



Visit Buffalo Niagara
Annual Members Meeting
Wednesday, February 8, 2023
Buffalo Niagara Convention Center

PRESENT: C. Abbott-Letro, M. Alnutt, T. Beauford, M. Brown, D. Castle, M. Chiazza, P. Kaler,
T. Long, K. Minkel, M. Roberts, D. Spasiano, H. Taran, G. Wells

ABSENT: J. Dandes, D. Gallagher, M. Glasgow, W. Paladino

STAFF: E. Healy, D. Marzo, R. Toney, J. Smith

GUEST: J. Fink

CALL TO ORDER: The annual members meeting was called to order by Board Chair, Mary Roberts at 3:05 p.m. Ms. Roberts welcomed Ms. Brown to the Board, who is serving as an appointment of the County Executive.

ELECTION OF DIRECTORS: Ms. Roberts presented the slate of directors proposed by the Executive Committee and asked for a motion to elect the slate for 2023:

Representatives of the Hotel Industry:

Matt Chiazza
Thomas Long
Huseyin Taran

At-Large Directors

Kimberley A. Minkel
Steven P. Ranalli
Donald Spasiano
Gail V. Wells

A motion was made by Ms. Abbott-Letro and seconded by Mr. Alnutt to elect the slate of directors as presented for 2023. Motion carried.

ADJOURNMENT: A motion was made by Mr. Spasiano and seconded by Mr. Alnutt to adjourn the annual members meeting. Motion carried and meeting adjourned at 3:08 p.m.

Minutes prepared by J. Smith

Approved: _____ /s/ Mary F. Roberts
Mary F. Roberts, Chair



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STAFF: E. Healy, D. Marzo, R. Toney, J. Smith

GUEST: J. Fink

CALL TO ORDER: Board Chair, Mary Roberts called the annual directors meeting to order at 3:09 p.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: A motion was made by Ms. Abbott-Letro and seconded by Ms. Minkel to approve the November minutes as presented. Motion carried.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS: Ms. Roberts presented the slate of officers proposed by the Executive Committee and asked for a motion to elect the slate for 2023:

Chair – Cindy Abbott-Letro
Vice Chair – Kimberley A. Minkel
Treasurer – Huseyin Taran
Secretary – Thomas Beauford, Jr.
Immediate Past Chair – Mary F. Roberts

A motion was made by Mr. Spasiano and seconded by Mr. Chiazza to elect the 2023 slate of officers as presented. Motion carried.

FINANCE REPORT: Mr. Marzo reviewed the financial statements for the year ended December 31, 2022. VBN ended the year with \$2.4 million in total assets. For the twelve-month period, VBN realized a decrease in net assets of \$448,749, ahead of budget by \$84,000.

For the year, total revenues were below budget by \$234,000. The majority of the variance is due to timing associated with the recognition of the PPP loan forgiveness which was recognized in 2021.

Expenses were under budget by approximately \$84,000. The reason for the variance in the expenses include open staff positions that were either filled later in the year or were not filled in 2022. The one position that was not filled is planned to be filled in the 3rd quarter of 2023. Also, several of the program lines items such as Convention Commitments came in under budget and those funds were reallocated to advertising, research, fam tours and tradeshow.

Mr. Marzo reported the Foundation and Sports Commission had minimal activity. The Foundation activity has centered around the mobile Visitor Center and the Paul Murphy Scholarship fund.

Mr. Marzo reported the audit is scheduled to begin the first week of March.

A motion was made by Mr. Beauford and seconded by Ms. Minkel to approve the financial statements as presented. Motion carried.

Q4/PRESIDENT'S REPORT: Mr. Kaler reviewed the Q4 reports and the year-end Smith Travel numbers:

- 2022 hotel revenue compared to 2021 saw a 35.4% increase year-over-year. While still in the Covid-19 recovery phase, Erie County saw a 12.6% increase over 2019 revenue.
- Hotel occupancy increased 15.0% over 2021 but remained 2.9% down from 2019. by the number of rooms sold for that time period.
- In 2022, Erie County saw significant growth year-over-year from 2021 with 17.2% increase in ADR as well as a 16.3% increase over 2019.
- RevPAR in 2022 increased 32.7% over 2021 and 12.8% over 2019.
- The airport passenger number for 2022 was 4,048,306, a 38.4% increase year-over-year, but is still lagging behind 2019 by 18.5%.
- In 2022 cross border traffic saw a 181.2% increase over 2021, however 2022 was still down 44.2% from 2019.

