

SUFFOLK COUNTY VANDERBILT MUSEUM

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Minutes

A regular meeting of the Suffolk County Vanderbilt Museum Board of Trustees was held on July 11, 2002 in the Planetarium Lobby, Centerport, New York.

The following were in attendance:

Dr. Steven Gittelman - President  
Michael Broxmeyer - 2nd Vice President  
Dr. Anthony Pecorale - Treasurer  
Carl Luecke - Trustee  
Susan LeBow - Trustee  
William Macchione - Trustee  
J. Lance Mallamo - Executive Director  
Rita Beckman - Staff  
Russell Skadl - Staff  
Maryann Zakshevsky - Staff  
Lorraine Vernola - Staff  
Wendy O'Donohoe - Staff  
Betsy Harris Radecki - Staff  
Tom Enna - Staff  
Mike Caroll - Staff  
Zach Studenroth - Staff  
Mark McHugh - Staff

Absent:

Gary C. Fischhoff  
Marjorie Kossoy Fuhrmann  
Edward J. Hahn  
R. Douglas Shaw  
Donna deLuca Periconi  
Robert LaBua  
Bertram E. Seides  
Dr. William Rogers

Minutes Transcribed by:

Ann Marie Pastore - Stenographer

(Dr. Steven Gittelman called the meeting to order at 8:00 p.m.)

DR. GITTELMAN:

This is a regular meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Suffolk County Vanderbilt Museum. With regret I inform you that our stenographer has broken her collarbone. Therefore, we are taping this meeting so the verbatim minutes can be produced at a later date. So if you're going to speak, I will try to identify you or if I miss out on it, please identify yourselves. I want to thank all of you for attending. Do we have a list of people attending?

MS. BECKMAN:  
Yes.

DR. GITTELMAN:  
Thank you, Rita. Does anybody have any comments to make or any questions they would like to ask the Board? Marge is not here.

MR. MALLAMO:  
Marjorie did contact me and said she had reviewed the minutes and did not find any inaccuracies.

DR. GITTELMAN:  
May I have a motion to approve the minutes?

MR. MACCHIONE:  
I'll make that motion, Bill Macchione.

DR. PECORALE:  
Are we able to make that action?

DR. GITTELMAN:  
To approve the minutes?

DR. PECORALE:  
I'm just raising the question. I'm not making a definitive statement one way or the other.

DR. GITTELMAN:  
No, we don't have a quorum. So we will dispense with the approval of the minutes.

DR. PECORALE:  
I guess we could do them at the next meeting.

DR. GITTELMAN:  
Sure. Public Relation's Report?

MR. MALLAMO:  
Leslie Tannen from Todd Shapiro Associates had a car accident, so she was unable to be here. Todd was here earlier and I think addressed the Board. He was unable to stay, but he will provide his material at the next meeting.

DR. GITTELMAN:  
Marge is not here for an Education and Exhibits Committee report. Is anyone else - Betsy or anyone else - able to give us any report?

MR. MALLAMO:  
We didn't have an Education Committee meeting this month. Betsy is here to answer any questions that anyone may have.

DR. GITTELMAN:  
Okay, we'll move on. Development Committee, Carl or Michael.

MR. BROXMEYER:

The Development Committee has met several times this past month. Our entire focus has been on refining all the details for the Gershwin gala on August 2nd and selling sponsorships and tickets for the event. Sales are going pretty well so far. We hope that they increase over the next three weeks until the event. Actually, I'm going to give Zach a few minutes to speak to give you a little more detail on that as well as a few other projects he's working on.

MR. STUDENROTH:

Okay, thank you, Michael. As Michael said, the sales of tickets have commenced. We've done a few things differently this year from last. We sent out more invitations. For example, we purchased the Chamber of Commerce list from the Town of Huntington. That augmented our list by about 1,400 names. So all together the mailing was approximately 4,000 pieces. We do have about 200 invitations left. If any member of the Board this evening or anyone within the next several days thinks of anyone else that we could send an invitation to, we certainly have those available, and those can go out.

We're beginning to see returns from those. As of today, we stand at approximately \$5,000 committed, about \$3,500 in hand from individuals purchasing tickets. That's about \$8,500. We're about, I'd say, a third of the way to goal in terms of individuals purchasing tickets. We do have the Porter Foundation in for \$5,000 and also a commitment from Fleet Bank, which has yet to be finalized. That will also be a substantial contribution.

DR. GITTELMAN:

I'm told that it's \$5,000, plus.

MR. STUDENROTH:

Correct. We don't have an exact number, but we know that it's at least as large as last year's. So we're in good shape on that front.

