

FDFA lobbies hard to reintroduce Canada's visitor rebate program



Barbara Barrett, Executive Director of the Frontier Duty Free Association (pictured above), has revealed her plans for the industry body – including lobbying for the reintroduction of Canada's visitor rebate program.

Canada is one of the few countries in the OECD that doesn't have a visitor rebate program, which would give visitors a tax rebate on their purchases in Canada.

Barrett, who was appointed to the top FDFA post in August 2018, explained that Canada used to have a visitor rebate program, but it was canceled in 2007.

The Retail Council of Canada recently published a 10-year impact analysis on what that has meant for the country and its tourism industry, which Barrett described as a good platform from which to launch a discussion about re-establishing the program.

"The mechanism of how it will work has not been established yet," said Barrett. "When we had the program in the past, people were able to go into the FDFA stores and get their reimbursement in the stores. They would often spend their rebate right in the stores."

Although there is no specific timeline for the program's introduction, and the details are yet to be

hammered out, Barrett points out that this is an election year, “so we have to be sure we’re in the minds of the parties that are setting out their election platforms”.

As part of the lobbying process, Barrett has been holding conversations about the mooted rebate program with the Minister of Tourism, Mélanie Joly, and some of the stakeholders within the tourism industry, including Destination Canada, the tourism authority, and other government officials.

“There seems to be some interest in re-establishing the program, so that’s one of the conversations we’re having,” she said.

For the coming year, Barrett described the rebate program as “high, high on the list of priorities”.

Other issues discussed at the Board’s first meeting of the New Year, held in Toronto in January, were tobacco issues and making sure there are fair rules for stores.

Goals for the upcoming FDFA Convention, which will be held from November 11-14, 2019, are now being set.

“We want to build on that success of 2018 and continue that momentum making sure that our members and suppliers are getting the meetings that are most valuable to them so that their time is well used, and also making sure that our suppliers have the right space to hold these meetings. It’s important that the space is conducive to their product line,” she said.

As part of last year’s revamped event, the conference was divided on a category basis, a move the FDFA said would allow for more efficient time planning for suppliers and operators. Monday and Tuesday were devoted to liquor and cosmetics, Tuesday saw the first tobacco and ancillary appointments, with these meetings continuing into the Wednesday.

These dedicated days per category went “quite well” for the most part, said Barrett, noting that it will work better going forward because people will be familiar with it and will be able to plan around it.

The contract with the King Edward Hotel in Toronto will run for another two years, confirmed Barrett.

Later this year, the Board will examine the possibility of moving the venue to another city. “Obviously, Toronto works very well, but we have to make sure we’re being fair to all our members,” she said.

Also in 2019, a Parliament Hill Day government relations event has been slated for May during the Board’s semi-annual meeting in Ottawa, which operators will attend.

The FDFA will coordinate member meetings on the Hill with their Members of Parliament.

The semi-annual meeting with operators will review the association’s activities, its goals and discuss major topics.

A representative from the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) is expected attend to keep members apprised on any issues and regulations.

Meanwhile, Barrett will be attending the Summit of the Americas in Orlando with FDFA President Abe Taqtaq for best practice learnings and relationship building.