

Minutes  
**Frontier Culture Museum Board of Trustees Meeting**  
**September 16, 2011 9:00 a.m. - Lecture Hall**

**Members Attending:**

Nwachukwu Anakwenze, Ted Beck, Richard Bell, William Card, Emmett Hanger, John Higgs, Ophie Kier, Gabrielle Lanier, Scott MacMillan, Lynn Mitchell, Frank McDonough, Rhodes Ritenour, Philip Rundle, William Sibert, Peggy Sheets, Cheryl Talley, Emmett Toms, Paul Vames

**Members Absent:**

Benjamin Cline, Pamela Fox, Edward Houck, Steve Landes, Kenneth Plum, Roscoe Reynolds, Beverly Sherwood

**Guests Attending:**

Ms. Judy Wyatt (for Delegate Steve Landes),

**Staff Attending:**

John Avoli, Executive Director, Eric Bryan, Deputy Director, Lydia Volskis, Operations manager, Mike Sutton, Marketing Director, Donna Parker, Fiscal Director, Merritt Schoonover, Fiscal Technician Senior and Visitor Center Supervisor, Andrew Richardson, Interim Education Director, Frances Carrington, Foundation Manager

**CALL TO ORDER AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Mr. Paul Vames, Chair of the Board, called the meeting to order at 9 a.m. He welcomed attendees and presented a framed certificate to Mr. George Dygert, who has completed his term on the Board. The minutes of the April 2011 meeting were approved as distributed.

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

**Budget and Finance**

Mr. Avoli commended the staff for their hard work during lean budget times, and thanked the American Frontier Culture Foundation for their support of the Museum. Summer visitation has been good and the Museum ended Fiscal Year 2011 with a 3% increase in guests. Events this summer have been successful, with the Wine Festival, the Brews and Blues Festival and the Foundation's Beach Party all welcoming record numbers of guests. Summer camps were full and well-received by parents and students alike.

Mr. Avoli thanked the Board's Legislative members for their help in securing extra funds in Budget Amendment 19. The Museum had expended all but \$4 of the \$500,000 allotted by the end of the fiscal year; items such as maintenance equipment, trucks, golf carts and a new large sign on Museum property were purchased. Additionally, a new modular restroom has been purchased and will be installed on the New World sites soon.

The Museum's issues with the Virginia Information technology Agency (VITA) have been for the most part resolved, with a few outstanding concerns, and Museum staff felt that the VITA management did understand the concerns of a small agency. R. Vames complimented Mr. Avoli and Museum staff for their hard work on the frustrating VITA issues of the past several years and the successful resolution of the problems. The museum still has ongoing challenges with site staffing, and marketing funds and will work closely with the General Assembly during the upcoming budget cycle to address these needs.

In other news:

- Fall events include the Naturalization Ceremony, the Foundation's Golf Tournament, the Fortune-Williams Music Festival, and Oktoberfest, Ancestral Skills weekend, Creepy Tales, Holiday Lantern Tours and the New Year's Eve gala.
- Both of Mr. Avoli's fundraising trips to Italy were a success and planning is underway for the 2012 trips. Mr. Avoli recounted his most recent trip to Italy during which some friends from the German town of Hordt (original location of the Museum's German house) joined the group on the final leg of the tour in his hometown.
- There will be an Igbo event this weekend on the West-African site, and the Native American site is under construction.

Fiscal Director Donna Parker thanked the Foundation for their support of the Museum's information technology (IT) needs. She gave the Museum expenditure report, explaining the difference between appropriations and cash, and reviewed payroll, operating, Budget Amendment 19, and capital projects. She reviewed the revenue report and answered several questions.

Mr. Bryan reviewed the Museum's Capital Projects and Maintenance Reserve activity and needs. The Museum has submitted a Capital budget request for various infrastructure improvements including replacement of the HVAC system in the Administration, Visitor Center and Museum Store, which have been in use since 1988. Current Maintenance Reserve Projects include stabilizing Dairy barn exteriors against moisture, replacing fire alarms in historic buildings, and replacing the thatch roofs on Scotch-Irish farm buildings. Upcoming Maintenance reserve requests include paving the Dairy Barn parking lot with asphalt, correcting the drainage between the dairy barns, and hardening the walkways on the West African site.

