

**BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING MINUTES
NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM OF THE ADIRONDACKS/
THE WILD CENTER**

July 5, 2011 – The Wild Center, Tupper Lake

Board Present: Paul Alioto, Tom Aydelotte, Joe Beck, Michael Bettmann, Lynn Birdsong, Obie Clifford, John Colston (via conf. call), Amy Elrod, Rick Godin, Nancy Howard, Bill Hutchens, Dave Johnson, Tom Jorling, Kevin Keane, Peter Kindler, Claire Leonardi, Betsy Lowe, Paul Maroun, Chris McFadden, Nancy Simpkins, Dan Sullivan, Sandra Strader, Charles Svenson, and Karen Thomas.

Board Absent: Jim Carr, Charles Frenette, Robert Friedman, Mike Hunsinger, and Steve Potter.

Advisory Board Present: Lynn Fox, Barbara Grose, Sally Hart, Gary Hartwick, and Ross Whaley.

Staff/Consultants Present: Marci Bencze, Hillarie Logan-Dechene, Jamie Dyer, Howard Fish, Diana Fortune, Jen Kretser, Bob Kronenberger, and Stephanie Ratcliffe.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

*The Board unanimously approved the March 28, 2011 meeting minutes.
Dan Sullivan motion, Betsy Lowe second.*

SKYWALK DISCUSSION (Theater)

Tom Aydelotte gave a brief presentation in The Flammer Theater about his involvement with the Skywalk project. He stated that he is uninterested in birds so the initial concept did not appeal to him. However, he said that Lynn Birdsong asked him to join the team to examine the project and since then he has become enthusiastic about the project. He stated that it should not be referred to as an exhibit, but a structure, and that the word exhibit should be eliminated when discussing the project. He stated that to call it a structure is a demonstration that The Wild Center is a living museum and not inert. He said that by taking it outside, the model of the museum becomes a bigger idea. He described the project as Chapter Two of The Wild Center. The Wild Center must have the structure to maximize its impact and expressed his feeling that positioning the structure is “imperative”. He stated that the task force believes building the structure makes a stronger fundraising case. He mentioned that on the last Skywalk phone call there was an urgency to extend the museum outdoors and he said that we should not strictly focus on birds.

Stephanie Ratcliffe stated that something needed to be written up to describe the experience of the museum and its exhibits. She stated that it was “like being with a great guide” – “let me show you something cool” – as if the walls and ceiling are dropping away and taking you

outside. Stephanie then gave a brief introduction of a film that Rick Godin put together for the board. She stated that she felt the need for a “visual” piece to help the board to describe the project to others and that this film can also be used as a fundraising tool.

The meeting then moved to the conference room where the group continued its discussion of the project. Tom Aydelotte shared with the group the following questions which were addressed by the task force:

- What is the relationship of the structure to The Wild Center?
- How does the structure complement the campus?
- Is structure consistent with/reflective of the mission?
- Does structure represent an important business asset financially and fulfill visitor expectations of TWC offerings?
- How do we want visitors to perceive the new structure? What will be the “buying incentive” that will cause visitors to want to visit the structure and the whole museum campus?

There was then extensive discussion about the project amongst board members. Dan Sullivan stated that the project was exciting because it is not only going outside, but going into the tree canopy where people can experience a whole different eco-system. He also stated that the structure would also not need to be heated, which would be a cost savings. Lynn Birdsong stated that it would be interesting to see how the Adirondacks change by the month seeing it from the level of the structure. Tom Aydelotte stated that the notion of extending the season was interesting. Claire Leonardi mentioned the idea of “owning the sunny day” and stated that with a significant outdoor attraction the museum would be in a different position. She said that originally she was not in favor of the project but strategically she feels that an addition to infrastructure is important. She stated that it isn’t just about the birds but can also be about the tress and the stars. She said that now she is much more enthusiastic about the project. Chris McFadden stated that he wanted to recognize Lynn and Stephanie for putting a mechanism in place to help people understand how the structure pertains to the overall mission of the museum. He also stated that he would like to applaud museum staff for their enthusiasm and their powerful passion for all they do here. Ross Whaley spoke regarding calling the Skytower project Phase Two. He asked the question “if not this, then what”? Claire Leonardi responded that the possibility of a boat on the river and Science on the Sphere were two different options that were being explored. She stated that the Skywalk project was at least five years down the road and that the museum needed something new in the interim.

