

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

**May 10, 2010 – American Museum of Natural History, New York City**

**Board Present:** Paul Alioto, Tom Aydelotte, Joe Beck, Michael Bettmann, Lynn Birdsong, Obie Clifford, John Colston, Robert Friedman, Tom Jorling, Kevin Keane, Peter Kindler, Nancy Lamb, Claire Leonardi, Betsy Lowe, Nancy Simpkins, Dan Sullivan, Charles Svenson, Karen Thomas and Tony Whaling.

**Board Absent:** Jim Carr, Charles Frenette, Rick Godin, Nancy Howard, Mike Hunsinger, Bill Hutchens, Dave Johnson, Paul Maroun, Steve Potter and Sandra Strader.

**Advisory Board Present:** Amy Elrod, James Elrod, Barbara Grose, Sally Hart and Russell Reynolds.

**Staff/Consultants Present:** Marci Bencze, Susan Clifford, Howard Fish, Diana Fortune, Bob Kronenberger, Hillarie Logan-Dechene, Christine Owens and Stephanie Ratcliffe.

Board President Lynn Birdsong called the meeting to order and thanked everyone for attending. He stated that Obie Clifford had asked him to take over the duty of chairing board meetings.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

*The Board unanimously approved the December 28, 2009 meeting minutes.*

*Tom Aydelotte motion, Kevin Keane second.*

**REPORTS FROM THE PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Stephanie Ratcliffe began her report by telling the story of a painting that been donated to The Wild Center by the late artist Robert Kuhn. He had donated the painting at the suggestion of Advisory Board member Tony Campbell so that the museum might sell it at auction for the museum's benefit. Mr. Kuhn's son, Casey, helped arrange sale of the painting at auction and the painting was sold bringing in \$20,000 to add to the endowment fund. Stephanie stated that this was a case of people thinking creatively to benefit The Wild Center.

Stephanie also reported that the museum had been in close conversation with the Klueck family to ensure our interest in acquiring their property, which is adjacent to The Wild Center property, is understood by the Klueck family. Since the last board meeting, Mr. Klueck had passed away. Mrs. Klueck has been in the process of selling her home and moving to Albany so she has had much business to attend to. However, there was confidence that the opportunity for the museum to acquire the property might occur within the next few months.

Obie Clifford stated that in the minds of many board members, it was a very high priority for The Wild Center to gain ownership of the Klueck property.

Stephanie reported that the pellet boiler had been operational for approximately a month and that a press event would take place in the near future. She then gave a brief overview about the cost of the project and stated that the cost of the project was approximately \$570,000. She also stated that there would be an Adirondack Climate and Energy Action Plan (ADKCAP) report out meeting on May 24 and extended an invitation to any board members in the area to come to The Wild Center to get a sense of the work that the group has been engaged in.

Lynn Birdsong began his report by stating that the museum had finished 2009 in good financial shape. He then gave an overview of some of the boards major accomplishments for the past year. He stated that it was important to establish clear procedures and guidelines for incoming board members. For example, geographic location should be considered as it is important the Adirondack Park be represented. He also stated that the younger generation and more women should be engaged. He said that the governance committee was trying to make the process more clear with a calendar based approach. Setting an annual nomination deadline was also an important factor to be considered. He stated that the nomination process would be discussed further at the upcoming July board meeting.

## **GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE**

Advisory Board member Jim Elrod asked whether or not The Wild Center had spoken with other comparable organizations about best practices for board governance. Board member Dan Sullivan stated that he would share information regarding St. Lawrence Universities process. It was suggested that the museum work with other like institutions to discuss the way that they approach board governance. Stephanie Ratcliffe mentioned that she and Bob Kronenberger would be getting together with The ECHO Center in Burlington, VT and would find out what they do in regard to various governance issues.

*The board unanimously approved a motion to add Nancy Simpkins to the Governance Committee.  
Dan Sullivan motion, Claire Leonardi second.*

Lynn Birdsong noted that committee chairmen will report on committee goals for the year and accomplishments to date at the August board meeting. He stated that successor's should be identified at for individual chair roles.

