

Portland's promoter

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Travel Portland spreads the word to visitors and locals alike

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SPECIAL WRITER

It's all about experiencing Portland the way the locals do.

That's what travelers told tourism officials they wanted before coming to the Rose City for conventions, business meetings or vacations: information about real people doing the real things that make living in the Pacific Northwest so unique.

And that's exactly what they get from Travel Portland, a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting the Portland metropolitan area as a preferred destination for business and leisure travelers.

Longtime residents might know the organization as POVA — the Portland Oregon Visitors Association. That name changed to Travel Portland in January 2008.

"It started as the Greater Portland Convention and Visitors Authority. Then it became POVA and then Travel Portland," says Jeff Miller, president and CEO of Travel Portland since 2006. "The outside world didn't know what a POVA was, and the industry embraced more action-oriented words. So we re-did the branding and energized the organization, making it all about the consumer."

As part of the reorganization,

"Portland . . . is progressive but not in a preachy way. We're sustainable without being self-righteous. This is a fun, friendly place to hang out."

Deborah Wakefield

vice president of communications and public relations, Travel Portland

Travel Portland conducted numerous focus groups and sent out more than 1,000 questionnaires. The result: More than 1,000 local businesses now are members of an organization that spreads the gospel of Portland across the country and around the world.

"We're all about marketing and promoting the city," says Deborah Wakefield, Travel Portland's vice president of communications and public relations.

That includes reaching out to journalists and tourism-industry professionals with facts and figures that show Portland is a world-class city, able to host large-scale conventions and to welcome everyone from food lovers and festival-goers to eco-tourists and those who simply love the beauty of the Pacific Northwest. It means continually recycling the idea that Portland is among the "greenest" travel destinations.

And if potential visitors crave tips on where Portland residents eat or what they do for fun, then

Travel Portland can provide those, too, with insider tips at www.goseeportland.com and customized updates on social-networking sites such as Twitter.

"We package it all together," Miller says, "and create a buzz about Portland for people outside the city."

At its heart, Travel Portland is really all about the member businesses that fuel the travel economy and make Portland a desirable place to live and visit. That includes those that are doing the right thing for the environment and making Portland a "green" tourist destination, such as many member hotels, the Oregon Convention Center and a slew of area retailers and restaurants.

Local businesses join Travel Portland to promote themselves, extend their reach and utilize the marketing and public relations tools that the agency offers. "All (members) want PR and exposure," Wakefield says, and Travel Portland can offer that in droves.

"We work with members in a

proactive sense," she explains. "We're always interacting with members and working with them on online marketing. There's a lot of collaboration. This is a partnership."

For example, Travel Portland works with McCormick & Schmick's Seafood Restaurants to host meals for traveling journalists and meeting planners. In addition to giving the restaurants exposure, Wakefield says, "it takes some of the burden off our budget."

Scappoose Bay Kayaking also works hand-in-hand with Travel Portland to attract visitors. "We take travel writers and tour operators there," Wakefield says, "and nobody ever leaves disappointed. By offering the tours, Scappoose Bay exposes the kinds of activities available in Columbia County."

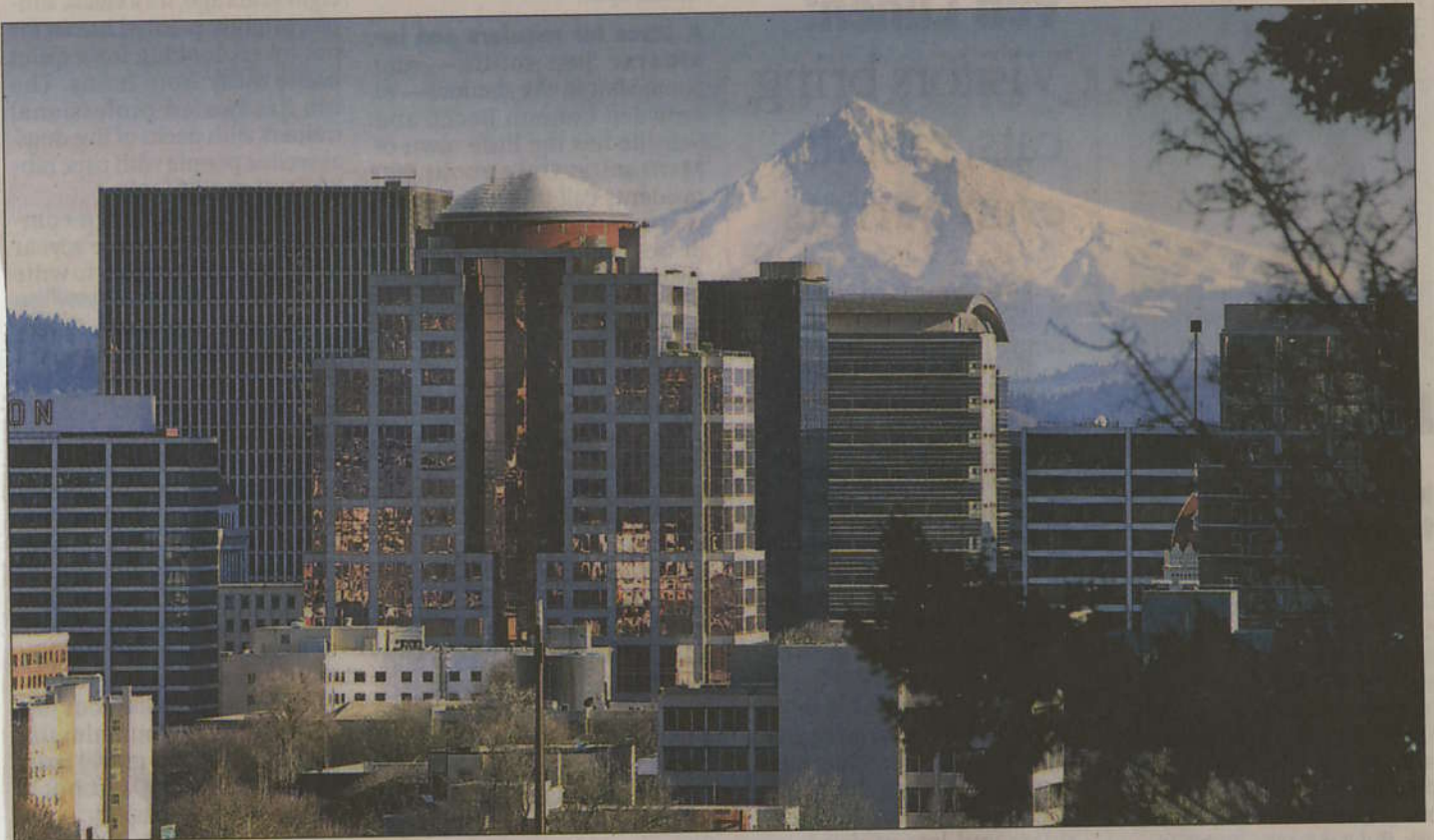
But Travel Portland members aren't just travel- and tourism-related businesses. For every hotel and sightseeing destination, there's a retailer, restaurant, brewery, printer or delivery service that relies on the agency to keep its name in front of potential clients.

There's a full list of members at www.travelportland.com, Travel Portland's online connection not only for out-of-town visitors but also for locals looking

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ADVERTISING SUPPLEMENT

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Photos by JOHN M. VINCENT AND MICHAEL WILHELM

Why visit Portland? Clockwise from top: Mount Hood's nearby slopes; dragon boat races and other Rose Festival events; the bicycle- and pedestrian-friendly Eastbank Esplanade; and a network of farmers markets.