UF TRSM PROFESSOR IS THE FIRST PROFESSOR TO GRADUATE FROM KOA UNIVERSITY

Dr. Stephen Holland Successfully Completed the Course on KOA Kampgrounds’ Operations, Marketing, and Management.

Gainesville, FL -- “There’s camping. And there’s KOA®.” No one knows that tagline better than Dr. Stephen Holland after attending KOA (Kampgrounds of America) University in Billings, Montana. Holland is an Associate Director of the Eric Friedheim Tourism Institute and an Associate Professor in the Department of Tourism, Recreation & Sport Management at the University of Florida. Holland is currently working on the development of a new course entitled Enterprise Outdoor Recreation and he is very interested in the subject because since around the 1980s, the government has started to privatize and outsource certain aspects of park management. Holland is very involved with the Society of Outdoor Recreation Professionals (formerly NARRP) and at a recent conference in Breckenridge, Colorado, he had the opportunity to meet Bruce Ward, a keynote speaker from Choose Outdoors, which is a coalition for outdoor recreation. Ward suggested that Holland talk to Jim Rogers, the CEO of KOA, and that their course on operating private campgrounds could give him great material for his new course. Bruce commented that some federal agencies were even sending their campground rangers to this course, to learn how to be more profitable and effective. Holland agreed, KOA waived the registration fee, and Holland flew into the city on the banks of the Yellowstone River on the last day of September until October 5th.

KOA University is offered six times per year and generally has about 15-20 attendees per weeklong session. Holland was with in attendance with nine others who were pleasantly
surprised that he was there, as most are new owners and managers of a KOA Kampground. The irony was that over 2,000 miles from home, Holland met Geoff Goetz, owner of both Wildwood and Lake Panasoffkee KOA Kampgrounds, which are approximately one hour from Gainesville. Hence, Holland found a Florida guest speaker willing to discuss campground recreation with his class on day one. The five-day course covered many topics such as: franchisee support, marketing, KOA quality controls, financing, computer reservation system training, KOA.com and social media, recreational programming, staffing, KOA merchandising, and employee training. One of the newest trends discussed was that of “glamping” or in essence, glamorous camping. The New York Times calls glamping “camping, but not quite roughing it.” Glamping.com indicates that this type of experience is found while staying in a treehouse, yurt, airstream, canvas tent, or cabin. KOA is trying to reach this new niche by now offering cabins at most of their campgrounds.

The other new marketing effort that KOA is beginning to do is to segment all of their campgrounds into three categories: 1) campgrounds primarily for overnight campers, known as Express KOA; 2) two – six night camp stays, known as Holiday KOA; and 3) campgrounds that generally have visitors staying more than one week, known as Resort KOA. KOA plans on setting different standards for each type and wants to better address the needs of various campers and what they are looking for when staying at a campsite or in a cabin.

According to Pat Hittmeier (KOA President), “Steve Holland is the first professor to successfully complete the course on the operation, marketing and management at KOA Kampgrounds at KOA University.” Holland feels that he acquired a lot of applicable material at the training and was even able to attend the 2012 KOA Convention in Orlando in November. There, he got to meet and chat with Jim Rogers, Chairman and CEO of KOA, who was recently featured on “Undercover Boss,” a CBS reality television series. There are currently 25 KOA Kampgrounds in Florida and almost 500 nationwide and in Canada.

The Eric Friedheim Tourism Institute is committed to building a bridge between the tourism industry, organizations, destinations, and higher education through excellence in interdisciplinary research that provides strategic information focused on a wide array of travel, tourism and hospitality opportunities.

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