

Minutes
Frontier Culture Museum Board of Trustees Meeting
April 17, 2009 9:00 a.m. - Lecture Hall

Members Attending

Mr. T.E. Beck Jr., , Dr. John Bunch, Delegate Ben Cline, Mr. Michael DiGrassie, Mr. George Dygert, Dr. Pamela Fox, , Senator Emmett Hanger, Dr. Gabrielle Lanier, Mr. Frank McDonough, Ms. Gail Nardi, Mrs. Thelma Newman, Mr. Frank Nolen, Delegate Kenneth Plum, Delegate Chris Saxman, Mr. Thomas Sheets, Mr. William Sibert, Dr. Cheryl Talley, Mr. Paul P. Vames,

Members Absent

Senator Creigh Deeds, Ms. Anna Fariello, Delegate Steve Landes, Mr. John O. Marsh, Jr., Senator Roscoe Reynolds, Delegate Beverly Sherwood

Guests Attending

Mrs. Maricia Capps, President, American Frontier Culture Foundation, Mrs. Thomas Sheets, Vice President, American Frontier Culture Foundation, Mr. Jay Russell, Mrs. Jerry Lynn Shiflett, Mr. Dale Hungerford, Mr. Robert Fonger, Mr. Ron Capps, Justice George M. Cochran

Staff Attending

Mr. G. John Avoli, Executive Director, Mr. Eric Bryan, Deputy Director, Ms. Lydia Volskis, Museum Operations Manager, Mr. Michael Sutton, Marketing Director, Mr. Larry Sabourin, Education Director, Ms. Frances Carrington, Foundation Manager, Mrs. Gigi Kelly, Historic Interpreter, Mr. David Landes, Historic Interpreter

Call to Order and Welcome

Board of Trustees Chair Ms. Gail Nardi called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the September 5, 2008 meeting were approved as distributed.

Chair's Remarks

Ms. Nardi welcomed attendees and asked each person to introduce him or herself. She noted that the upcoming reports for the trustees meeting were exciting and positive, in spite of the recent economic downturn.

Executive Director's Report

Mr. Avoli recognized and thanked David Landes, a historic site interpreter at the museum for ten years. Mr. Landes will be leaving the Museum in May to accompany his wife on her first international assignment for the US State Department. Mr. Avoli gave the Board an overview of Mr. Landes' accomplishments and presented Mr. Landes with several presents from the Museum.

Mr. Avoli continued that most of the upcoming departmental reports, with the exception of the finance report, would be positive in spite of recent worries about finances and the recession. He noted that the meeting presentations would focus mainly on recent successful education and marketing efforts.

The twenty minute video of the Mega-Movers television show featuring the move of the Museum's Appalachian Farm in the fall of 2007 was shown to all. Board Members were pleased and amused by the lively presentation; all agreed that the film clips of the region and Museum were lovely and showcased the Museum in a positive manner.

Mr. Avoli especially thanked Trustee Tom Sheets for his continued support of the Museum over the years with wood materials from his lumber business as well as his continued support on various committees and on special projects. Ms. Nardi complimented Mr. Avoli and the Museum staff for remaining positive and being good stewards of resources during tough economic times.

Financial Report

Fiscal Director Mrs. Donna Smith gave the Museum financial report for the quarter ending March 31, 2009. She alerted the Trustees that the Fortune-Williams Festival receipts and reimbursements during July and August (at the beginning of the fiscal year) might cause the revenue figures to appear skewed during those months. She reviewed several Power Point slides highlighting a new, simplified way of reporting and comparing revenue and visitation totals. She will now report on dollars, visitors, and those who visit the Museum for other reasons such as attending an event here etc... She reviewed a comparison chart for FY08 and FY09 figures for revenue and visitation, Mrs. Smith explained the year-to-date expenditure chart, first detailing the recent state budget reduction impact on the Museum, reviewing the base budget and highlighting expenses in payroll, contractual services, supply, transfers, continuous charges, site improvements and equipment. She also reviewed capitol expenses such as maintenance reserve projects (sidewalks, barn roof repair), and cash totals with the state treasury. She reviewed several slides showing ten to fifteen year's worth of funding and position funding for the Museum and other state Museums. Delegate Saxman asked for future reporting on the relationship between state funding and visitation; Mrs. Smith stated that she would be able to provide these reports.

Marketing Report

Marketing Director Mike Sutton discussed the Museum's new emphasis on social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace, professional networks like LinkedIn, microblogs such as Twitter, and content sharing sites such as YouTube and Flickr. He noted that the Museum is a presence on several of these sites, and will work to become involved in more. This will allow the Museum to reach out via new media and technologies to new and broader audiences. He reviewed recent statistics on internet and online users who frequent social networking sites; currently about 41% of web-users frequent the sites and by 2013 it is estimated that 52% of all online users will visit and use these sites. He showed several slides to illustrate the home pages of the social networking sites.