Tom Aydelotte asked the question “How will the structure benefit The Wild Center long term”? He said he hopes that it will create a “wow factor” and said that another Wall Street Journal article would be great.

Lynn Birdsong stated that the board was not trying to come to a conclusion immediately but that they have an important mission, to get from here to there to keep people interested in The Wild Center. He stated that he and Stephanie were working hard to try and find a way to

get a Science on the Sphere exhibit and that he trusted Stephanie's judgment on the best way to go about getting one. He said that there is a plan to get the museum from "here to there".

Dan Sullivan made a number of points:

- How do you measure return on investment (ROI)? – He stated that it has to start with the educational/transformational mission of The Wild Center. He also stated that he understands that better now than before.
- Nothing will pay for itself – That has to come from philanthropy. He stated that when we have something to sell that will affect philanthropy.
- What we have needs to be ever changing – This helps to engage people.

There was then more discussion amongst board members who expressed their feelings about the project. Karen Thomas stated that the number one attraction in New York City is the Highline which is a public park constructed on an old freight rail line on Manhattan's West Side. Nancy Howard stated that when her hotel "The Wawbeek" was open, they had phenomenal success with identified trails. She also stated that the concept of being off the ground was a new and exciting one. She asked what could be done to keep people engaged and prevent them from just racing up the structure and not taking the time to enjoy it. She also asked how to make certain that people stayed in the "See It, Feel It" frame of mind. Tom Aydelotte stated that one of the original ideas had someone literally taking visitors through a walkway and through the structure to ensure that they saw the whole thing. Tom Jorling stated that he would like to see a focus on the canopy eco-system and see an investment in scientific instrumentation above and below the canopy such as wind monitors, etc. to compare the air above and below the canopy. Nancy Simpkins suggested the creation of an intro film so that people were ready and aware of what they were about to see upon entrance to the exhibit. Stephanie Ratcliffe stated that an effort would be made to keep people engaged and interested throughout the experience. John Colston, who joined the meeting via conference call, stated that this new exhibit will tap into the six million acre Adirondack Park and that the "devil would be in the details". He stated that he was excited about how far the museum had come and also about the idea of getting people outside 365 days a year. He said that no one can deliver that the way The Wild Center can. Sally Hart asked if there was a plan in place to capture Admissions as the structure would be located so far away from the main building. Claire Leonardi stated that there were tremendous details in the execution and that all of these issues would be worked out. She also mentioned that this would be the museum's first major investment since opening.

There was discussion regarding what the next steps should be:

- Continue to work on positioning and visitor experience
- Continue to work on fundraising plan as part of the larger campaign
- Develop a critical flow chart and timeline

There was a question about what the price tag of the project was. Stephanie Ratcliffe stated that the total cost for the project was \$3.5 million, which was \$2.5 million for the structure and \$1 million for the exhibits but that it was still being worked out.

Chris McFadden stated that the good news for the structure is that the audience/user are parties that are already being reached out to. The bad news is that there is no untapped market. He stated that there will be risks as well as rewards associated with the project. He said that it will change how we enhance the overall opinion of the museum.

Lynn Birdsong stated that “See It, Feel It” is very key to the structure and suggested that it be used as part of the Visual Teaching Strategy concept and that it would help to engage families in conversation. He then stated that he would love more answers on ROI but said that question may never be answered. Lynn then stated that a good thing came out of the March 28th board meeting. He said that he felt that the board had developed a voice that hadn’t been heard previously. Stephanie Ratcliffe stated that all of the board’s input along the way had been extremely helpful. Obie Clifford exclaimed that he had been hearing lots of positive information and that “we should proceed and make this project a reality”.

