

**BOARD OF TRUSTEES RETREAT AND MEETING MINUTES  
THE WILD CENTER**

**July 6, 2015 – The Wild Center**

**1:00 PM – 5:00 PM**

**Board Present:**

Paul Alioto, Tom Aydelotte, Joe Beck, Michael Bettmann, Lynn Birdsong, George Cigale, Obie Clifford, John Colston, Amy Elrod, Connie Ferguson, Lynn Fox, Charles Frenette, Rick Godin, Sally Hart, Nancy Howard, Thomas Jorling, Peter Kindler, Betsy Lowe, Rich Malloch, Paul Maroun, Linda Rosenstock, Jack Ryder, James Schoff, Nancy Simpkins, Sandra Strader, Charles Svenson, and Karen Thomas .

**Board/Advisory Board/Staff Present via Web Ex:**

John Huwiler, Chris McFadden and Joel Treisman.

**Advisory Board Present:**

Lee Bailey, Tim Barnett and Gene Zeltmann.

**Board Absent:**

John Colston and Robert Friedman

**Staff/Consultants Present:** Katherine Alexander, Marci Bencze, Hillarie Logan-Dechene, Robin Ellis, Howard Fish, Meadow Hackett, Jen Kretser, Bob Kronenberger, and Stephanie Ratcliffe

**Welcome**

**Discussion:**

Lynn Birdsong welcomed all in attendance and thanked them all for taking the time away from family on this beautiful day. Lynn Fox spoke on the election of Linda Rosenstock to the Board – saying she would be a great addition with many accomplishments under her belt. She is also very familiar with TWC already, as she has been on the Advisory Board for some time.

**Action:** A motion to elect Linda Rosenstock to the Board of Trustees was unanimously approved.

*Charles Svenson motion, Nancy Howard second.*

**I. Approval of Minutes**

**Discussion:** Minutes of the April 20, 2015 meeting were unanimously approved.

*Joe Beck motion, Nancy Howard second.*

**Action: N/A**

**II. Executive Director Report**

**Discussion:** Stephanie Ratcliffe began her report by stating that Meadow Hackett, a Youth Climate Summit alum, has been chosen to attend the One Young World Summit in Thailand this November. Meadow is an excellent example of TWC youth, and Stephanie and Jen Kretser are planning on chronicling how the Youth Climate program has affected students' career paths. Stephanie then spoke about the recent school season at The Wild Center. She noted that Patrick Murphy has been hired as the new group sales coordinator and is working with school groups and the China initiative. This school season The Wild Center had 6,554 students onsite. She made note that TWC greatly serves the Tupper Lake school system and provides significant service to the local community through our various programs, including the Maple program. Stephanie then reviewed the Wild Walk opening day statistics with the Board – there were over 2,000 people at the event on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, and multiple days during the member preview week there were over 1,000 visitors. These numbers are encouraging and hold a positive outlook for the rest of the summer.

**President's Report**

**Discussion:** Lynn Birdsong began his report out by thanking the staff for all they have done. He also thanked the Board for all that they have done from the very beginning of the process – from the evolution of the “Bird Skytower” to the “Bird Skywalk” and every iteration since then. He noted that the Board had many conversations to hone the idea, to study it and perfect it – so much so that when the Board finally agreed to proceed with the project, it was unanimous. He also spoke on how the Board was one hundred percent behind the project and gave Stephanie the authority and support she needed to execute the project. Lynn then spoke on the next steps for The Wild Center. He said that with Wild Walk open, the Board needs to now think of the future. The sustainability strategy will play a part in this, but the Board must continue to look forward and keep thinking about how to make The Wild Center better.

**III. Wild Walk**

**Discussion:** Lynn Birdsong began by saying that at the April Board meeting Howard Fish mentioned that there would be no NYC media event promoting Wild Walk because we didn't have a location. Rich Malloch stood up and graciously donated the use of a space at Hearst Tower. Lynn took a moment to thank Rich for his generosity. Stephanie stated that it had elevated everything literally as well as figuratively.

Nancy Simpkins took a moment to thank Tom Aydelotte for working tirelessly these last four years and she also thanked Rick Godin for always making TWC look good. Howard Fish also thanked Rick Godin for all that he has done. He

supplied television quality footage for the I Love New York ad stating that we had supplied almost all of the footage for the latest commercial.

