

SUFFOLK COUNTY VANDERBILT MUSEUM

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Minutes

A regular meeting of the Suffolk County Vanderbilt Museum Board of Trustees was held on October 17, 2007 in the Planetarium Lobby, Centerport, New York.

The following were in attendance:

Dr. Steven Gittelman - President
Daniel Olivieri - 1st Vice President
Gretchen Oldrin-Mones - 2nd Vice President
Michael B. DeLuise - Treasurer
Marjorie Kossoy Fuhrmann - Trustee
Dr. William Rogers - Trustee
Matthew Swinson - Trustee
Carol Hart - Acting Executive Director
John Pokorny - Staff
Bill Dieck - Staff
Ann Marie Pastore - Stenographer

EXCUSED ABSENCE:

Susan LeBow - Trustee

ABSENT:

David D'Orazio - Secretary
Maria Figalora - Trustee
William Macchione - Trustee
Ronald Parr - Trustee
Dr. Anthony Pecorale - Trustee

(Dr. Gittelman called the meeting to order at 8:15 P.M.)

DR. GITTELMAN:

This is a regular meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Suffolk County Vanderbilt Museum. Can we have approval of the minutes from the previous meeting?

MR. OLIVIERI:

Motion.

MS. OLDRIN-MONES:

Second.

DR. GITTELMAN:

Discussion? The only change I have is that Susan LeBow had an excused absence at the last meeting, and we neglected to say that on the record. All in favor? Opposed? **Motion carries. (Vote: 7/0/0/8 Absent: Mr. D’Orazio, Ms. Figalora, Mr. Macchione, Ms. LeBow, Mr. Parr & Mr. Pecorale. Two vacant positions.)**

Public Relations Report, Todd isn’t here.

Buildings and Grounds Committee, Bill isn’t here.

Education and Exhibits Committee, Marge.

MS. FUHRMANN:

Gretchen will be giving the report.

MS. OLDRIN-MONES:

The recent car show was a huge success with excellent attendance. By noon the lots were full. If you were here, you noticed that people had to park on the street. The success can partly be attributed to the fact that there was a half-page advertisement in *Newsday*. The Committee believes that advertising is what’s needed to improve attendance at our laser shows. Carol has just committed to the *All Island Media Brochure*, and we’re in October’s edition. The ad highlights the laser shows. We will also be in two additional editions during the year, May and June in a hardcover book ad.

Sometimes posters can help get the word out. I’m going to pass around some flyers. Please take as many of these as you can distribute, especially if you can give them to college-age people. They are most likely to read them and to come to the laser show.

Advertising would help our October Fest also. Although there are many festivals going on at this time of year, we have the unique advantage of offering the planetarium for a place to go even if it rains.

As you know, the planetarium is a cornerstone of our educational programming and the future of the museum. Next month the planetarium will debut a moon show that was developed in-house.

If one of the grants that Carol has applied for from the New York State Council for the Arts comes through, it might provide some additional funding for a marketing plan, which will be an important tool for us, especially when the new projector is in place. The other grant will be the catalogue, "The Samuel Yellin Iron Works," and to compile a complete catalogue of the interior artifacts and the architectural elements. This catalogue will be available on-line.

Staff has continued their work to paint and spruce up the appearance of the lobby. I'm sure you can notice the difference. They have given it a cleaner, more modern look. They're looking now for exhibits for the future. Also there is a need for a bench or a couch for the lobby. If anyone knows of a corporation with office furniture that they might want to donate, please let Carol know about that. There is also a need for stainless steel garbage receptors.

Efforts to secure a telescope through a grant are continuing and successful, and I think that the telescope is going into contract.

Progress continues on the whale-shark. Various members of the restoration team, which come from all different shops and must coordinate their efforts, have been working on the resurfacing phase of this project. Now that it's hunting season, their time is even more in demand. The IMLS paperwork is all up-to-date, and the craftsmen were paid for the first segment of their work. Marianne has taken a lot of pictures to post on our website to create interest in the whale-shark.

We would like to thank staff for all their efforts during the gala.

The "Living History Tour" was especially popular this year with more people experiencing it than in prior years. Carmen, as Betty Davis, and Mary the cook were standouts.

The loan to the New York Yacht Club is going forward. We are finalizing the paperwork and updating the evaluation.

Greeters and educators continue to be cross-trained to allow more flexibility for staff. Stephanie is continuing our policy of keeping up our community connections and opening our archives to the public and especially the historical societies. Last week she had a researcher visit her from the Suffolk County Historical Society who is researching a house on Bagatelle Road, which was once owned by Willie K.'s father.