Year-end Sales metrics:

- In 2022, the VBN sales department's productivity in sales leads (558) increased 66.6% over 2021 but remained 24.4% below leads distributed in partners in Buffalo and Erie County.
- An 86.9% increase in lead room nights (308,507) were generated in 2022 over 2021, while a 19.4% decrease compared to lead hotel room nights 2019.
- Definite leads (332) in 2022 were 66.6% higher than in 2021 but paced 32.9% behind 2019.
- Definite rooms booked (152,684) in 2022 were 86.9% higher than in 2021 but were behind 2019 by 19.4%.

Mr. Kaler noted that many of our hotel properties are either closed or in transition with ownership (The Buffalo Grand, Millenium Hotel, Buffalo Marriott, Radisson Grand Island), which is impacting our ability to book business. Also, the Embassy Suites is going through a renovation and taking half of their rooms off-line through the year.

Year-end Marketing metrics:

- Website sessions in 2022 were 28.9% higher than sessions in 2021, and 0.9% higher than 2019.
- Page views increased by 33.1% from 2021 to 2022, and an increase of 0.5% for 2022 compared to 2019.
- VBN's video views in 2022 on all platforms were over 5 million, an increase of 1,394.8% over 2021 and 249.5% over 2019.
- The number of Touring Guide requests in 2022 were 15.9% higher in 2021 and 17.2% higher than 2019.

Q4 UPDATES: Mr. Kaler reported tradeshowes attended in Q4 include SportsETA, ESports Travel Summit, Society of Government Meeting Professionals and Empire State Society of Association Executives holiday

event. Mr. Kaler also reported we are being more strategic with group fam tours this year, and planning for smaller groups of targeted markets. In April we are hosting top meeting planners from the religious meetings market.

Mr. Kaler reported in 2022, VBN launched two new annual initiatives – Theater Month and Restaurant Week, both were very successful. VBN is currently creating individual video content for over twenty theater companies throughout Erie County for promotional purposes during Theater Month and through the year.

Restaurant Week surpassed all expectations with over 70 restaurants participating, and visitation to the Restaurant Week landing page generated over 100,000 views in one week. For 2023 we are planning spring and fall events.

In less than one year of operation, our mobile visitor center was a big success. The van, our staff and volunteers greeted and engaged with over 200,000 visitors and residents at 36 events since hitting the road in 2022.

Freedom Footsteps is on pause while sites in the corridor are under construction.

Mr. Kaler reported we are also working on the 2024 Eclipse taking place on April 8, 2024 from 2:34-3:37 p.m. Buffalo is right on the centerline and will be an excellent place to see totality. We are looking for activation sites throughout Erie County and organizing different events in conjunction with the eclipse. VBN will create a landing page of the different events and sites, safety information, etc.

Mr. Kaler reported we have begun working with Zartico, a data-collection platform which will help direct our overall marketing. Representatives from Zartico will attend a future Board meeting to do a presentation on the system.

Mr. Kaler recognized and thanked Jon Dandes, who is going off the Board after this meeting. Jon chaired the search committee for the VBN President position back when Patrick was brought in to fill that position, and he also chaired the search committee for the BNCC General Manager position. He has also been very involved in our efforts for getting the TID legislation passed. He also just signed on to chair the committee for the World Canal Conference in 2025. VBN is making a donation in Jon's name to ECMC and Explore & More.

Mr. Kaler recognized and thanked Mary Roberts, as outgoing Chair. Mary will continue on the Board as Immediate Past Chair. She has served as VBN/BNCC Chair for five years and was also a member of the search committee for the BNCC General Manager position. She also served on the steering committees that developed our Strategic Plans and the Tourism Master Plan. VBN is making a donation in Mary's name to the Martin House.

OTHER BUSINESS/ADJOURNMENT: There being no further business, a motion was made by Mr. Long and seconded by Mr. Spasiano to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 3:45 p.m.

Minutes prepared by J. Smith.

Approved: /s/ Mary F. Roberts
Mary F. Roberts, Chair