There was more discussion about logistics, etc. Lynn Birdsong then asked for a general conclusion regarding the project. Obie Clifford stated that he had heard tremendous support and that he would like to see a more detailed plan on moving forward on the project. Lynn Birdsong then asked for board members to express their support for the project by a show of hands. Based on this, there was unanimous board support for the project to continue to be developed. Stephanie Ratcliffe then thanked the subcommittee for their support.

REPORTS FROM THE PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Board President Lynn Birdsong began his report by saying that he would like to reiterate three things from the March 28, 2011 board meeting, what is our business model?, sustainability plan?, and what are Lynn’s goals?

Business Model

He stated that board members heard at the last meeting from Consultant Jason Drebitko who reported that the museum is heavily dependent on contributions as well as the endowment fund and that 2/3 of the museum’s support comes from contributions, attendance, café and store sales.

Sustainability Plan

Lynn also reiterated the three key pieces of the sustainability plan:

- **Keep the core fresh:** Tower exhibit, Science on the Sphere, Fests, etc.
- **Develop Center Concept:** Been talking about this for years, “center for” is key to the museum’s development, will allow museum to apply to foundations, etc. Howard has built on concept with “center for” ads this year.
- **Invest in Development:** Because the museum is an endowment model it is essential how it goes forward.

Lynn’s Goals

1. Make sure the museum has a balanced budget – this has been a challenge.
2. Implement sustainability plan.

3. Build endowment – started from nothing, now valued at approximately \$2 million. Lynn stated that he would like to see the endowment in excess of \$10 million during his tenure.

He then shared some exciting news with board members. He stated that Stephanie Ratcliffe had gotten word that the museum was the beneficiary of a \$750,000 unrestricted gift. Stephanie stated that she was informed that it was the first of two gifts, the second of which would be at least as much as the first disbursement. Lynn reported that the person had been a \$35 a year member and that her largest gift had been \$100 with a lifetime total of \$1050. He said that this boost gives the museum a great shot at being successful.

Lynn also reported that the governance committee had a conference call to discuss attracting new board members. He also mentioned that they had decided that it would be good procedure to participate in executive sessions and that there would be one at the end of the board meeting.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT

Stephanie Ratcliffe then gave her report. She stated that the museum was already in its sixth season and that it has already been mentioned in four different books, two of which are Richard Louv's new book – *"The Nature Principle"*, and *"The Participatory Museum"* by Nina Simon who came to The Wild Center and gave a staff workshop. She mentioned that the museum's convening work has gotten much attention.

Stephanie then spoke about the recent flooding and she showed a photo of one of the Oxbow Overlooks to show board members the water level of the Raquette River. She then spoke briefly about the impact of the flooding on the area. She also reported that there had been discussion about paddling to the museum and stated that the museum was now ready to move forward on making this a reality and that a request was in to the Adirondack Park Agency to secure more dock space. She stated that the hope was to have the docks installed by the end of August and that the museum would be partnering with Raquette River Outfitters who will lend The Wild Center equipment for the season. She then stated that there were many details to be worked out before this happens and that there would be a "soft opening" first.

Stephanie gave board members an update on the most recent Finland exchange. She showed photos of a bullhead fishing excursion that was guided by Bryan Larson, one of the students involved in the Youth Climate Summits as well as the first USA to Finland exchange. She stated that at the end of the Adirondack Research Consortium that the Finn's announced that they were planning to do a Youth Climate Summit in Finland.

Board member Tom Jorling asked if there had been any progress made on the Klueck property. Stephanie replied that the owner's main focus at this time was the sale of the family home and that she would resume talks with the museum at a time that was convenient to her. She did state that the notion of leasing the property was still an option. There was then

discussion about the possibility of the property providing a tax credit to the owner and that the idea might make her more apt to move on some sort of deal sooner.