Tom Aydelotte then reported on the Wild Walk project. He reiterated that he first spoke on TWC 2.0 and Wild Walk four years ago. Since then, he and the TWC marketing team have developed product positioning, copy strategy, a marketing and promotions plan, and a public relations plan. These efforts have been successful – website traffic has increased. The Wild Center has had media coverage in the New York Times, Los Angeles Times, Washington Post, among many others. Tom noted that a piece of this had to do with Wild Walk being featured in the I Love NY campaign as part of the video commercial. He mentioned that a number of learning experiences have come out of the marketing campaign – there have been significant increases in the NYC, NJ and other markets. The public relations campaign has been multi-pronged and successful. Overall, the marketing plan has been a successful investment for The Wild Center. Tom also took a moment to recognize the team involved in helping to launch Wild Walk.

Before everyone headed into the main conference room, Hillarie Logan-Dechene took a few moments to present the new Donor Recognition Kiosk to the Board. She noted that Natalie Zurek and Ruth Burnell had worked tirelessly with Rick Godin and Tim Holmes to get the kiosk in for the opening of Wild Walk. The kiosk goes beyond simple donor recognition, it is an active history of The Wild Center – fully editable and able to be changed and added to instantly, it records donor history, information about the present and past Board of Trustees, videos of current programs, a complete map of the campus both inside and out, among many other things. Rick Godin demonstrated how the kiosk operates in front of the Board, and noted that it was operational and they would have time later to fully explore the newest tool of the Center.

#### IV. **Sustainability Committee Update**

Discussion: Joe Beck began by stating that the former Sustainability Committee is now known as the Futures Committee Task Force and that the original four members, Charlie Frenette, Joe Beck, Chris McFadden and Lynn Fox, would be joined by other Board members who would help share different perspectives. Joe then shared the following about the progress of the task force:

- Proposals are already coming in.
- Consultant reports are due by July 15<sup>th</sup>.
- By mid-August the task force hopes to have a report ready.
- Five or six nationally recognized consultants are submitting proposals.
- May bring chosen consultant to October Board meeting.
- We have great traction.

- The committee is very excited.

#### IV. Financial Report

Discussion: Bob Kronenberger went over the monthly financial dashboard showing results through May 2015. He also shared current operating data through June, sharing the following information:

- Overall visitors were up through June.
- Wild Walk costs through June were at \$5,350,000.
- Overall revenues for May YTD are 10% below budget and 2% below 2014.
- Admission and program revenues are down \$10,000 from last year and \$2,000 under budget. Actual May YTD attendance is up 1% from last year (and paid attendance is up 2%).
- Contributions are \$124,000 (or 13%) under budget and \$33,000 less than last year through May.
- Wild Walk contributions received YTD are \$809,000 vs. \$10,000 last year.
- Membership revenues are 31% above budget and 36% above last year. The number of active members at the end of May 2015 are 3315; at end of May 2014 were 2787.
- Store, café, and facility rental revenues are below budget, but 9% ahead of last year.
- Actual YTD expenses are \$152,000 under budget. Approximately 66% or \$100,000 of this reduced spending has been deferred until later in the year.
- Salaries and benefits are 2% below budget and last year.
- Consulting fees are \$19,000 over budget and \$65,000 more than last year.
- Maintenance and supplies are \$52,000 below budget and \$2,000 more than last year. About \$50,000 has been deferred until later this year (largest item is staining the building).
- Utilities are \$9,000 under budget and \$3,000 less than last year.
- As expected through May of this year we are running at a deficit. This is consistent with our budget and historical operations. The actual YTD operating deficit is \$35,000 less than budget but \$143,000 more than last year, primarily due to higher marketing expenses.

There was then much discussion about numbers to date for July. Bob Kronenberger stated that there had already been \$40,000 in membership revenue in the first five days of July and that there had only been \$47,000 for the whole month of July in 2014. Lynn Fox mentioned that we had gone out on a limb to spend money on marketing for Wild Walk, she asked if there was a plan to chip away at the deficit. Lynn Birdsong stated that it was way too early to know and that the most important thing will be contributions. Obie stated that contributions are heavily skewed by a few major gifts. Lynn Birdsong replied that

he hopes that the trend works into some Annual Fund gifts. Hillarie stated that we need to build in a higher attrition rate and that this year there will be a better chance of people joining because of Wild Walk but not sure if that will continue. Bob Kronenberger said that there will likely be a mix in the renewal rate.