### **Information Technology**

Ms. Parker reported that there is one outstanding bill from VITA for June, and that all billing has stopped as of June 15. The current monthly bill for the museum's VITA computers is about \$187. The Museum is partnering with the Foundation and their new network to gain access to VPN, the Virginia state information systems main network. She reviewed the new VITA bill for \$2400 to decommission the site from most VITA equipment, and requested input on whether to pay the bill, as most of the work listed has been performed not by VITA but by Museum staff. She reported that the Museum's website has been moved to a new host site, and that larger video and other elements are now functional. With the new host, the Museum receives up to 1,000 email accounts for free, as opposed to VITA's charge of \$14.95 per account.

Mr. Avoli asked for Board direction on the VITA bill for work not performed by VITA; after some discussion, the general consensus among the Board was that while these charges were inappropriate, the Museum should consider paying the bill in order to finally resolve the issue. Senator Hanger made a motion, seconded by Mr. Kier, that Museum staff be given discretion to pursue a negotiation to reduce the bill, but that the bill should be paid if these negotiations fail. There was no discussion and the motion passed unanimously.

### **Education and Interpretation**

Interim Education Director Andrew Richardson reviewed recent education program statistics. The Museum received visits from 17, 033 students in elementary, middle and high school, or a total of 264 groups from around the state. This total includes about 1,600 students who attended on Home School Day. The Charles Fund, a special fund from the Foundation underwrote field trips for 76 groups in FY 2011, or 5410 students. The grants covered transportation, entrance fees, lunch and gift bags or some combination thereof for the students. The Museum's six weeks of summer camp were full and successful this year, and staff have begun plans for expanded camps in 2012. Teachers have already begun calling to reserve field trip dates for 2012.

Plans for 2012 include physical education and middle and high school programs, expanded summer camps, a new education department brochure and marketing.

Mr. Richardson reported that the Museum's John Lewis Society, the volunteer interpreter group for 12-16 year olds, hosted 40 students in 2011, who have given about 407 days or 2,136 hours of volunteer service. The program will allow several more students for next year, but must keep the numbers manageable, as the slim number of adult interpreters must supervise and instruct the youth as well as carry out their own jobs on the site and respond to tourists etc...

Mr. Bryan reported that the interpretive staff consists of 10 full time, 5 part-time and several adjunct staff as well as a number of costumed and non-costumed volunteers. These staff must cover 9 exhibits, school visits, special events and additional holiday programs. The tight staffing situation has also been reflected in visitor comments on report cards. The museum will submit a budget request for the Education Director position to be replaced, for a West African Farm specialist, and 10 part-time wage interpreters.

There was a special blessing ceremony on the West African Site on the weekend of July 29-30 when the Eze Nri (spiritual leader of the Igbo) offered a blessing and declared the site as the center of Igbo experience in America. Mr. Kier and Dr. Talley both complimented the event, and noted that the blessing ceremony was a particularly moving experience after all of the Museum's hard work to create the exhibit. Mr. Bryan continued that there are Igbo events planned for the weekend of September 17-18 to correspond with the Staunton African American Heritage Festival.

Materials have been collected to begin work on the American Indian exhibit, and the museum has hired a new wage staff member, Matt Weatherholtz, to act as primary builder and interpreter at the site. Matt has experience working on a variety of ancestral skills and has worked at the Monacan Village at natural Bridge. School program development for the site is underway and an ad hoc committee of Board and staff Members has met and will assist as needed as the site develops. Ancestral Skills weekend is set for October 14-15, to coincide with the Virginia Archaeological Association's annual meeting at the Museum. Schoolchildren and the general public are expected to visit the Museum Friday and Saturday for the programs and events.

Other events scheduled for Fall include Home School Day on September 30, Oktoberfest, Ancestral Skills Days, Creepy Tales and Holiday Lantern Tours.

### **Visitor Experience and Satisfaction**

The Museum's goal has been to increase the percentage of report cards we receive rating the Museum as good/excellent. In FY 2011 the Museum received 680 cards, of which 678 rated the Museum as good/excellent. About 2% of visitors completed the report card; it is the goal to increase the percentage of completed cards to 5% of visitors. IN FY 2012, so far 127 report cards have been collected, of which 97% rate the Museum as good/excellent. Mr. Toms suggested that the Museum investigate a web-based evaluation form to complement the paper form, and some discussion followed. Mr. Kier pointed out that if all the returned forms rate the Museum as good or excellent, it will be difficult to know in what areas we can improve.

