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Old Town Cottonwood Driving Tourism Using New Technologies

*Partnership with Local First Arizona Snags
Governor's Tourism Award for Creative Collaborative Marketing*

Phoenix, AZ (July 14th, 2012) - The merchants of Old Town Cottonwood have joined forces to market themselves as a travel destination, steeped in wine tasting, great food, and antiquing. Working collaboratively, the business owners created a 'package deal' on Living Social and proceeded to sell 750 tasting packages in less than 4 months. 96% of the participants who provided feedback in an on-line survey after their visit had never been to Cottonwood, and all indicated they would return.

Using the brand new WeekendZona video clip, created by Local First Arizona and Dean Studios, the merchants worked to create a fun travel guide aimed at 35-55 year olds who are interested in wine and weekend getaways. WeekendZona is a stay-cation oriented tool that Local First Arizona hopes will drive more Arizonans to explore the state. "Collectively, Arizonans spend \$6.5 billion per year vacationing in California, and if we can redirect even 10% of that into our rural towns, we could make a huge impact on our overall economic health," said Kimber Lanning of Local First Arizona. WeekendZona videos are currently in development for 5 more Arizona towns.

Cottonwood Economic Development director Casey Rooney supports Economic Gardening, or homegrown economic development, and believes that celebrating his town's existing assets is an effective way to grow the local economy. Through collaborations encouraged by Rooney's department, the Mayor's office, and the city at large, Cottonwood has effectively created a district worthy of interstate travel.

“These 3 tasting rooms represent some of the best wines being made in the country, and when you couple that with great restaurants, quaint places to stay, and a fun shopping corridor, you’ve got the ability to really compete for tourism dollars,” he explained.

Local First Arizona has also worked with merchants to create a *Small Wonders* map that highlights restaurants, wine tasting rooms, and retail. 50,000 of the maps have been distributed all over the state, showcasing the best of the Verde Valley. Hotels and resorts throughout Arizona, as well as Sky Harbor airport, tourism centers, and dozens of art, food, and wine events have been targeted by LFA staff as key areas to connect with potential visitors to Old Town. The *Small Wonders* maps have also been used as a guide for travelers who bought into the package deal offered by the businesses, which is largely a take home piece to share with others that showcases the high quality, unique experience Cottonwood offers.

In addition, Local First has taught social media workshops to Old Town business owners to help them think collaboratively using Facebook to create more awareness about what Cottonwood has to offer. LFA has a fans and followers list of over 22,000 people across the state, which has provided a great platform to share information and excitement.

Lana Tolleson, President and CEO of the Cottonwood Chamber of Commerce, has been a critical supporter of the overall project. “The Cottonwood Chamber is always looking for ways to partner that will ultimately benefit our businesses and our town overall- this project benefits everyone and we were proud to be a part of it,” said Tolleson.

Also key to this project were the businesses, including Arizona Stronghold, Pillsbury Wine Co, Old Town Wine Cellar, Crema Café, Orion Bread Company, Verde Valley Olive Oil Traders, and Bon Lait.

About Local First Arizona

Founded in 2003 by Director Kimber Lanning, Local First Arizona (LFA) is the largest alliance of independent businesses in the country, working to strengthen communities and local economies through supporting, maintaining, and celebrating locally owned businesses throughout the state of Arizona. With over 2100 members, LFA educates citizens, stakeholders, business leaders, and legislators about the significant environmental, economic, and cultural benefits of strong local economies.

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