

Martha's Vineyard Museum
Annual Meeting
August 17, 2009

Introduction:

Good afternoon. I want to welcome you to the Museum's annual meeting. As executive director of the Martha's Vineyard Museum, it is my pleasure to speak to you about the Museum's accomplishments in 2008/2009. It has been an extraordinary year. I am very proud and grateful for all the efforts that the staff and Board have exerted in repositioning this organization. As one museum supporter recently said to me after viewing our new exhibits, "you have truly become a Museum this year." She was speaking of the ongoing transition from being a Historical Society to that of a Historical Museum.

I want to speak to you about the successes, emerging opportunities, and challenges of the last 12 months. In speaking to members and the public—they all want to know how we have responded to such challenges as competing visions of the future, institutional debt, and a global financial crisis. In each case, the Museum has evaluated the situation and developed an action plan that is keeping with its over-all vision. Indeed, the Museum's 2008 turn-around efforts have resulted in increased admissions, positive buzz, and record contributions.

While we are facing the prospect of the recession stretching into 2010, I believe the Museum's renewed focus on mission, education and programming, collaboration, technology, and improved visitor access to collections and exhibits will grow our membership and support our fundraising efforts. We have a momentum, a clear message, and a new visibility that is engaging new audiences and energizing the existing membership. We are providing substantive programming and making the case for the Museum's future plans for expansion.

Over-View:

When I spoke to you in August 2008, the national economy was beginning to slow. The global credit crisis ended a 20 year period of museum building and historic growth in the United States. Yet, the recession continues to alter how American museums are planning for their future. At a recent professional webinar on museums and the recession, I was not surprised to learn that each of the 500 museum participants have experienced drops in endowment or budget cuts at their respective institutions (in the past 12 months).

The Martha's Vineyard Museum's own financial snap-shot is decidedly different. Despite the plummet of the stock market in the fall of 2008, the MVM paid off its debt and ended the year in the black. This is a remarkable achievement. In the first seven months of 2009, the Museum has seen evidence of a decrease in giving and a drop in corporate sponsorships. At the same time, however, the Museum has seen strong growth in admissions and sales and the sustaining of membership levels. I want to recognize the

work of the development department (led by Amy Houghton) in promoting the organization, developing a consistent communications approach, and hosting special events

What is going on here? I believe that the Museum's success is based on a vision and a set of program priorities that were implemented before and during the economic crisis. Specifically, I believe that the Museum's vision is that of a cultural organization that seeks to broaden its audience through collaboration with other organizations, innovative programming, and marketing. The Museum's priorities now focus on outreach, technology, and access to collections. We have all been challenged to grow admissions and develop a schedule of year-round programming and exhibits.

I am happy to report that the over-all health of the Museum (from admissions, to staff morale, to programs) is good in August 2009. I am also pleased to report that the over-all direction of the Museum (from board leadership, internal planning, and the hiring of a new ED) is good. Nevertheless, I believe the Museum still faces the immediate challenge of responding to a deep recession.

August 2008-August 2009

Let's turn to the last year. I would like to focus my comments on the issues of collaborative partnerships, community outreach, technology and access, future plans, and museum leadership.

Collaborative Partnerships:

The buzz word amongst museum professionals today is collaboration. With tight budgets and limited grant money, professionals are championing partnerships as an effective budget device. Because of the Island's high concentration of non-profits and a seasonal economy, the Museum has been seeking partnerships before 2008. With excellent collections and a skilled staff, it makes great sense to leverage our assets— of collections, skills, and expertise.

Island Affordable Housing:

The Museum is collaborating with Island Affordable Housing to work on the Bradley Memorial project in Oak Bluffs. Linsey Lee has been a critical player in establishing this unique partnership. In a bid to save the building that housed the first African-American church, the Museum has served as:

- Historical Advisor
- Grant partner
- Archivist of the papers and images in the building. Curator of key collection objects
- Future consultant on exhibit display

INSERT BRADLEY MEMORIAL PICTURE HERE

Preservation Trust: The Museum's relationship with the Preservation Trust has always been friendly and supportive. But, starting in 2008, we developed a combination pass that visitors could purchase that would allow access to both organizations' properties.

While providing visitors with a savings, the combo pass allowed both organizations to share in the costs of creating and advertising the pass and in the increased visibility.
INSERT PICTURE OF COMBO PASS OR VINCENT HOUSE

The establishment of the combo pass in 2008 has led to preliminary conversations about how the two organizations could really transform the visitor experience in Edgartown—to an all town experience/walk.

- Audio or Phone Tours
- Hanging Temporary Exhibits in Trust properties

Other Partnerships include:

- MV Schools—Professional Development and training of educators with primary documents (all grant funded)
- Edgartown Board of Trade—Wine Festival
- Chamber of Commerce—Lighthouse Challenge

PICTURE OF EVENTS

Community Outreach:

The Museum has redoubled its efforts at community outreach. Our goal is to remain socially relevant and to meet the needs and interests of a broad audience. It is central to our mission to document and present the history and heritage of the Island.

