

Palm Springs tourism group to focus on health

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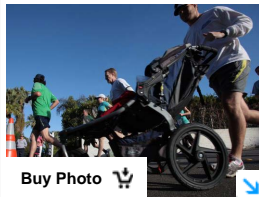
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12:39 a.m. PST February 2, 2015



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The Mayor's Race in Palm Springs could grow to become a centerpiece of a "wellness week," as the city positions itself as a health and wellness destination in addition to its already well-established creed in areas like LGBT or film tourism.

"We see that this event, truly, has so much opportunity," said Aftab Dada, chair of the non-profit PS Resorts, remarking on the organization's \$50,000 sponsorship of the 2015 Mayor's Race.

PS Resorts is a consortium of about a dozen hotels in the city, charged with growing tourism. It received \$406,760 in funding in 2014, according finance documents. PS Resorts' funding comes in the form of transient occupancy tax rebates it receives from the city. For example, 50 percent of the TOT hotels collect on resort fees is rebated back to PS Resorts for the purpose of offering sponsorships to local events and growing tourism.

The 2015 Mayor's Race was the largest single sponsorship in 2014 — the year before, the race received a \$25,000 PS Resorts sponsorship — and reflects a clear direction the organization would like to move when thinking about growing a "signature event" in Palm Springs.

"One of our plans and goals is to create a 'health week,'" said Tim Ellis, general manager of the Palm Mountain Resort and Spa and a member of the PS Resorts Board of Directors. "One market that would be easy for us to put our arms around could be 'adult retreat' things like yoga, and exercise and the health benefits... And do a whole health week where maybe people would come out and spend four or five days."

Last year, PS Resorts tried to attract [Wanderlust](#), a traveling yoga festival with a dedicated following, but was unable to secure the dates.

"They're still at the table," Ellis remarked. "And that would be a tremendous endcap for this wellness week."

"So that's a possibility. Can we merge them together? Well, that would be the goal," he added.

Next year's Mayor's Race will be moved one week later so that it overlaps with the Humana Classic golf tournament and Health Matters summit, even though Mayor Steve Pognet is careful to point out that the Mayor's Race is its own event and not officially connected to the Humana.

"I just think the visibility of that weekend is always a good weekend to have my race because the money that I raise does fund all the stuff that President Clinton is doing here in the valley," Pognet said Friday.

Clinton and his Clinton Foundation are the centerpiece of the Health Matters summit, launched in 2013, with an emphasis on using technology and creative partnerships to improve the community health picture, largely through preventive care and improved health through exercise and healthier eating.

The Mayor's Race, with its strong focus on health and wellness, is "a natural fit" with the Health Matters conference, said Pognet.

And the goal is to leverage the Mayor's Race to grow Palm Springs' reputation as a health and wellness destination, say officials.

"That fits right in, sort of like eco-tourism. Eco-tourism is on the rise, and wellness tourism kind of goes hand-in-hand, and there's absolutely no doubt," said Pognet. "I'm convinced that is a growth opportunity for us."

Seventeen years ago a little known bike race called the [Tour de Palm Springs](#) attracted 400 riders. Today, the race attracts some 9,000 cyclists from across the country, with 72 percent of them participating in the 50 mile route or longer.

Tourism officials look to the growth of events like the Tour de Palm Springs as an indicator of not only the growth of wellness and eco-tourism, but the attraction the Coachella Valley poses for these types of visitors.

"I don't have the exact numbers, but I know there were well over 1,000 participants in the actual race, and another couple thousand that came to the wellness festival," said Pognet of the Mayor's Race. "So we had several thousand people there... And I'm pretty sure nearly half were from outside Palm Springs. So some are starting to book rooms, some from out of the country."

PS Resorts contributed a total of \$266,741 to Palm Springs events in 2014. Other expenses like consulting and administration fees or public relations totaled \$82,049, according to finance reports filed with the city. Altogether, sponsorships and expenses totaled \$348,790, down 11.6 percent from 2014. PS Resorts' revenue in 2014 was \$406,800 in 2014, up 8.3 percent from the year before.

However, in 2015 PS Resorts' largest single sponsorship will be its partnership with the Buzz trolley system. PS Resorts will contribute \$100,000 toward the system's \$900,000 first-year price tag.