

Summary Description: Tauck World Discovery “Yellowstone Guest-Volunteer Program”

BACKGROUND

Tauck World Discovery is an 80-year-old escorted tour operator that offers over 100 upscale land, cruise, riverboat and safari itineraries in 60 countries and on all seven continents. A family-owned and operated company, Tauck World Discovery (“Tauck”) was launched as Tauck Tours in 1925 by Arthur Tauck, Sr., and today operates under the leadership of his granddaughter, Robin Tauck.

Since 1926, Tauck has offered itineraries that include visits to United States National Parks. In honor of its 75th anniversary in 2000, the company committed itself to “giving back” to the National Parks through grants and employee volunteerism activities within the Parks. The volunteerism experiences proved to be so rewarding to employees that the company sought a way to expand the scope and impact of its efforts by involving its guests, and allowing them to also experience the rich rewards of volunteerism and public service. The result of that initiative is Tauck’s Yellowstone Guest-Volunteer Program.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW AND RESULTS

In 2003, Tauck launched its Yellowstone Guest-Volunteer Program (“the program”) in Yellowstone National Park. The voluntary program offers guests visiting the Park with Tauck the opportunity to donate approximately two hours of labor to various Park preservation and rehabilitation projects.

In three years, 5,148 Tauck guest-volunteers have donated 9,376 hours of labor at Yellowstone valued at \$162,325.80 by the National Park Service.

Itemized three-year results for the program are highlighted below:

Program Year	Tauck Work Groups	Total Tauck Volunteers	Volunteer Hours	Value/Hr. (per NPS)	Value To Park
2005	84	1,922	3,201	\$17.55	\$56,177.55
2004	70	1,622	3,339	\$17.19	\$57,397.41
2003	87	1,604	2,836	\$17.19	\$48,750.84
Total	241	5,148	9,376		\$162,325.80

Projects completed by Tauck guest-volunteers within Yellowstone National Park include:

- Controlling rain runoff drainage problems
- Repairing flood damage
- Constructing walkways
- Sanding and staining historic buildings and backcountry cabins
- Sanding and staining amphitheaters
- Sanding and staining sitrails and beauty fences
- Sanding and staining picnic tables
- Staining bumper logs and log curbing

- Staining lamp posts
- Painting fire hydrants
- Grounds work at various locations
- Broken asphalt removal
- Noxious weed control
- Other beautification and rehabilitation efforts throughout the Park

In 2003, 3,019,384 people visited Yellowstone – and each had an impact, however small, on the Park and its infrastructure. The Tauck guest-volunteer program is creative and innovative in that it takes an element that normally has a negative impact on the Park (Park visitors) and helps convert their presence into a more positive asset for the Park.

Besides the obvious benefits to Yellowstone, the program also pays substantial dividends in a second, and perhaps more surprising, area – among the program’s participants. The program fosters a strong sense of national pride and community among participants, it enhances their sense of “ownership” of our National Parks, and it opens their eyes to the larger rewards of volunteering. ***In an anonymous on-line survey conducted among 600 guest-volunteers, 86% said that volunteering enhanced their on-tour experience, and 94% said they would choose to volunteer again if given the opportunity.***

The positive experience of guest-volunteers is best articulated by Tauck traveler Mrs. M. Rosen, who said: “The experience was wonderful and our group had a good time doing the project. It was nice to do something for the National Parks, so that those who come to visit them later can view their beauty, history, and splendor as we did. Thank you for allowing me the experience of giving back to this great country in which we live.”

YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK

Yellowstone National Park has the distinction of being the *world’s* very first National Park. It is both the flagship of the United States National Park Service, and one of America’s premier historic and natural heritage assets. Established by the federal government in 1872, Yellowstone was named an International Biosphere Reserve in 1976, and designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1978. The Park features 1,106 Historic Structures, 13 Historic Districts, five National Historic Landmarks and over 1,000 documented archeological sites.

Yellowstone also contains half (over 10,000) of all the world's known geothermal features. The Park also has the world's largest concentration of geysers, including the iconic “Old Faithful.” Within Yellowstone’s borders there are more than 300 geysers, or two-thirds of all those on the planet. The Park is also home to the largest concentration of free-roaming wildlife in the lower 48 states, and more than 1,000 plant species.

According to the Yellowstone National Park Business Plan of July, 2003, visitation to the Park has increased by 50% since 1980. However, as of 2003, the Park’s appropriated base funding had increased at a nominal (non-inflation adjusted) rate of 4.8%, which is 1.4% after adjusting for inflation. With this budget, the Park’s staff is responsible for the stewardship of 3,470 square miles in the states of Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming, and for safely accommodating (and minimizing the impact of) nearly 3 million visitors per year.

Each year, Yellowstone’s dedicated staff focuses their considerable energies and expertise on the Park’s most crucial and urgent preservation and rehabilitation projects. Other projects are by necessity placed on the Park’s “deferred maintenance backlog” for completion at some unspecified later date. Many of these projects are also critical to the long-term upkeep of the Park, yet do not require specialized skills. These are the projects that participants in the guest-volunteer program typically undertake and complete. The projects are identified and prioritized by Park personnel, and the efforts of the guest-volunteers are organized and supervised by a full-time, seasonal Program Coordinator.

PROGRAM DETAILS

Tauck initiated the guest-volunteer program concept, and coordinated the involvement of Yellowstone National Park and the Yellowstone Park Foundation.

Each year, Tauck solicits the voluntary participation of guests on its Yellowstone itineraries, and underwrites the vast majority of program-related expenses through either its corporate giving program, the Tauck family foundation, or a combination of the two. Annual expenses underwritten by Tauck include the Program Coordinator’s salary, all tools, materials and supplies, and the cost of a souvenir t-shirt for each guest-volunteer.

Tauck’s partners in the program include The Yellowstone National Park (project identification and oversight), The Yellowstone Park Foundation (oversight of project funding), and Xanterra Corporation, which operates the Old Faithful Inn, the Lake Yellowstone Hotel, and other businesses throughout the Park (logistical support).

Costs for the program since its inception in 2003 have been:

	2003	2004	2005	Total
Tauck	\$22,000	\$25,000	\$23,000	\$70,000
National Park Service		\$7,000		\$7,000
Yellowstone NP			\$500	\$500
Total	\$22,000	\$32,000	\$23,500	\$77,500

PROGRAM RECOGNITION

Tauck’s Yellowstone guest-volunteer program has been honored with two awards. In 2004, the program was the recipient of the Travel Industry Association of America’s (TIA) “Public & Community Service Award.” The award recognized the program’s achievements during 2003, and was part of the TIA’s annual Odyssey Awards, the premier recognition program for the \$545 billion U.S. travel and tourism industry.

In September of this year, the program’s 2004 achievements were recognized with a “Take Pride In America” National Award in the Corporate category. An initiative of the Department of the Interior, Take Pride In America is a national partnership promoting volunteer efforts to improve America’s public spaces.

The Tauck Yellowstone guest-volunteer program was launched by the company in 2003, and is an on-going effort that will resume in May, 2006.