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New director takes over at county tourism office

West Linn, Ore. – There is a new person at the helm of the Clackamas County Tourism & Cultural Affairs office.

Samara Phelps has been announced as the new head of the department tasked with enhancing and promoting Clackamas County tourism assets under the brand Oregon's Mt. Hood Territory. Phelps is replacing Danielle Cowan who is retiring after 9 years in the position and nearly 12 with the County itself.

The County performed a nationwide recruitment for the position, with candidates going through multiple interviews with administration and the Tourism Development Council (TDC), the nine-member volunteer board comprised of tourism industry leaders that oversee the work of the tourism department.

“Samara is an exceptional leader who brings a wealth of experience in tourism, destination marketing organizations and non-profit leadership. She rose to the top of a very competitive national recruitment for this position. She will continue the accomplished legacy of success of Clackamas County Tourism and Cultural Affairs and I look forward to working with her in the years ahead,” said County Administrator Gary Schmidt.

TDC Chair Jody Carson echoed Schmidt's assessment.

“I'm very excited that Samara is going to be the next executive director. She brings a wealth of experience with her and really understands the Mt. Hood Territory area and the vision of the tourism industry both here and in the state. The new industry standard is more than just marketing, but development and management. Samara is incredibly knowledgeable in these aspects,” she said.

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Phelps has more than a dozen years of experience in the tourism industry. She got her start first managing the visitor services program at Travel Lane County where she later served as Community & Stakeholders Relations Manager. She made the transition to Clackamas County in 2015, where she took over as Destination Development Lead. In that role she worked closely with partners throughout the county to strengthen communities through the creation and improvement of tourism products, and the creation and implementation of strategic plans.

“I’m excited to take on the opportunity to lead this organization into the next chapter,” Phelps said.

“We are a high-performing team at the leading edge of the industry. There’s a lot of changes happening in tourism right now that affect how organizations like ours do business. We’re up for the challenge and continuing to lead the way to continue to strengthen Clackamas County’s economy through tourism.”

Phelps will officially start in the new role on August 1. Cowan will continue to serve on a limited, part-time basis, representing the county’s interests with outside organizations.

Clackamas County Tourism and Cultural Affairs is funded solely through the voter-approved transient room tax at lodging properties throughout the county. Visitors spent more than \$600 million in Clackamas County in 2018 according to the Dean Runyan & Associates economic impact study. That same study showed that travel spending supported more than 6,700 jobs in the county during that same time.

About Oregon’s Mt. Hood Territory: Please visit us at: www.mthoodterritory.com. Clackamas County Tourism & Cultural Affairs (branded “Oregon’s Mt. Hood Territory”), is dedicated to economic development through visitor spending, and is funded by transient room taxes from area lodging facilities and campgrounds. Clackamas County is a contributing partner in enhancing Oregon’s quality of life by strengthening the economic impacts of the state’s \$12.3 billion tourism industry.

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