Bob Kronenberger presented the newly created Whistleblower Policy, explaining that it should be used in the event that someone was aware of an unethical activity in relation to finance.

*A motion to accept the new Whistleblower Policy was unanimously approved.  
Paul Alioto motion, Tom Aydelotte second.*

## **CAMPAIGN FEASIBILITY STUDY**

Lynn Birdsong introduced consultants Christine Owens and Mike Brodie of BCC & Associates (BCC) who would ultimately be presenting the results of the Campaign Feasibility Study which had been conducted during the spring. Lynn Birdsong stated that the Campaign Planning Committee would hear this report on June 16. The full board would have the opportunity to hear the results on June 17. Christine Owens stated that in today's discussion they would be presenting indicators and general themes that were being expressed by those interviewed and that they want all board members to be aware of the process to date. Some of the reasons that were stated for conducting the feasibility study were that it helps to identify institutional priorities, tests strategic direction, helps to engage donors as well as volunteers, assesses an institutions fundraising capacity and gives guidance to the boards on whether a new fundraising campaign is appropriate.

Christine stated that BCC had worked with the planning committee to identify fifty people to be interviewed for the study. The pool of interviewees consisted of a mix of board members, advisors and friends of The Wild Center. She said that some of the benefits of the study could be to help to set the stage for a campaign as well as identify potential leadership. She also said that a feasibility study tests underlying assumptions for the case for support. Christine reported that two of the key elements of the study were the Case for Support and chart of gifts. She reported on some of the comments that were made by those interviewed in regard to the case for support. It was indicated that the draft case needs to be strengthened. The notion that The Wild Center is saving or changing lives did not come through in the case, the sense of urgency was not clear, and the goals expressed perhaps too ambitious. The question of "why should I invest" came up. Some thought that the draft case for support was a little too overblown or grandiose. Many people talked about endowment which they said spoke to the sustainability of The Wild Center.

Stephanie Ratcliffe stated that TWC has the "passion" but we need to grow and expand that passion. Lynn Birdsong said that we need to be as relevant as we can be in our region. Claire Leonardi mentioned that many people invest in The Wild Center but are not that involved, do they perceive that the museum has changed directions?

After the Board participates in discussing the Feasibility Study findings on June 17, the Planning Committee will consider all input and make a recommendation to the full board.

## **RETURN OF THE WILD**

Howard Fish gave an overview of the new summer theme, Return of the Wild. He spoke about the return of moose, wolf and coyotes to the area on the importance of this story to our Adirondack environment. He stated that after three years we are getting much better at temporary exhibits. The new exhibit will be unveiled on July 4.

## **MARKETING**

Howard Fish reported on his marketing efforts for the summer. He stated that it was important to reach new people as well as measure what is working for the museum in terms of advertising. He said that we have purchased ads at the top of the [www.visitadirondacks.com](http://www.visitadirondacks.com) website as well as the word Adirondacks on Face Book and have also purchased banner ads on the New York Times website. He stated that it was important to reach new visitors once they get to the region. He then talked about other places that we are advertising such as the movie screen at the Strand Theater in Old Forge, a collaboration with Adirondack Bank in northern New York, as well as an ad on the Lake Placid website under the “what to do” section. He reported on an event that will take place in Lake Placid on June 23, which will help to familiarize front line staff including, waiters, waitresses and bartenders with The Wild Center so that they can tell their customers about us. We have had coasters designed for front line staff to hand out so that they can be given to customers and thereby promote The Wild Center.

## **ELLEN FUTTER**

Ellen Futter, President of the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH), joined the meeting briefly to discuss the role of museums in relation to the issues of today. She stated that institutions such as TWC and AMNH are more essential than ever before in dealing with issues such as public policy, national security, energy, water, climate change and the environment. She spoke about the things that AMNH does to train teachers on teaching the sciences because there are not enough teachers trained in the field. She said that there is currently an acute crisis in this country in science education. Ellen then gave a brief overview of some of the other programs that AMNH hosts. Ms. Futter then gave board members a chance to ask questions. Board member Michael Bettmann requested advice on how an institution such as our museum can do its best to survive in such difficult economic times. She stated that it was important to scale things to who we are as well as to our population, location, target audience, and mission.