As far as on the expense side, we're really looking at two things. One is to augment revenues and to hold down expenses. We have done that through the gift of much of the products that we'll be serving from Duck Walk Vineyards and a number of caterers, etc. We're holding our costs down. We're looking at a ratio of roughly about a third of the event in terms of the gross being cost, which is less than is normal for a fundraiser. So we're still trying to target a net profit of \$35,000 this year, which will be about twice what our net was for last year. As Michael said, we're starting on that. We are counting on some of you on the Board to follow through with your contacts, anyone who is certainly willing to make that commitment.

As Michael said, the Development Department is active on a number of other fronts. I believe you have this in your packet this evening, some of the other initiatives that the Development effort is making here. One of which in collaboration with Betsy and the Programming Department was to collaborate with the Harbor Fields Library in Greenlawn. Coincidentally, they have a dinosaur theme, a reading program, which every year attracts some close to 1,000 children. It's not every year it's a dinosaur theme; it just happens to be that this year. It was very fortuitous. We have collaborated with them to encourage people who are going to that to follow up with a visit here, which should prove profitable to us.

The second initiative in terms collaboration is reaching out to the Town of Huntington. We are collaborating with the Parks and Recreation Department. We have a draft of the agreement to offer fall courses and spring and then augment our summer children's programming next year. This could be very profitable to us. In terms of exposure, we are now in the households of everyone in the Town of Huntington. They can see how active and vital our programming is, which also has additional benefits.

Moving along, we have gotten off several large grant requests and some small ones. What I'm finding is that not only are individuals being adversely affected by the performance or the lack thereof of the stock market, but I'm finding from a number of charitable foundations that they are saying, well, they only have a half or so of what they normally have to give because they have been similarly affected. While my personal expectations of the performance in grant writing is certainly affected by the financial climate, we're still aggressively pursuing every opportunity that we can find, and we have several significant grant requests in place, notably to New York State Office of Parks and Recreation for a half a million dollars to augment the budget for the seaplane hangar. That would go specifically to restoring the dock and ramp area exterior to the building giving visitors access to the waterfront.

We have also put in a sizable grant of \$158,000 to the National Parks Service, hopefully, to give us money to restore the diorama hall, which has been closed and would be a wonderful space to put back into operation. Those are the significant ones there.

Another important somewhat small but a bit of a nuisance for us on staff has been a relationship with the New York State Council on the Arts. We had received a number of grants a few years ago, and the bookkeeping on that end was never finalized on a few grants. Simply, on technical grounds, it prevented our returning to the New York State Council for future funding. They don't give large grants, but it's a State agency, and it's important for us to maintain very clear record keeping and communication with them. As a matter of fact, we just receive word today that all of those old issues have been resolved. This is no longer an issue for them, and we are now free to return to them for funding, which is a good development.

We're moving very close on the website. I'm hoping that we will have the final website, which is an expanded version of what we already have up, which has been a very successful thing for us. The new one will expand out and represent additional aspects of the Museum's various programming as well as other things that we're doing. We have been working with Web Tech in Melville. We should be able to demonstrate that at the next Board meeting, which should be of interest to all of you.

Those are some of the highlights. That and membership, which does fall within the Development area, is running pretty close to projections. One significant development is that we have someone here in the lobby who is selling memberships. It's a great value to the average family who pays for the various fees of entrance. The cost of a family membership is roughly equal to what you would pretty much spend for four or five people for a single visit. Just in this month alone we have sold about \$1,200 worth of memberships to visitors coming who perceive the value of joining. So that's a very powerful tool to have someone here communicating that.

Those are some of the highlights. Any questions?

DR. GITTELMAN:

Thank you. Finance Committee, Tony.

DR. PECORALE:

A copy of the Treasurer's Report has been provided to each member of the Board. I would like to have each member note that our admissions and educational programs are sustaining the Museum very well and are up considerably. The staff should be very proud of what they're doing because they're doing a very fine job. If anyone has any questions relative to the Treasurer's Report, I would be happy to respond to the questions.

DR. GITTELMAN:

If there are no questions, Personnel Committee.

MR. MALLAMO:

There was no Personnel Committee meeting this month.

DR. GITTELMAN:

Membership Committee, Doug is not here. Dinosaur Committee, Ed is not here. Buildings and Grounds.

MR. MACCHIONE:

To make a short report, basically the Dinosaur exhibit that the staff has worked very hard on is really excellent. I see that as a big benefit and boost to our income and with all the rest of the areas outside that have to be developed, I think it's an excellent addition to the Museum. The staff should be congratulated for all the work they put into it.

DR. GITTELMAN:

Lance.

