 2004, she took several classes in the Mass Communication program at Louisiana State University before deciding to pursue a Master of Education degree with a concentration in sports management at the University of New Orleans in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Kristen worked as an intern for the Sun Belt Conference in New Orleans, Louisiana while completing the Master of Education program. She then began working for the Louisiana State University Athletic Department after completing the internship in May 2007. After gaining several years of professional experience, Kristen returned to Louisiana State University as a graduate student in August 2009 to pursue the Master of Mass Communication degree. For the past two years, Kristen has worked for the Baton Rouge Area Sports Foundation while also continuing to work with the Louisiana State University Athletic Department and upon graduation in May will return to New Orleans to pursue a career in the hospitality and tourism industry.