Monday Stephanie hosted a kick-off luncheon for the holiday decorating program. It's hoped that the decorations will be in place by the Friday before Thanksgiving. On the Monday after Thanksgiving the tree will go up in the Memorial Wing. The holiday season will kick off with two laser shows and the "Star of Wonder" program.

December 1 is tentatively planned for the holiday progressive dinner, which will be one night on a Saturday with a couple of seatings. It's a beautiful event in an exquisite setting.

December 2 is the tree lighting. It sounds like it's getting very festive around here.

Finally, a biography has been published about Cornelius Vanderbilt. It's entitled, "Commodore, the Life of Cornelius Vanderbilt," by Edward J. Renehan, Jr.

That's the end of the report.

DR. GITTELMAN:

Thank you very much for that report.

Finance Report, Mike DeLuise.

MR. DELUISE:

The Treasurer's Report is in your packet. If you'll notice, the month of August due to some positive attendance numbers and some tightening of the belt as much as we could, we actually had an excess of about \$4,392, which helps. Pray for good weather. Pray for good attendance, and pray that our fuel costs keep down and we'll do the best we can by the end of the year. I think the staff is really doing everything they can to keep costs down and to bring people in here. Anyway, looking at the August numbers, things do look a little bit better.

That's the end of my report.

DR. GITTELMAN:

Okay, thank you. Questions?

Audit Committee, Dan.

MR. OLIVIERI:

We finally were able to meet. We went over the proposed audit from our auditors. At the meeting we voted to accept it and bring that to the Trustees meeting tonight to vote on accepting their report and giving the final draft to the County. If there aren't any questions, I'd like to make a motion that the Board of Trustees accept the draft prepared by our auditors for the audit ending on December 31, 2005.

DR. GITTELMAN:

Do I have a second?

MS. FUHRMANN:

Second.

DR. GITTELMAN:

Discussion? All in favor? Opposed? **Motion carries. (Vote: 7/0/0/8 Absent: Mr. D'Orazio, Ms. Figalora, Mr. Macchione, Ms. LeBow, Mr. Parr & Mr. Pecorale. Two vacant positions.)**

I'd like to thank you and the committee for your hard work.

Nominating Committee, allow me to explain this. We vote in officers each year. We typically create a Nominating Committee to recommend candidates in the January meeting. We create the committee in October. It presents its recommendations in November, and then we vote in January. The recommendations are non-binding. Typically we look for three or five members,

an odd number of Trustees. I think our by-laws call for three. If you would like to nominate your colleagues or yourself, by all means, please nominate your colleagues to be a member of the Nominating Committee. It's not a committee that I select or chair.

MS. OLDRIN-MONES:

I nominate Dan.

DR. GITTELMAN:

Okay.

MR. OLIVIERI:

I'm going to return the favor. I'm going to nominate Gretchen.

DR. GITTELMAN:

Okay, that was easily done.

MR. DELUISE:

I nominate Matthew.

MR. SWINSON:

I nominate –

MR. OLIVIERI:

But we already have three. Do you want to go for four?

MR. DELUISE:

Isn't it better to have an odd number?

DR. GITTELMAN:

Yes, it's better to have an odd number.

MR. OLIVIERI:

Maybe it's better if we just stick to the people we have.

DR. GITTELMAN:

Okay, can I have a second for these three nominations?

MR. DELUISE:

Second.

DR. GITTELMAN:

Can I have a motion to close the nominations?

MR. DELUISE:

Motion.

DR. GITTELMAN:

Is there a second?

DR. ROGERS:

Second.

DR. GITTELMAN:

All in favor? Opposed? Since the Secretary is not here, I will cast a single vote to make this the Nominating Committee. **Motion carries. (Vote: 7/0/0/8 Absent: Mr. D’Orazio, Ms. Figalora, Mr. Macchione, Ms. LeBow, Mr. Parr & Mr. Pecorale. Two vacant positions.)** You will have to get together and do it quickly, so that we can be prepared for November.

MR. OLIVIERI:

So November we will report back to the committee.

DR. GITTELMAN:

Yes, thank you.

Search Committee, Matthew.

MR. SWINSON:

I’m growing concerned. I’m still looking for a time frame for us to work within so that we can refine the resumes and cover letters that we have at this point. I probably have now about 20 candidates. Personally, I believe that the website that is advertising the positions should close the advertisement down, so that we can start to focus in on three finalists or three candidates that we’re considering for the position.

