



## Dance moves

by Linda Poland

Observing people having a good time laughing and enjoying themselves makes me want to stop and see what they are enjoying. Is it a good tour guide sharing a story, a family reunion, or some crazy antics like a monkey at a zoo? One group I observed served as an inspiration for a new tour concept.

I was teaching storytelling at the John C. Campbell Folk School in North Carolina a few years ago and when I had a break I would observe other classes. It was especially fun to watch the dance groups and the ones that caught my eye were the Irish Set Dances. Irish sets are the square dancers of the Emerald Isles with unique steps and figures. There is a wonderful old-fashioned dance called Four Corners; this dance requires people to practice working together in a coordinated effort. Each dancer had to be in the right place at the right time because their partners were depending on them. When done correctly, the Four Corners was a delight to watch and judging by the laughter of the dancers even more fun to perform.

Preparing for my drive back to Tennessee, I looked at a map and

noticed the corners of four states abutting each other. It gave me the idea for designing a tour series that could bring groups to our region for extended stays. The Four Corners dance, with its partnerships, and the corners of four states connected. The new Positive Solutions Tour would be named Our Four Corners Region. Inspiration, of course, is only the jump-start of a project but by the time I arrived back at the office my enthusiasm must have been infectious because my staff jumped on the idea. We began to brainstorm and highlighted the options for the new tour series.

Our next step was to contact the people with whom we already had good working relationships and see how we could work together on this tour series. Outside of Tennessee, Positive Solutions had already been partnering with tourism entities in Virginia and North Carolina, so we added Kentucky in 2004 to become the fourth corner. In order for this tour series to be a success and generate the important return visits (we all count on), we had to be able to depend on our partners to do the right thing at the right time, just like in the dance.

With the intent to offer Our Four Corners Region tours in 2005, we scurried to visit the sites, restaurants, and hotels that would fit our standards on customer service. Our site visits had no announcement as we wanted to see how everyday visitors were greeted. By using a checklist we could compare notes on hotels for such things as location, cleanliness, services, and places of interest in the surrounding area. Restaurants were evaluated on cleanliness, service, quality, variety, and their ability to accommodate large groups. Sites and attractions were evaluated for their age appropriateness, accessibility, and the knowledge and communications skills of the guides and staff. Poor options were weeded out. Finally, we made appointments to visit with our preferred selections to present our vision and solicit their input. Day and evening options were designed for each area.

We partnered with tourism entities in Northeast Tennessee, Southwest Virginia, Northwest North Carolina, and Southeast Kentucky. This was a win-win situation because we all had the same goal ... to increase tourism to our region by offering high-quality, extended-stay tours.

The skill and cooperation necessary in the Four Corners dance gave birth to the idea of a tour highlighting the natural beauty and heritage of Our Four Corners Region. The history and culture of the area, America's first frontier, is interwoven with the stories common to mountain heritage. From an idea to reality, the end product was an offering of tours ranging from four days/three nights to eight days/seven nights.

The beauty of this tour series is its flexibility. We have agreements with hotels, attractions, and restaurants in all four states. This offers a group the convenience of choosing which state to stay in and still have the opportunity to experience great day trips of the region. We were ecstatic about the new partnering opportunities that are working so well.

The Four Corners Region tour, like others I market through Positive Solutions Tours, took time to develop, but the relationships developed are priceless. Our team is very appreciative of our new partners and we "bow" to all our partners who met us at the right place at the right time in this tour dance.

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