

For Immediate Release

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SUU students cooperate with Beaver to create new city website

BEAVER — Southern Utah University's Centurium Consulting Group, a student advertising and public relations agency, worked with the Beaver City Council during the spring semester to design and create a new website for the community.

The new site should be online in late June, said Beaver City Manager Brent Blackner, who praised the students' efforts as being "attractive to the eye, as well as functional and easy to use for our city employees."

After an initial inquiry in early 2011 by Beaver City Mayor Mark Yardley to the SUU Office of Government Relations & Regional Services, the city was connected to SUU's Communication Department, home of Centurium Consulting Group.

Under the direction of CCG adviser and department chair Art Challis, the students met with Yardley, Blackner and members of the city council to discuss the pros and cons of the city's existing website and receive input about desired changes.

"The current website is antiquated and not very user-friendly," said CCG President Challis Pascucci. "We were pleased that Mayor Yardley and the city council had enough faith in us to let us help them with the new site."

Blackner agreed with Pascucci's assessment of the current city website.

"We have a website, and it is functional, but we can't make changes when we want to make them," he said. "The students worked hard to make the new site more user-friendly. It's easier for the community to navigate, and it allows our city administrators to make the changes without waiting for someone else to do it for them."

Pascucci oversaw the project in cooperation with account executives Jason Bleazard and Caleb Carling, who worked on the webpage design, and Isaac Gifford, who wrote most of the computer code.

After meeting with the city council in mid-January, Pascucci said CCG students "took the things they told us and the colors they gave us to work with, and we made a couple of new designs that simplified things."

On Feb. 22, Pascucci and CCG account executives presented templates for proposed designs that Bleazard and Carling had created.

"We were able to showcase the functionality of the new designs because we had a mock website already running on a test server," Pascucci said. "We showed them how both two options functioned, how to navigate them, and most important, how they could update the website on their own."

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Bleazard said the students “set it up so that the city employees could sit down at any computer, to the website, and update it anytime they want.”

Based on feedback from the city council and subsequent meetings with Mayor Yardley, the CCG team spent another two months tweaking the website and working out a few final bugs. They presented a second draft to the city council on April 25.

Additional feedback led to more revisions during the final weeks of spring semester classes. The students finished the website and turned it over to the city council on May 4.

“The council has been impressed by the things they’ve seen,” Blackner said.

Currently, Blackner said, the city’s webmaster is “tweaking” parts of the website and adding new links that the students could not access.

“When that’s done, we will put it up on the host site for the city council to review,” Blackner said. “I estimate it will go online to the general public in the latter part of June.”

Pascucci said building the website was “a great experience working with real clients and presenting something that is a big deal for them. Smaller communities increasingly rely on their websites to get the word out about public issues, so this was an important project for Beaver.”

Bleazard added, “It was fulfilling to know that we weren’t just creating something for the sake of aesthetics, but that they will use it to benefit their citizens and improve the quality of life for the people in Beaver.”

That benefit should not be underestimated, Blackner said.

“Small communities like Beaver do not have the resources to go pay some larger company to build a website for them,” he said. “This was a real service to the community.”

He said people in the community have been so impressed by the students’ dedication that the city and county are discussing plans to offer an annual three-month internship to an SUU student interested in public service.

“We’re all excited about it,” he said. “We appreciate all these students have done for us.”