There was also a brief discussion about the safety of Wild Walk. The following are some of the points that were made:

- We do have insurance.
- Facilities staff walk the structure every day at the beginning and end of the day.
- We have invited our insurance company to come and make sure it is safe.
- Safety evaluations have been done, still working on some tweaks.
- There is a high tech security system in place.
- There are weekly staff meetings to make sure that all concerns, safety or otherwise are addressed immediately.
- There is a crisis management plan in place just in case.
- All on staff are first aid trained, some are also trained as certified Wilderness First Responders.

Board member Charlie Frenette asked if the Board could request a review of the crisis management plan as well as our liability plan, Lynn Birdsong stated that we should take Charlies advice and review the plans that are in place.

## **VII. Development and Campaign Report**

Discussion: Karen Thomas took a moment to thank all for their emotional and financial support. She also thanked Stephanie Ratcliffe for her vision and leadership stating that it was truly remarkable.

Hillarie Logan-Dechene then gave her Campaign and Development Report sharing the following information with Board members:

- Membership – Healthy growth over the last two years/
- Wildly successful Member Preview Week.
- 347 new members vs. 25 in same week last year (average 50 per day)
- YTD 850 vs. 179 in 2014.
- The record for membership sales in one month – July 2006 (\$70,194) until now – June 2015 (\$74,785).
- Campaign Update – Wild Walk Donor Preview Party – 500 attendees.
- With six months to go – Over \$21,754,000 in gifts, pledges and bequest intentions raised so far. Up \$1,474,000 since April Board Meeting.

### **Campaign Priorities**

- Sustain Annual Fund
  - Re-up multi-year commitments

- \$960,000 in new gifts (not pledges) for FY 2015
- Finish Wild Walk
  - \$1.5 million needed to fully fund project
- Support 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration
  - Net \$1 million to conclude Campaign

Hillarie stated that we need some surprises. Charlie Svenson asked if there were any prospects for naming opportunities and Hillarie said that we had a few ideas. Lynn Birdsong stated if anyone knows anyone try to welcome them into the fold. He said that if we raised enough money before the gala anything that comes in from that could fund the deficit as well as help to increase the endowment. Lynn Fox stated, what a happy, transformative time to come into the fold. Michael Bettmann stated that Wild Walk is a great tool to translate into donors. Hillarie then mentioned that there would be many chances during summer events to thank donors as well as to engage new friends.

### **10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala**

Gala Co-chair Nancy Simpkins shared the following facts about the upcoming 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala:

- It will take place on Monday, January 25, 2016 at the Metropolitan Club in New York City.
- The committee has been working very hard, meeting every two weeks.
- Howard Fish stated that the theme was “NYC goes wild for the night”.
- Hired a NYC cover artist, Eric Druker, to commission a piece of art to commemorate the event.
- Goal for the evening is \$1 million, that may be ambitious.
- Shared a list of top 10 corporate sponsorship prospects as well as the top 5 environmental law firms who could potentially be sponsors of the event and asked all Board members to take a look at the list to see if they have contacts at any of the places.
- Gala committee is working on packages for top donors.
- Joe Beck asked each Board member to identify at least two people that they have a connection to and send letters, Christine Owens can help personalize asks. He also said that it is important to get a couple high level sponsors.

### **Future Board Meeting Schedule**

There was a brief discussion about the next couple Board meetings, the next meeting would take place on Friday, October 9<sup>th</sup> at The Wild Center and it was proposed that the first meeting of 2016 would take place on Tuesday, January 26 to coincide with the gala that will take place on the 25<sup>th</sup> of January in New York City.

### **Upcoming New York State CFA Proposals**

Hillarie reported that there are some state funding opportunities that are coming down the pipe. She stated that we were planning to go on a hiatus but this may change that stating that the statewide CFA process was happening again. She said that this year the state added an Upstate Revitalization Initiative which three regions would be awarded and could share in a \$1.5 billion pot of money. As a result of this, the North Country Region could be awarded a large sum of money. She stated that with the CFA and the URI the upstate region could get more money than ever before. She also reported that there was a Market NY grant available that could provide funds to upgrade our theater which is in need of repair.

### **XIV. Executive Session**

There was a brief executive session and the meeting was adjourned at 5:00 pm.

### **XV. Upcoming 2015 Meeting Dates**

Friday, October 9, 2015 (TWC)

### **PROPOSED 2016 Board Meeting Dates**

Tuesday, January 26, 2016 (NYC)

Monday, April 11, 2016 (NYC)

Friday, July 1, 2016 (TWC)

Friday, October 7, 2016 (TWC)