

President's Report

Good evening everyone! I extend my apologies for making you all attend ONE more virtual meeting, but as we were creating the spring and summer calendar, we were not anticipating that the rollout of the vaccine would be so quick nor the lifting of State restrictions so soon. I chided Becky in January that all the Trustees would be vaccinated long before the youngest of the Museum staff and we would be gathering without them! We both agreed that as a team we would not move forward without everyone. So, endure this virtual meeting one last time and I promise to be brief. I look forward to seeing you all in person very soon.

I am also going to extend a second apology if my remarks highlight the same topics as Becky's report. We wrote our remarks independently of each other, but we have discovered over the last 12 months of working together that we have the same thoughts, often simultaneously.

I sat in my kitchen, alternately staring at my computer screen and gardens trying to gather my thoughts about the remarks that I would make today. I do not believe there is a word in the English language that describes the last 12 months. At the onset of the pandemic when the cases rose and the restrictions rolled out, we 'pivoted'. When the second wave came in the fall, we talked about 'resilience'. But what is the word that captures the essence that one has stayed the course, sailed through a storm, and emerged, with an appreciation for things once taken for granted, perhaps transformed, perhaps stronger, but certainly the understanding that adversity and change can be an ally?

How did we stay the course?

Becky set a course for the Museum that allowed visitors to safely enjoy the Museum: visiting the house, enjoying our exhibitions and gardens, and lunching at Café Flo. A flexible schedule of working remotely kept staff members safe. We agonized over virtual meetings, but we were able to operate the museum and not one staff person or volunteer got sick.

Fearing the worse financially, a Finance Working Group, a subset of the Investment Committee, met monthly with Becky and Fred to review cashflow and discuss the possibility of having to take a supplemental draw from the endowment. We successfully applied for a PPP loan. There were budget revisions. The Development Office went into overdrive. The Garden Luncheon was replaced with a raffle that netted nearly as much as the luncheon and this year's raffle will net more than any of our previous Garden Luncheons. The Benefit was replaced with Benefit in a Box and the Auction went virtual. The Annual Fund exceeded its original goal set prior to the pandemic! At the end of the fiscal year, not one person was laid off nor had their hours

reduced, there was no supplemental draw from the endowment and the museum ended its fiscal year with a minor surplus. Shout of praise to everyone who made that happen!!

The Museum did not just hunker down for 15 months. The pandemic was a time to prepare, not pause. It was a time to strengthen our foundation. We took advantage of the winter and reduced visitor capacity to install Altru, a software system that will integrate the different departments to Blackbaud Edge, our financial hub. The new system will increase efficiency, provide better reporting, and allow us to make informed business decisions.

The strategic planning process, which paused with the closure of the Museum resumed in August under the leadership of Barbara Smith. Goals were approved at the December Board meeting. The staff went to work developing strategies and tactics over the winter and the plan was completed in May. It reflects the input of the staff, membership, and the board. It is our roadmap to the future and how far we go will be determined by an upcoming Feasibility Study.

We could not have weathered this period without the support of all of you. The staff kept the Museum open and safe. They continued to tell our story, bring art into our lives, educate us, and inspire us. For many, coming to the Museum to have lunch at Café Flo and wander through the gardens or the galleries was a sanctuary, a bit of normalcy in a surreal time. This collective group deeply cherishes this Museum and whenever we asked for assistance, you were there for the Museum. Thank you, for all you have done to sustain us.

There are two Trustees who are stepping away this year and they will be missed. Helen Kriebel's term ends this year. We do not have to look to far to see how Helen and her family have supported the Museum. During her term, Helen chaired the Collections Committee. In my short time as President, I have looked to Helen for support. Her knowledge of art collecting is immense. In front of everyone today, Helen, I am going to promise you that there will be more sculpture at the Museum. George Willauer has been a member of the board since 1979. He told me his first visit to the Museum was in 1962. I was five. He served as President of the Board of Trustees from 1983-1988 and most recently served on the Planning Committee. I am delighted that the Committee of has voted to make him an Honorary Trustee. George is our cheerleader and always has been.

It is with sadness and excitement that we say 'farewell' to Ted who is retiring. Ted, retirement is for volunteering, and volunteering means you will be busier than when you were working. Have fun and please answer our texts, especially if they begin with the word 'Help!'

Last year in my remarks at the Annual Meeting I posed “How does the pandemic alter the future of the Florence Griswold Museum? I said, “With careful stewardship of our resources, both human and capital, we will survive the temporary museum closure.” We did. I said, “Sustainability and the visitor experience have always been priorities for museums and will continue to dominate the conversation in the post-COVID world,” and they are reflected in two of our goals in the Strategic Plan and they incorporate what we have learned in the past year.

What awaits is a future that interprets our mission of ‘Fostering the understanding of Art, Landscape, and History’ and shares it with a wider audience. What awaits us is collaboration with other institutions to leverage our collection. What awaits us is the continued excellence in Educational Programs. What awaits us is the OPPORTUNITY to create a larger footprint in the world-perhaps one that includes additional gallery space to permanently display the Hartford Steam Boiler Collection or larger exhibitions, one that has expanded lecture space, an accessible archival library, and a year-round Café Flo. We have endured 15 months where our steps were small. If there ever was a time to think bigger, be bolder, and march onward it is now.

Thank you all, for all you have done for the Museum. Thank you in advance for what you will continue to do. It has been a pleasure to serve you.

Onward.