The other thing is, these candidates of the resumes that I have seen, a lot of the good ones are from out of state. If we are truly interested in making an effort to consider them and at least look at them and get them in here so that we can find out about what their background is and what they have been successful with, how are we going to get them here?

MS. FUHRMANN:

Big silver bird.

MR. SWINSON:

Sorry?

MS. FUHRMANN:

Big silver bird.

MR. SWINSON:

We can beam them up, right, Scottie?

DR. GITTELMAN:

We have to bring candidates here somehow. If a candidate lives in a neighboring state, perhaps they can drive. It’s kind of silly to take a plane from Connecticut to here.

MR. SWINSON:

Sure.

DR. GITTELMAN:

Clearly we don’t have funds to spare but we have to spare some funds to fly in candidates for the Board to meet them. Perhaps you could pick the five that you feel are best and talk to them over the phone and then narrow down to three.

MR. SWINSON:

Is it presumptuous or too soon to ask the two of you for a date so that we can sit down and review some of these candidates?

MS. OLDRIN-MONES:

No, I just need to get my calendar out.

MR. SWINSON:

Okay.

MS. OLDRIN-MONES:

Do you want to do that after the meeting?

MR. SWINSON:

Yes, we can do that after the meeting.

MR. DELUISE:

Do you want to move on this quickly?

MR. SWINSON:

Yes. That is the report.

DR. GITTELMAN:

Thank you very much. Interim Director's Report.

MS. HART:

We had a very successful networking event of the Melville/East Farmingdale Chamber of Commerce here last month. Everyone totally enjoyed it, and we had a number of good contacts made from that event. We're going to continue that relationship and hopefully see some good impact from that.

We also had the meeting of Congressman Israel and Congressman Shays here about the Long Island Sound Study. That was, again, a very nice event held in our courtyard. The weather was beautiful. Participation – people came from really over the country, from Washington and from local conservation groups and environmental groups. There was a very interesting discussion, and everyone was very happy that it was held here with the view of the Long Island Sound. It was very appropriate for our site. They thanked us for allowing them to come have their Congressional hearing here.

I also have received the contract for the telescope grant that State Senator Flanagan has gotten for us. I do need a resolution naming me as authorized to sign legal documents.

DR. GITTELMAN:

Do you want to put that resolution on the record, please.

MS. OLDRIN-MONES:

Resolved that Carol Ghiorso Hart, who is the Acting Director or Deputy Director of the Vanderbilt Museum, is hereby authorized to sign legal documents on behalf of our organization.

DR. GITTELMAN:

Is there a second?

MS. FUHRMANN:

I'll do that.

DR. GITTELMAN:

Discussion? No discussion. **Motion carries. (Vote: 7/0/0/8 Absent: Mr. D'Orazio, Ms. Figalora, Mr. Macchione, Ms. LeBow, Mr. Parr & Mr. Pecorale. Two vacant positions.)**

MS. HART:

I have been meeting with a representative from DPW every other week. We're on a regular schedule now going over all the capital projects on the site. It's been very helpful for me. I think the communication we now have going back and forth is really wonderful. We have a number of capital projects in the works upcoming. You'll be hearing a lot more about that later.

I also had a site visit from a representative for the New York State Council on the Arts. It was the second time here to review. We have two grants in through the Council on the Arts. We have high hopes that we will be able to get one of those. She, again, loved seeing the site.

The tent is down for the year. The event tent is down. Grounds crew has been working really hard on that.

Our gardeners for many different areas have done a wonderful job, and I just wanted to thank them again. Our master gardeners help keep up many of our gardens. The Centerport Garden Club does the rose garden. We have about a dozen different garden clubs that are going to be helping with the Christmas decorations. Without their help and support we would not have the beautiful grounds that we do have. We are going to be thanking them with an upcoming event.

I also want to note that Susan LeBow did call, and she had to go to the doctor today, so she asked to be excused.

Now for the exciting part. For the Vanderbilt Museum this week has been one of those transformational, exciting moments when the future of the whole museum has really been secured in a way. Steve and I have worked very hard over the past few months. In fact, Steve has been working hard over the last decade, I guess, to ensure that the planetarium and the museum at large is the best that it can possibly be for the public and for the health of us as an institution as well. I'm going to let Steve talk a little bit more about that, but it's been cause to celebrate.

