

# Beckwith hired to organize festival

But lodging tax board still vague about specific activities, attractions.

By Kevin Huelsmann

There's money in place.

A coordinator soon will follow.

Now, all the members of the Jackson Hole Travel and Tourism Board need to do is start figuring out exactly what their new, conservation-themed fall festival is going to look like and how it's going to function.

"It feels like we're investing in a great idea with a great person," board member Ponteir Sackrey said.

Last week, board members selected Outerlocal founder Christian Beckwith to organize the festival. They're working out the details of his contract, which they're slated to approve next month.

Tourism board members already committed \$350,000 to the event over the next three years. This year, Beckwith will have a \$50,000 budget to get the festival off the ground. Another \$50,000 was set aside for his salary.

Next year, that amount will jump to \$150,000 before falling back to \$100,000 in 2015.

Once the contract is in place, Beck-

with will have about eight months to assemble the basic pieces of the event.

The festival is expected to develop over a period of several years.

Board members have been working with various consultants over the past year and a half to vet the concept of holding a large event to extend the valley's tourist season past the annual Fall Arts Festival.

They studied festivals in other communities, surveyed residents and researched potential partners who could help get the event off the ground. Last fall, Clare Payne Symmons, who was hired to oversee a feasibility study for the event, delivered a recommendation that the board move ahead with the concept.

Once Beckwith's contract is finalized, he'll be able to start planning specific portions of the festival. The only parameters require that the event be held in October and revolve around conservation.

Beckwith's arrangement will be similar to the board's contract with the Denver-based marketing firm Cactus, which oversees a contract to promote Jackson Hole. Board members provide general direction and will review spending decisions.

"It's a multifaceted approach to what

we're supposed to be doing," board member Aaron Pruzan said.

Eventually, board members hope the festival will attract sponsors and won't need as much financial backing from the lodging tax.

Board members on several occasions have debated whether they should wade into organizing events. There's some concern the group might be heading too far into event production.

"We're opening this board up to a lot of exposure that I don't think is really necessary," board member Chip Carey said.

The board is scheduled to review Beckwith's contract on March 14. County attorneys are reviewing the document to address questions about who owns the event and what the scope of Beckwith's work will be.

Beckwith was one of three finalists for the job. Sue Muncaster and Steve Duerr also applied.

Beckwith is the founder and editor-in-chief of Outerlocal, a social media website for adventure athletes. He is the former editor of the American Alpine Journal, was the founding editor of Alpinist Magazine and founded the Alpinist Film Festival and the Mountain Yodel. He also coordinated the Teton Boulder Project.