

A Members Message

by Gary Hall

I want to congratulate the new members to our board and acknowledge the existing members for their continued efforts in supporting our society.

As a 6-year board member of another non-profit corporation, I know how many hours of your time it takes every month to be an active member of a Board of Directors. I am here today to give you my thoughts about the museum and hopefully cause you to think about your roll in its success.

What is your roll? Why are you here? Why did you run for the Board of Directors? Was it to help us make good purchasing decisions? Help control costs, ensure we remodeled the facility? Do you have a goal? If you don't, I suggest you should, and I am going to suggest one to you.

But before I start I want to say something about the people here today. Everyone here cares about our society and the museum or they would not be here; they would be out riding in their boat or doing something else that they enjoyed. I think that it is an important thing to remember about everyone that belongs to this society and is active in one way or another.

Because a person may have a different viewpoint than another it does not mean they do not care about the museum or have less to contribute. In fact, the diversity of an organization such as ours is perhaps its greatest strength and should be fostered and supported to have the greatest chance for success.

Everyone should be treated with respect and consideration. With that said, again I want to say that I appreciate everyone's hard work on the Board and encourage you to voice your opinions and thoughts as you work to improve our society.

I do also understand the frustrations of being a Director in an organization in transition. What Transition? Well, the transition from being a relatively small startup organization with a founding person and only a relatively few active members to an ongoing non-profit organization whose structure is not dependent on any given person but rather continues to grow and prosper because of the way it goes about doing business....as people come and go over time.

Hopefully, everyone here agrees the society is in the business of running a museum. And like any other business, we can have great success or we can fail and be gone in time. While it is true we are not a "for-profit" business, we do need to raise money to pay the costs of acquiring and restoring our equipment. We want to improve the museum itself and we want to have fun while doing it. Because, after all, we are all volunteers, not paid staff. We are givers and supporters of the museum. Giving both our time and money to help accomplish our common goal. We are the most important asset the museum has!

I believe one of the most important things that sets business apart today is customer service. Great businesses provide great customer service. Failing businesses usually

want to, but don't know how. Boards I believe are no different. The only difference is that your customers are your membership. Yes, you make business decisions for them but they give you the power to do so by electing you. I suggest you need to think of us as your customers and like all businesses try not to get them to be "blown away" by your service but make them want to come back and bring their friends. As I said, the membership is your real asset.

Having said all that, what am I asking? I'm asking that, like the business who wants to provide good service but may not know what it looks like, or doesn't know how to provide it, that this Board set as a goal for the year 2000-2001 adjusting its procedures, policies and if necessary, the organizational structure itself. This can help ensure that our members feel like they are a valuable part of this organization and have a say in how it is run.

Many people have done more than just complain. Some have shown specific examples of problems and made specific recommendations for a way to fix them. These kinds of members are valuable. They, like us, are workers. They are trying to help in their own way.

We need to try and support these members in both words and actions. I am not suggesting every complaint is valid or that every idea is a good one. I am saying that I believe it is time for the organization to be more inclusive and to act in ways that suggest to our members we want to hear from you and support you if we can. Maybe we can't, but everyone needs to be treated with respect and given the opportunity to contribute if they can.

The very first thing this Board needs to do in my opinion is to set a firm calendar for meetings. Establish both the time and place of every meeting for the next 12 months. I also suggest that a good start in being inclusive would be to ask for suggestions and then make your decision based on the suggestions after getting that input.

Second, is to establish committees and then act on your committee's recommendations. If you really don't want advice then don't ask for it! The worst thing you can do is set up a committee, encourage their recommendations and then not implement them.

Each year the new Board should establish or re-establish the committees it feels are needed to meet its goals. I personally believe this is one of the responsibilities of the President. The President should recommend goals to the Board and then appoint the committees he or she needs. Chairpersons for each committee should be appointed and timelines/guidelines set for the committees. It is better to close a committee than to ignore its findings.

To that end, if this Board chooses to establish an organizational committee, I would like to volunteer to be on it and am willing to continue to be a member of the election committee if you wish.

In closing, I want to thank you for allowing me the time to speak and to encourage you to act on your thoughts.