Brazilian Community: In 2009, the Oral History Center obtained grant money to interview members of the Brazilian community. Linsey Lee has developed a project that involves:

- Interviews in native language
- Translations
- Transcriptions

Wampanoag Tribe: The Museum has been consulting with the Tribe for several years about ways to develop or improve exhibit design and content as well as future programming. In 2009, the conversations have centered around the Museum's permanent exhibit on the Tribe. The Museum has determined to improve the visitor experience:

- signage, audio, exhibit display
- collections and content

Technology and Access:

To compete for Island visitors as well as with sister organizations, the Museum needs to improve its visitor experience. Museums have discovered that people have different learning styles and that they want to be able to choose what they want to learn. Thus, the Museum has been looking to use technology in existing exhibits, educational programming, and the web. Technology will allow the Museum to leverage its intellectual assets and reach a bigger audience.

Technology in the Exhibit Space:

In the past year, the Museum has sought to introduce technology into the exhibits when deemed appropriate. This push for technology has been funded by grant monies. The Museum's curators—Dana Street, Anna Carringer, Linsey Lee, and Nancy Cole—have set up listening stations...DVD viewing stations...touch screen technology for children...and improved signage. These are baby steps. But, we have noticed that visitors are staying longer in the exhibit space and making use of the technology

Technology-New England Whaling:

The Museum was awarded in 2008 a NEH grant to develop and launch on New England Whaling. The website uses the diary of a Vineyard girl on whaling vessel as its narrative focal point. But, surrounding this story is the story of New England Whaling. Education Director Nancy Cole has lead a team of web designers, writers, researchers, and curators. Content was considered. Design options evaluated.

- Beta Testing of the Website
- Additional Content and features will be added
- Live launch in 2010
- Accompanying Exhibit

PICTURE FROM LAURA PROJECT

Technology-Cross-Campus Catalog:

The Museum is in the process of evaluating the software and hardware needed for an all campus catalog that would be used for the collections. The catalog would replace the existing stand alone data bases in departments. Grant monies have been directed to support this initiative.

- Staff Access to Collections Information
- Standard cataloging Language
- Eventual Development of Online Public

Future Planning:

In 2008, the Museum decided to put the campaign on hold until the economy improved and decisions regarding the location and design of the Museum were resolved. When I last spoke to you, the Museum was evaluating the Town of Edgartown's offer to use the old Edgartown School. A Planning Committee was established and evaluated the space in terms of present/future space needs and the cost of a retro-fit.

In December 2008, the Board decided that it need more time for a thorough evaluation and passed on the offer. The Town issued an RFP on the School. And, the Museum's Board in April voted to reaffirm its decision to establish a presence on its property in West Tisbury. The Museum's Planning Committee will continue to evaluate its options and needs. The Development Committee will our campaign goals. And, as the economy improves, the organization will move forward on its plans to grow.

Leadership Change: Board Chair

At the Annual Meeting in 2008, Board member Elizabeth Beim was voted to become the new Board Chair. As the Board's senior vice-president, she succeeded Chris Morse. Mrs. Beim has a distinguished and lengthy career in museums and arts organizations.

Prior to her appointment, Elizabeth played a significant role in the MVM's development efforts, planning, and governance. She is a seasonal resident who divides her time between West Chop and New York. During her 12 months as Board Chair, she has stressed Board governance and over-sight, communications and transparency. Her leadership has been a key contributor to the Museum's forward movement.

Leadership Change: Executive Director

My decision to step down as executive director was reported to the Board in April 2009. To my relief, the search for the executive director went smoothly and quickly. I am very pleased with David Nathans' appointment and enjoyed speaking to him about a wide range of matters. I am confident that the Museum will be greatly served by David's energy, experience, and leadership.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, I want to thank you all for your support. Besides working with a wonderful staff and Board, I am very fortunate to be working for a highly motivated and knowledgeable membership. Your deep commitment to documenting the history and heritage of the Island helps to guide all of our actions as we move forward.

On a personal note, this will be my last annual meeting at the Museum. I am so blessed to have been able to work with such a dedicated group of museum professionals. They are so deeply rooted to the community and deeply committed to the Museum's mission. I have been humbled by their knowledge and their sacrifice. It has also been a privilege to work with such a skilled and focused Board.

I came to the Museum 4 years ago—June 2005. In that time, I have had the professional goal of improving the use and access of the Museum's collections. I began my efforts in the Museum's archives. And, in 2007, I assumed a leadership position and continued to champion-use and access. I believe that the Museum has taken great strides in that direction. I am going to deeply miss the people, history, and natural beauty of the Island. It has been an honor to work for such a vital organization.