MR. MALLAMO:

While I would echo Bill's comments, I think the Dinosaur exhibit is a wonderful addition to the Museum site. I know our visitors think that. I'd like to salute the whole team that put this together, which really represented virtually all the departments of the Museum. It was a collaborative effort of curators, grounds' crew and the people from the Business Department. Virtually everyone was represented and it was a pleasure to see everyone work together so well to make such a wonderful addition to the facility. This is a work in progress. It's not complete yet. We have many exciting things yet to be installed. I know our educators and, Betsy, maybe you can just say a few words on some of the educational programs we're working on for the exhibit right now. We're trying to develop two programs. We will be taking a field trip shortly to different places up in New England that have dinosaur exhibits and hopefully learn some interesting things that we can do there. Maybe you can just talk about the two programs that we have come up with so far. This is Betsy Harris.

MS. HARRIS:

Our education brochure is going to press as we speak because we would like to get that into the teachers' hands in mid August when they're preparing their classrooms.

With respect to the dinosaurs, we have two new programs, one that will target the pre-K through grade two. Mostly that will focus on the concepts of adaptations to habitat and the different physical characteristics of the different dinosaurs. We have a hands-on segment. It will be a similar style to our natural science programs because it will be an actual science program. Of course, it will use the inquiry method as to all of our education programs. In the hands-on segment we have claws, teeth, fossils, and eggs. We will have the children examine those and see how they are used in the various phases of the dinosaurs' lives.

The next program we have will target grades three through five. So it will be a little more complex where we will emphasize the relationships among the physical characteristics of dinosaurs and we will study things like how the physical characteristics of the dinosaurs fit together. This is where we will start picking up the idea of the kids being able to put together their own dinosaur idea or their own dinosaur plan and for them to understand how choosing one element of the dinosaur's body will necessarily cause certain choices to be made in other elements of the dinosaur's body. If they don't, the dinosaur will fall down or not be able to move or not be able to sustain itself. So we're looking forward to having a lot of fun with the kids doing that. Again, they will be able to handle the touch specimens as well.

We put this out to the teachers. Our education brochure goes to every public school, private, and parochial school in Nassau, Suffolk, and Queens. We have a mailing list of approximately 4,000 individual teachers who get it as well as the schools. We have a thriving program as it is, so I think that having an addition to our program will bring in a lot of people. I'm looking forward to working on it. Questions?

MR. MALLAMO:  
Thank you.

DR. GITTELMAN:  
It sounds like a great start.

MR. MALLAMO:  
It is a work in progress. To supplement that and in conjunction with the purchase of the Normandy Manor property, which our closing date will be July 24, it was two weeks from yesterday at 2 p.m., I am told it would have been sooner but the attorneys each were taking vacations this week and next week, so that's what the delay has been. But all the environmental remediation work has been done. Every "t" and "i" has been dotted and crossed. Once that acquisition takes place and we make some changes, we're hoping to free up space in this building to develop an additional classroom. So we're working with the Department of Public Works and the Fire Marshall right now to achieve those goals.

Also I have been working with the Department of Public Works aggressively during the past several weeks on the implementation of our new Capital Project Program that is underway and that we have planned for the near future.

Currently, just to review, we're doing HVAC in the mansion, and rewiring and the plumbing project is about to begin. Next week I'll be traveling up to the Bronx with the landscape architect from DPW to give final approval on the fencing that will be installed at the Museum. It is under construction as we speak. We have to approve the final samples.

We're also working on the development of the ADA compliance project, finishing up the security project, as well as a number of other ones that are coming on.

Steve and I also attended the last meeting of the Suffolk County Legislature to advocate for the retention of Capital Projects here at the Museum that were threatened from being eliminated or delayed in the Capital Program. We were successfully able to retain the waterfront projects for funding in 2003 -- beginning in 2003. That was quite an effort to get that through. I think the fact that we were successful bodes for the support that we continue to enjoy with the County Legislature. That's my report, Steve.

DR. GITTELMAN:

Any comments or questions? I guess it comes to me. I'm proud of everybody who put together that dinosaur exhibit. I think it's handsome. I think it's wonderful. It shows that there was a lot of teamwork. Frankly, those dinosaurs are very difficult to put together, especially the T-Rex. They all look great. The repairs were terrific. I'm looking forward to seeing what staff does with them because they don't speak for themselves. They need somebody to do the interpreting for them. I hope that they are an asset to you. I hope that they become a good interpretive tool. They are clay in your hands. Do with them what you are best capable of doing.

We had some publicity today about handicapped access at the Museum. I thought I would comment on my view of that. I think it's unfortunate that young lady was not invited into those spaces that were accessible to her. I think there is also a broader issue of the fact that we await funding to improve handicapped accessibility at the institution and that there's currently \$75,000 in the budget for a planning study to do so. So it's not as if this institution has given up on the concept of doing that.