## **DEVELOPMENT**

Kevin Keane reported about annual giving stating that our operating budget is our most critical need. He stated that in 2009 we covered our needs but reminded the group that we need to raise \$300,000 more in 2010 than in 2009. He said that board members are integral to the process of supporting the institution and support early in the year rather than waiting until fourth quarter would be most helpful. He also discussed the need to continue to identify new supporters.

Diana Fortune discussed an available capital tax credit opportunity with an upcoming deadline. She noted that the deadline for donors qualifying for empire zone tax credits is

June 29, 2010. She then discussed the Development summer events calendar and stated the importance of board members introducing new people to The Wild Center. Inviting prospects to our post board receptions is a great opportunity. She also spoke regarding the Upper Saranac Lake reception scheduled for July 29<sup>th</sup> and mentioned that a similar reception in the Lake Placid area may occur dependent upon identifying a host and a location.

There was discussion regarding the board meeting scheduled for Monday, August 30. Lynn Birdsong stated that he would not be able to attend on that date and asked for consensus about whether or not Friday, August 27 would be acceptable to move the meeting to. All board members were in agreement that the alternate date would be okay and the meeting was scheduled for August 27.

There was then discussion regarding the upcoming September 30 tribute to Chairman, Obie Clifford. Karen Thomas and Nancy Simpkins, co-chairs of the event, gave a brief summary stating that invitations would be mailed in mid to late June.

Sue Clifford then gave a brief presentation regarding the new Wings group and mentioned two upcoming events, one in Lake Placid in August and another event in New York City in November. Claire Leonardi suggested inviting a Wings member to serve on the board. Lynn Birdsong stated that it could be discussed at the governance level in July.

## **FINANCE**

Claire Leonardi gave an overview of the finance materials that were included in the board packet. She stated that the “dashboard” had been refined, presenting certain information on an annual basis and a slightly different format for interim periods to better communicate relevant statistics to the board. She reported that for 2009 the museum ended in a breakeven position. She told the Board that 2009 revenue of \$2.7 million was approximately \$700,000 below 2008. She noted that the prior year included non-recurring revenue of \$485,000 from the Climate Change Conference. She also reported that contributions for the year were \$1.3 million. This was below 2008 by \$200,000 and was partially offset by a \$100,000 increase in grants. Claire pointed out that, in 2009, The Wild Center hosted 80,000 visitors. She reported that year over year attendance was down by about 10% which caused Admissions revenue to be lower by about \$100,000. Café revenues and store sales also declined driven by lower attendance.

Claire reported on first quarter 2010 performance. She indicated that through March 31, The Wild Center was running a deficit of approximately \$390,000. She pointed out that this is expected given the seasonal nature of the museum’s operations. She reported that performance was \$40,000 better than budget. Through the end of March, revenues were \$28,000, or 9%, below budget but were ahead of 2009. Contributions were very close to budget, while admissions and café and retail store sales were significantly behind budget and lower than prior year levels. Attendance was 12% lower than prior year levels. Claire reported that first quarter expenses were nearly \$70,000 under budget. She indicated that about 50% of this amount was due to spending that was deferred but was anticipated to occur later in

the year. She cautioned that the current level of savings should not be expected to continue throughout the year.

Lynn Birdsong reported that the museum has a \$1.6M endowment to date. There was discussion regarding investments and Lynn stated that we were being cautiously optimistic. He mentioned that we had taken out a term loan last August and that the terms were extremely favorable.

*A motion to adopt the 2009 Audit Report and Financial Statements was unanimously approved.  
Kevin Keane motion, Joe Beck second.*

## **NEXT MEETINGS**

The next 2010 meetings of the Board are scheduled for the following dates:

Friday, August 27, 2010 and Tuesday, December 28, 2010.