The feeling among the staff is tremendous. Staff has been working together on a variety of projects like a team in a way that I really haven't seen in a while. The feeling of optimism here is terrific. The next year we have a number of incredible projects coming up that really will mark a major turning point in this institution and really on Long Island for the educational facility that we offer. I'm going to let Steve talk a little bit more about that, but he, again, has done a

really incredible job behind the scenes. I'm appreciating more what it takes here. There's a lot that is not easy to learn from books or even from talking to people. There is a lot of information there in skill that I'm very fortunate to be able to work so well with Steve as a team here and the rest of the Board as well. We have seen this in a number of different projects. Again, I just have to thank Steve from all the staff for all the work he put in and for this wonderful project that's coming up. Steve, if you want to tell us a little bit more about this week.

DR. GITTELMAN:

Are you done with your report?

MS. HART:

I'm done.

DR. GITTELMAN:

It was a wonderful week. It's been 12 years, and it's a crossroad. We can't count our chickens because the County Executive still has not signed this bill yet. I felt warmly embraced by the Legislature, which is something odd to say, but I felt that they supported us in a way that it was really wonderful. Certainly there's a number of them who deserve credit. I will always be grateful to the Legislature for listening to me. I'm grateful to Carol and to Lance and to, frankly, the Director before Lance who helped me get started on the road pursuing this. The Director's role is very important in terms of having somebody to talk to when you're doing this. I need somebody to just plot and plan with.

There are wonderful people in that Legislature. You really get the feeling that they care about the institution. That didn't come overnight. Nobody gets something like this through unless it's warmly received. It's very exciting.

I think that when you look at the projector and you look at the habitat and you realize that we will be opening the habitat reasonably soon, in a matter of a month, that will be a huge boost to our attendance and to our public image. Within a year, hopefully the planetarium will be going. Then within two years we'll have the waterfront. It's been a long haul. I'm looking forward to finishing it. I really am. That's really it. That doesn't mean that as an institution we haven't suffered in some way when we have had so much focus on these projects, but hopefully it will be rewarded in the end. I feel very grateful for all the support from you and the staff and from Carol. I am very grateful.

Is there any old business? New business? In new business, as we all know, Marjorie is leaving the Board. She is unhappily leaving the Board. We are extremely unhappy to see her leave the Board. She is relocating to Maryland.

MS. FUHRMANN:

Silver Spring, Maryland.

DR. GITTELMAN:

She is one of the hardest working Trustees we've got. It's going to be a tremendous loss. I wouldn't know what to say but it appears that you have something to say.

MS. OLDRIN-MONES:

When you're finished.

DR. GITTELMAN:

I want to celebrate her tenure here at the next meeting. If we can all just think of how we would like it to be when we left, especially after working so hard.

DR. ROGERS:

Does she get a fish?

DR. GITTELMAN:

She gets her choice. She gets a fish and you make sure that she picks the one she likes. Then you'll call me and let me figure out what it should say. I have some choice words.

MS. OLDRIN-MONES:

On a personal note, I would just like to say that I am so sad that Marjorie is leaving. She is such an integral part of the Education and Exhibit Committee. I really don't know what we're going to do without her. She is always full of ideas and information. The best thing is that she brings the most wonderful food. She brings the best bakery treats you have ever eaten in your life. I don't know how we're going to replace that.

I think Marjorie is one of a kind. I think she's a unique blend of character and expertise. I think you're irreplaceable. Although I'm happy that you have this new home and new opportunity in a new state, and I'm sure there will be a Board that you will be volunteering for, and they will be very lucky people to have you. I'm going to miss you. It just won't be the same here without you.

MS. FUHRMANN:

Thank you.

DR. GITTELMAN:

I totally agree.

MR. DELUISE:

You've been a great colleague. We really are going to miss you.

MS. FUHRMANN:

Thank you.

MS. HART:

Our staff will miss you, as well. We'll be talking more next month, but you'll certainly be missed. We will be having a series of parties.

MS. FUHRMANN:

I want to make sure I can be at the next committee meeting so I can bring something nice.

DR. GITTELMAN:

Okay, but we're going to continue with this next time. We're not done yet.

MS. HART:

No.

DR. GITTELMAN:

There is no need for an executive session, to my knowledge. Therefore, I'll ask for a motion to adjourn.

MR. DELUISE:

Motion.

MS. OLDRIN-MONES:

Second.

DR. GITTELMAN:

Motion carries. (Vote: 7/0/0/8 Absent: Mr. D'Orazio, Ms. Figalora, Mr. Macchione, Ms. LeBow, Mr. Parr & Mr. Pecorale. Two vacant positions.)

(Dr. Gittelman adjourned the meeting at 8:55 P.M.)

SG:ap