Board member Betsy Lowe stated that she had been captivated by the effects of the recent flooding and stated that the natural history story within all of it was amazing. She stated that she would love to see some sort of documentary possibly co-produced by The Wild Center and ECHO Lake Aquarium in Vermont that shows the impact of the flooding on both sides of Lake Champlain. There was also discussion about the possibility of a post flood conference of some type. Board member Karen Thomas stated that it would also be great to have information readily available to share with the public (i.e., fast facts) about the impact of flooding on the area.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Claire Leonardi asked board members to take a look at the dashboard provided in the board packet. Robert Kronenberger stated that the information provided in the dashboard was current through May. He reported that total revenues were \$176,000 or 20% below budget. Admissions are down 16% which is \$10,000 under budget. He also reported that May YTD attendance was down 21%. June attendance was down 7.5% from last year and the first four days of July were up 4% compared to last year. He stated that Membership numbers were down considerably from last year and that they were 42% below budget (and 25% less than last year) through May. Mr. Kronenberger reported while overall store and café sales were down, sales on a per visitor basis had increased. In the store, per visitor sales were \$4.08/person, which is up from \$3.78/person last year. Café sales at \$1.44/person were also up over last year on a per visitor basis.

He also reported that there had been many significant changes made in the café over the last year. He stated that catering capabilities were being expanded and that the museum was doing 12-14 events this year with 3 or 4 of them being catered by The Wild Center which he said he hoped to increase next year.

Lynn Birdsong mentioned that the acquisition of a catering only liquor license was being discussed within the Finance Committee and that it would require an application and that it was subject to stringent requirements. Mr. Kronenberger stated that having a liquor license would add approximately \$30-45,000 a year to gross profit for food and alcohol on events.

Claire Leonardi stated that to date the museum had been asking customers to secure their own liquor license for their events but that it would be a great customer service piece to be able to provide that.

Board member Thomas Jorling suggested contacting the Olympic Regional Development Authority (ORDA) to work out some kind of system to make families of attendees of the new conference center aware of the museum to get them here.

Mr. Kronenberger also reported that expenses were \$226,000 below budget. He stated that salary and benefits were 4% below budget this year but 17% higher than last year due to the new positions that were added in 2010 and staff increases. He mentioned that consulting and maintenance and supplies were also below budget. On the revenue side, contributions are higher than a year ago but are less than were budgeted.

Claire Leonardi stated that the Finance Committee had met and that once summer results are in they will review our results and determine what steps are necessary to achieve a breakeven for the year. If needed, a contingency plan to help balance the year's results will be discussed.

Lynn Birdsong stated that the endowment was just under \$3 million with the latest \$750,000 gift. He reported that the Investment Committee had been buying bonds and investing the money, purchasing certificates of deposit and also putting money in a money market all in an attempt to help build the endowment.

With regard to the liquor license, Lynn Birdsong asked if there was any objection to pursuing the license. All board members were in favor of proceeding.

DEVELOPMENT REPORT

Hillarie Logan-Dechene then gave her development report. She began by stating that overall development and membership were on track and figuring out new strategies for meeting some challenges. She gave a brief background on a member who had made a bequest received recently by the center. She stated that it was a classic bequest story; the woman was a charter member who stayed below the radar – no attendance at events but consistent consecutive years membership dues and annual fund gifts. Each gift had always been personally acknowledged by the staff. HLD noted that this story is quite typical and it underlines how important it is to carefully steward your members and donors at all levels.

Hillarie then spoke briefly about membership which she said was below the projected budget through May and said that she was actively working to reverse this membership trend. She stated that two paid sales people had been hired and that she felt good about the strategy as well as the results. Board member Chris McFadden asked what had contributed to the lack of membership renewals and Hillarie gave two possible reasons: 1) economy, and 2) not having something new to come back for. Hillarie stated that they were trying to use events such as the fests to offer members incentives for repeat visitation and that the fests would likely be a draw. She reported that there were 12 renewals as well as 12 new memberships sold at Buzzfest. Advisory Board member Barbara Grose asked what people get for their membership and Hillarie said a closer connection to TWC, free admission for a year, discounts in store/café, behind the scenes tours, and special event invitations.