Mr. Sutton also pointed out that many classic rules of advertising also apply to the use of new media, namely to remain fresh, evolve, adapt easily and remain engaged with your customers.

He reviewed current Museum marketing efforts on television, radio, website, e-blasts, web impressions, magazine features, collaborative internet advertisements, and educational advertisements, programs and videos. He reviewed Museum visitation numbers to date; overall Museum visitation is up a little more than 3% for the year.

Committee Reports

Public-Private Committee – Mr. William Sibert reported that the AWASAW project is nearing completion of the planning stage and will soon move to the groundbreaking phase. The plans have been approved by all required state agencies and Mr. Gordon Barlow is completing the financing plans. Mr. Barlow hopes to break ground in the early Summer. He reported that the gateway Road has been accepted into the state roadway system (the art through the Museum property); this road gives the Museum access to its property on the east side of Highway 81, even if no current plans exist for the land's development. He continued that after eighteen months, the contract for the land lease of the old DeJarnette property has been finalized with the Petrie-Ross company. The final copies will be transported to the Office of the Attorney General for signatures today. The contract features an initial grace period followed by up to five consecutive six-month "due diligence" periods in which the firm will owe the Museum \$50,000 per period. He noted that while the economy is still in a slump, Petrie-Ross is a solid, quality company handling much of their own financing.

Ms. Nardi thanked Mr. Sibert, Mr. Vames and Mr. Sheets for taking leadership roles and working hard on behalf of the Museum to complete the land lease deal. Mr. Avoli agreed and offered his thanks as well. He also thanked the General Assembly members for their efforts to obtain funds to secure the DeJarnette buildings until such time as the developer is ready to either use or demolish them. The buildings have been a source of concern due to their dilapidated state and the chance that someone might be hurt if they entered the building, even though “no trespassing” signs are clearly posted.

Buildings and Grounds – Facilities Manager Cliff Edwards reported on two major projects recently completed. He reviewed slides of the new paver sidewalk surface between the Administration building, Store and Visitor Center. About 6500 square feet was replaced at a cost of about \$85,000. He also noted that the roof of the second dairy barn has been repaired at a cost of \$9,800. A number of shingles had been damaged or fallen off.

Committee on the Future – Deputy Director Eric Bryan reported that Master Site Plan work is moving forward. He reported that Shuler schoolhouse restoration is currently underway; funding for the schoolhouse project comes from the American Frontier Culture Foundation and from wood donations from Mr. Sheets. He continued that the West African Site work will resume in early June under the direction of Professor JAK Njoku and Father Stan Ogbonna. He stated that the budget will allow the Museum to hire about ten temporary workers to assist with mud puddling and heavy labor. In July, the Igbo immersion program for children of Ibo parents across America will run concurrently with the Teacher’s Institute, which will focus on West African culture.

Mr. Bryan reported that the infrastructure expansion project is underway and the Museum has recently been dealing with issues involving storm water management and erosion control. In late May the scope of work will be advertised for bids. He reviewed slides of the Shuler schoolhouse and West African site work. Mr. Mike DiGrassie reported that the open space along the tram route leading to the New World just past the Dairy Barns will be cleared and planted with trees and grasses. This space will be used for signage and outdoor seating and will serve as a small precursor to the planned crossing gallery. Mr. Bryan added that Museum staff spent much of the Winter repairing and upgrading fencing, yard and open spaces around the New World sites. Mr. DiGrassie complimented the staff’s work on these and other projects.

Mr. Avoli stated that he was recruiting a number of local high school athletes for summer jobs working on the West African site.

Education and Interpretation – Director of Education Larry Sabourin introduced Trustee’s Dr. John Bunch and Dr. Cheryl Talley, both of the Education and Interpretation Committee. Dr. Bunch reported on the outcome of Committee discussions following the recent visit of Mr. Jim Loewen, who spoke on interpreting slavery and the need for museums to be accurate and forthright. Dr. Bunch reiterated the need to be candid, not negative, use factual data, and ensure that all cultural stories presented at the Museum are similar tone another in narrative tone and elements included.

Dr. Talley noted that she has been working behind the scenes to gather information for the West African exhibits three main themes; Africa/the Atlantic Crossing/New World. Dr. Talley thanked the Board for the opportunity to serve in a leadership capacity on the West African project. She continued that for all Museum staff and Board Members it has been a great process to educate ourselves about West African history and tangent New World themes, with the help of many, including Mr. Loewen. She agreed with Dr. Bunch that the Museum should be accurate, truthful and sensitive in its interpretation of West African culture. She stated that members of the Igbo diaspora in the United States have been enthusiastic about the project and have indicated a willingness to participate. Ms. Nardi complimented Dr. Talley for her work.