### **Marketing**

Marketing Director Mike Sutton reported that in FY2011 total visitation increased by 3%, with general admission down 1% from FY 2010. He attributed this to the cancellation of the May Day festival and lower attendance at this year's July 4 events. School admission increased 3.2% from FY 2010. Virtual Rabbit tours of the Museum began online on November 1, 2010, and to date over 20,000 visitors have visited the site. The West African site page is the most-visited page on the tour. The new orientation video, produced by Metro Productions has been well-received and was funded by part of the Charles Fund Grant. The new website, launched April 8, 2011, features video clips and an introduction to the Museum by David McCullough. The website is now hosted by a site which allows for more features and videos to be presented.

He reviewed plans for marketing budget expenditures for FY 2012, noting that for the most part, his expenditures would be similar to those in FY 2011. He will increase spending for electronic ads by about 3% and this year there will be a new run of the Museum's main brochure and a new education program brochure. He will also increase spending for special event ads on local television and radio. He plans an increased internet presence, stronger visitor tracking, an increase in education program marketing, improved interstate signage, pilot programs for assisted living facilities, and work to educate the public and schools about the new American Indian Site.

Mr. Rundle suggested a donation button on the Museum website, to allow online visitors to contribute, or for those who want to contribute to be able to do so at any convenient time. Mr. Avoli noted that there is a link on the Foundation's website – the Foundation, as a 501C3 non-profit can more easily accept donations to benefit Museum programs. Donations to the state agency become a part of Non-General Fund income and are subject to the often precarious budget process. Delegate Bell complimented Mr. Sutton on stretching his slim marketing budget to cover so many important needs.

#### **REPORT FROM THE FOUNDATION**

John Dod, President of the American Frontier Culture Foundation reviewed the Foundation's fundraising efforts since the last meeting. He reported that for Fiscal Year 2011 the annual fund raised about 73% of the goal, unrestricted funds raised were at 422% of the FY2011 goal, special events at 136%, and the annual pass program raised 101% of the goal for a total of \$240,482 total raised in FY2011; the goal was \$198,000. He reported on restricted grants received from Target and the Charles Fund, and reviewed the agency budget requests from the Foundation for FY2012. The Foundation's annual Golf Tournament is planned for the Clun at Ironwood next week, the Foundation hopes to raise between \$14,000 and \$15,000. He thanked Mr. Frank McDonough of McDonough Toyota for the promise of a new Toyota to any golfer who makes a hole-in-one at the tournament. A dinner will follow the tournament in the Cochran Pavilion. The New Year's Eve gala is the next big fundraising event for the Foundation; the gala will be held at the Stonewall Jackson Hotel in downtown Staunton.

The recent land transfer of the DeJarnette property from the state to the Foundation has more than doubled the Foundation's assets. A joint real estate committee is meeting regularly to plan for the use of the land. The new computer system, separate from the state system is running smoothly, and the Foundation's website is also operating as planned. Mr. Rundle broached the idea of fundraising to encourage corporations to underwrite or fund staff members at various sites; this reduces the overall burden to any one entity and gives support to a pressing need at the Museum. Mr. Sibert reminded the Board that Trustees Members should support the Foundation; often grantor organizations look for 100% giving from Board Members as a sign of their strong support and engagement.

#### **OLD BUSINESS**

Mr. Card made a motion, seconded by Mr. Sibert, that the Board enter Closed session to discuss matters involving real estate and personnel. There was no discussion and the motion passed unanimously. All non-Board attendees left the room at 11:20 a.m. At 11:45 a.m., Mr. McDonough made a motion, seconded by Dr. Lanier that the Board end Closed session, and that no other matters were discussed. All Members affirmed verbally that no other matters were discussed, there was no discussion and the motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Vames presented a certificate of appreciation to Mr. George Dygert, who has finished his term on the Board of Trustees. Mr. Dygert has accepted an invitation to join the Board of Directors of the American Frontier Culture Foundation

#### **NEW BUSINESS**

No items of new business were brought forward.

**NEXT MEETING DATE**

The next meeting of the Board of Trustees will be Friday April 13, 2012 at 9 a.m. in the Dairy Barn Lecture Hall.

**ADJOURNMENT**

With no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 11:50 a.m.