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New Hollister brand: 'The Original'

Friday, April 15, 2011

By [Melissa Flores](#)

Consultants learn history, culture

Tripp Muldrow, and his brother Ben, spent three days in Hollister this week developing a new brand image for the city.

From Arnett Muldrow & Associates, the two travel the country working with cities and counties to develop a marketing plan that locals can use to promote themselves. The pair met with five subsets of the community on Monday and Tuesday, before taking the afternoon to develop a logo and other branding items.

The final design was presented to the community Wednesday, at 1 p.m., in the city council chambers.

During a 2 p.m. session on Monday, the two met with community leaders and elected officials in what was a loosely-led candid discussion about their personal view of Hollister, outsiders' views of the community and many other issues in the city.

The nearly hour-and-a-half conversation discussed everything from the death of the motorcycle rally to the other Hollister brand - the clothing company produced by Abercrombie and Fitch.

"We are on a very intense time frame," Muldrow said. "As you know this a three-day process and Ben has to hit the ground running. As he is listening he is already beginning to work."

The Muldrows met with those involved in tourism; community leaders and elected officials; teens and young professionals; downtown business members and general members of the public.

The marketing and branding initiative was co-funded by a grant from the Community Foundation for San Benito County and funding from the City of Hollister Redevelopment Agency. The effort was led by the Hollister Downtown Association (HDA). The cost for the three-day community workshop was \$10,850, with the Foundation and RDA splitting the tab.

"What we are trying to do is give a set of tools that tell Hollister's story," Muldrow said. "You'll have a consistent way of doing that. It's not just giving a logo, but a set of tools."

One of the first questions Muldrow asked the group gathered was about the relationship between the county and the city. Those present included Hollister city council members, county supervisors, school officials and nonprofit directors.

Some members present said the relationship had been polarized in the past, but that the city and county have been working together in recent years.

"We are all dealing with the same issues," said Ray Friend, a Hollister city councilman. "If we don't cooperate, we have problems."

Cesar Flores, a board member of the Arts Council San Benito County, said the community is small enough that it is easier to communicate than it might be in other places.

"Here you run into them at church and at the grocery store," Flores said.

Muldrow asked what leaders and residents think of Hollister.

"It's a place with potential," said Robert Rivas, a county supervisor.



A photo shows the logo designed by Arnett Muldrow and Associates to brand the city of Hollister.

Photo by: [Nick Lovejoy](#)



Residents watch the revealing of a new brand name and logos.

Photo by: [Nick Lovejoy](#)

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Starr Wolf, the coordinator of the United Way in San Benito County, said as someone with a young family she thinks of it as a safe community.

Others noted the landscape and the proximity to other assets such as mountains, beaches and cities, such as San Jose and San Francisco.

"We have agriculture, climate," said Margie Barrios, a county supervisor. "We have that advantage."

When asked what outsiders think of Hollister, many present said they think those from the Bay Area see it as rural.

Flores also noted that the city is well known in motorcycle circles - both on and off road types. Some noted that city officials have not embraced that image in recent years, with the cancellation of the motorcycle rally over Fourth of July weekend. Friend said the city is open to revitalizing the rally.

The other Hollister brand came up when City Clerk Geri Johnson mentioned that she gets e-mails from people inquiring about the Hollister Clothing Co.

"We are dealing with some nasty type of branding," said Ben Muldrow, of the Abercrombie and Fitch-owned brand. "What they created is based on fiction. The fact is the company is based in Ohio. One thing they created was a monologue that helped create a personality. We need to figure out how to keep out of trouble and preserve our image."

Tripp Muldrow asked those present about the current city logo and county seal.

"The (Hollister Downtown Association) and the city both feature very prominently the tower on the Masonic Lodge," he said. "How resonant is that image?"

Most residents said the clock tower is an image that could be about any city, not something that is specific to Hollister.

"It almost seems to be that the branding of Hollister should include San Benito," Barrios said. "People will come here for the outdoorsy recreation and climate. It's not downtown Hollister that draws people here."

Muldrow said that the branding effort is focused on Hollister, but that they might be able to incorporate the county into it.

"We need to imbue (a logo) with meaning when moving away from something literal to something more figurative," he said. "It's quite literal on both the city and county level. How comfortable are you with moving a little more into the figurative realm?"



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