Mr. Sabourin reported that this summer’s Teacher’s Institute would focus on Igbo culture, and would run concurrently with the Igbo immersion program in July. The two programs will focus on Igbo arts, culture and geography, as well as practical teaching strategies for use in the classroom. The American Frontier Culture Foundation will support the programs.

He continued that the Museum's children's summer camps are already about half full to date, and that he expects the rosters will be completely full by summer. He reviewed planned activities and themes for the camps.

Mr. Sabourin informed the Board that he had predicted that due to the economic slowdown, school groups might be as much as 25% reduced. However, due to creative marketing and increased special outreach programs, he reported that school visitation is almost the same this year as last year at this time. Interpreter Gigi Kelly presented a ten-minute abbreviated outreach program for the Board.

Mr. Sabourin informed the Board that the Foundation has received a \$100,000 Charles fund grant renewal; the funds will be used to bring disadvantaged students to the Museum over the next two years. He also previewed several new program ideas under development such as Industrial arts programs for Vo-Tech students, extended classroom offerings for teachers to use the Museum's natural areas for science learning, and customized teacher programs.

Legislative Report

Senator Emmett W. Hanger Jr. gave a brief update on the state budget situation, and emphasized that while the cuts were difficult, the results could have been worse, and current indicators show that the economic downturn may have slowed. He also informed the Board of the funds appropriated to the Department of General Services to secure the DeJarnette buildings, and noted that he hoped there might be another bond referendum for capitol projects sometime in the next several years. Delegate Plum complimented the Museum's resourcefulness in dealing with the budget crisis. Mr. Sheets asked about the possibility of stimulus money reaching the Museum; Senator Hanger stated that much of Virginia's money is already allocated; although the Governor has some discretion is applying the funds. Mr. Avoli noted that much of the money has already gone to support K-12 education.

Miscellaneous

Dr. John Bunch reported that one of his students, Johanna Craig, who has volunteered at the Museum, will present a paper about the Frontier Culture Museum at a national conference soon.

Lydia Volskis, Operations Manager, reported that she will distribute small volunteer program information cards to each board member; the cards carry contact information for prospective volunteers.

Report from the Foundation

Mrs. Maricia Capps, President of the American Frontier Culture Foundation reported that the Foundation has exceeded goals set for unrestricted giving in 2009. She reviewed annual fund giving, restricted and unrestricted giving, and event income. Memberships, rentals, program funds and capitol expenses. She especially complimented the Foundation's development committee fro their creation of the new special events committee which raised \$52,000 at the New Year's Eve party and raffle. The special events committee will be an active and important part of the Foundation Committee structure.

She reviewed slides depicting the ways in which the Foundation uses funds raised to support Museum programs, and slides showing sources of income and expenditures for the year to date. Although she noted that 2009 has been a tough year for fundraising due to the economic downturn, she reported on recent events such as the first New Year's Eve party, the St. Patrick's Day party and movie night and also upcoming initiatives such as the Beach party, Golf Tournament and second New Years Eve party, among others. She also informed the Board that the Museum staff havssubmitted a list of funding requests to the Foundation for the upcoming year. The list was approved by Executive Director John Avoli before it was submitted to the Foundation. She thanked the Trustee Board members for their support of Foundation programs during the past year.

Mrs. Peggy Sheets, Vice-Chair of the Foundation, reported on the volunteer program, and informed the Board that there are about 187 volunteers “on the books”, and with the loss of staff due to layoffs in October, the volunteers will be making a huge difference at the Museum. She reported that she, Operations Manager Lydia Volskis and Interpreter Sarah McCumsey will be planning events and programs for the volunteers throughout the year as well as recording their hours and preparing a monthly newsletter. Another new program for volunteers will be the volunteer of the Quarter program, modeled after the Museum’s employee of the quarter program; this new program will get underway at the end of the summer.

She gave the “fudge report”, stating that the Museum Store has sold over \$34,000 worth of fudge so far in FY2009; she estimated cumulative fudge sales over the past several years at over \$200,000. She also noted that sales of books in the Store are at \$21,000 this year and about \$142,000 over the past number of years.

Old Business

No items of old business were brought forward.

New Business

No items of new business were brought forward.

Next Meeting Date (August 28, 2009)

The next meeting of the Board of Trustees is scheduled for Friday August 28, 2009 at 9 a.m. in the Lecture Hall.

Adjournment

With no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 11:45 a.m.