Hillarie thanked the boards for helping broaden the base of support and then gave four examples of how board members can help bring new donors into The Wild Center and the difference they can make to the museum.

1. **Gary Hartwick** – gave name of person at foundation out West, worked with them, asked them to come visit, they came to visit, thought would be interested in birds. It turns out he was interested in café to generate more revenue, we sent proposal, got a note from them stating they would give us a zero interest loan as well as a grant to secure equipment that the café needs.
2. **Dan Sullivan** – had a connection to a foundation, Dan wrote letter and piqued their interest, staff then prepared as proposal and the foundation subsequently helped with some of museum’s technology needs.
3. **Lynn Birdsong** – through a personal contact with a private foundation Lynn engaged the Trustees, one of whom is a possible Trustee candidate for The Wild Center. Lynn asked the staff to submit a formal request and as a result a significant grant has been pledged.
4. **Nancy Howard** – made introduction to a friend, she purchased a patron Circle membership. One of the staff gave the family a Behind the Scenes tour and engaged in conversation which led to submitting an application for Youth Climate Summit and it was funded.

CAMPAIGN UPDATE

Hillarie then gave a brief campaign update. She reported the following:

- 462 gifts had been given which constituted about \$7.3M in commitments/gifts
- 192 prospects capable of leadership gifts
- 13 cultivation planned for this summer
- The Campaign Cabinet has set a goal of 100% board participation before reaching out beyond the “family” and they hope to wrap up commitments before the end of summer

Lynn Birdsong stated that as a Cabinet they had reached out to all trustees and if not, they would. He asked board members to give thought about what they can do to help with the campaign and asked them to stretch as best they can as \$20M was a lofty goal. He encouraged all to pitch in and get involved. Obie Clifford then underscored the importance of 100% participation of both boards.

Diana Fortune then handed out a list of attendees for the reception following the meeting. Lynn Birdsong asked board members to try and identify 3-5 people who might be able to give at the Patron Circle level.

WEB CONTENT DEVELOPMENT

Howard Fish gave a presentation to board members. He stated that Google searches are up 26% over the past year and that Ironman Lake Placid was the #1 Google ad with over 40 hits a day. He said that was a group that had not yet been targeted. He then mentioned a few of the things that were being done to try to attract new visitors:

- Changed The Wild Center brochure – Half is about the inside of the museum and half is about the outside
- Coupons – Trying to see if Lake Placid and Lake George are markets for the museum

Howard then shared a few fun facts about the museum and social media.

- 451 Followers on Twitter
- 4177 Friends on Facebook
- 3017 Monthly Views
- 236,331 Total Visits to Facebook
- The Wild Center You Tube Channel has over 60 videos

He reported that the museum has received a Regional Office of Sustainable Tourism (ROOST) award. He also said that he was trying to build donor and prospect awareness with the new “center for” ads. The museum recently received \$110,000 in free advertising from Google and there are over 2,000 keywords and currently 45 Google ads running.

He then gave a brief presentation about the new Chirp website that had been created which was ready to go live. It is “building a home for lively content on the web”. He took a few moments to click through and let board members get a feel for the site and they were very impressed. Board member Dan Sullivan stated that although he thought the site was very cool he was a little worried that visiting the website might prevent someone from actually visiting the museum. There was then discussion amongst board members about how they felt this new site would influence attendance. Lynn Fox stated that she had to be convinced to come here but once she got here she was amazed. Chris McFadden stated that he felt the site was cutting edge web engagement and that the elegance should have a huge impact on attendance. Barbara Grose stated that the website was like a third way for people to come into the museum and that it should be used as a campaign selling point. Lynn Birdsong said that there should be more discussion about the new site at the next board meeting because board members should have all of the information.

The meeting ended with a brief discussion on other areas that should be targeted. Gary Hartwick stated that Canada was a market that was being left unattended. Howard Fish said that we have access to data to help decide where to advertise

NEXT MEETINGS

The next 2011 meetings of the Board are scheduled for the following dates:

Thursday, October 6, 2011 (TWC) and Monday, January 9, 2012 (NYC).