I didn't like the front page of Newsday today. So in my own way I guess my way of trying to deal with it is I called Mount Vernon and I asked them what's their handicapped access policy. They don't have handicapped access either to the second floor. It's not excusable for Mount Vernon to not allow access to the handicapped. If it's not excusable for them, it's not excusable for us. I guess we're in good company, in that it's a problem because we are an historic structure. When I challenged them and asked them as to why they don't allow access, they said because of the historical integrity of the place.

Well, we're just going to have to deal with it. We're going to have to find some way to make the place friendlier for everybody. I think that has to be a goal. Or, let's put it this way, we have to make it as friendly as possible.

MS. LEBOW:  
Question.

DR. GITTELMAN:  
Yes.

MS. LEBOW:  
Has anyone read the American with Disabilities Act? Does it require an edifice that predates the enactment of the statute, which is a historic preservation site? Does it require that you invade any part of the structure to create these accessibilities?

DR. GITTELMAN:

That's a good technical question, and I thought of that this afternoon when I was brooding over the article. At first I said to myself that we ought to check that out whether we're grand fathered out of it.

MS. LEBOW:

Let me finish because I think you have to balance that with public perception. I don't think you want to take a position, but there may be certain areas of the Museum that we can make accessible and others that to do so would really be to violate the structure itself.

DR. GITTELMAN:

That's right.

MS. LEBOW:

The only reason I was asking is so that you can then explain why you're willing and want to do it in the areas that lend themselves to that, but if the statute doesn't require that you destroy a relic --

DR. GITTELMAN:

I don't believe it requires you to destroy a relic. If it required you to destroy a relic, Mount Vernon would have been required.

MS. LEBOW:

To do it, yes.

DR. GITTELMAN:

I'm only doing that deductively. I'm not doing it having read it. But I think that we have an opportunity in the study that's going to be done. I think that we should mesh law and brick and mortar in what we have here. I think that today's article awakens us to a need. I think it's something that we are fortunate that the County has set aside \$75,000 to study the issue. I think we should ask the County if we can participate in that study.

MR. MALLAMO:

If I could just interject and just make a correction, Steve. The \$75,000 that we're referring to is actually \$10,000 for planning, which has already been appropriated. That was appropriated a year ago. The \$65,000 is for construction to implement those recommendations. We are in the process of working on that plan currently. Ironically, when I first learned of this incident late yesterday afternoon, I was meeting with the County Architect on this very matter. So this is a problem that we have recognized for some time. We have applied and received Capital Budget approval for it. In fact, our Director of Historic House and Exhibits, Florence Ogg, at the meeting in Dallas specifically attended the workshop on ADA compliance and how you can affect it in a historic building. Certainly you have to balance the accessibility needs with preserving the historical integrity. It's very, very complex. I'm not an architect, but I work with architects frequently, and it's certainly going to be a challenge in there. It's not as simple as just putting in a ramp. Ramps have to be put in at a grade of twelve-foot incline for every one foot in elevation. Just to give you an example, in the Moroccan Court, you would need an incline of twenty-four feet. The room is only eleven feet wide, so it may be that we need a mechanical seat. This is what we've been working with in DPW to affect this.

MS. LEBOW:  
Certain areas will just never be -

MR. MALLAMO:  
Right, and then you'll have to come up with an alternative, whether it's by video tour or something of that nature. But I think it is something we have been trying to address for some time. It's very unfortunate that this incident occurred. But we're not reacting to it from that perspective. It's something we have already been working on.

MS. LEBOW:  
Is there some training needed in how explanations are given to people?

MR. MALLAMO:  
Yes, I think if you remember at the last meeting we talked about or I had indicated to you that we were going to be doing a new staff training session on customer service, knowledge of the estate, and what our policies and procedures are. We have not yet implemented that. We're hoping to do that in the next month. We have a few final details. Actually, one of the major stumbling blocks that we had involved using resources of the County and the person that was responsible for providing those resources is out on disability. So we are trying to provide that in another way, by going to another human resource professional to look at how we can achieve that aspect of diversity training. So I think we will well address this in our training that we are planning and have been planning for several months.

DR. GITTELMAN:  
If there are no more comments on that subject, is there any unfinished business? New business? Have we established a need for an executive session? There has been no executive session called for. Do I have a motion to adjourn?

MS. LEBOW:  
Can we make a motion?

DR. PECORALE:  
I don't think we can.

DR. GITTELMAN:  
Well, we can leave. Thank you.

(Dr. Steven Gittelman adjourned the meeting at 8:35 p.m.)

SG/ap  
1