

NIAGARA ERIE REGIONAL COALITION

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Tod A. Kniazuk

MEMORANDUM

To: Co-Chairs Clyde Burmaster & Kathy Konst

From: Tourism & Culture Chair David Lacki

Re: March and April, 2008 Meetings

Date: May 9, 2008

The Niagara Erie Regional Coalition Tourism & Culture Subcommittee met March 28, 2008 at the Buffalo Niagara Convention & Visitors Bureau (BNCVB) and April 18, 2008 at the Niagara Tourism & Convention Corporation (NTCC). Present for the March meeting were subcommittee members Lacki, Bereson (proxy by Patrick Fagan), Casale, Iannello, and Rath, as well as Regional Coalition Co-Chair Kathy Konst, BNCVB CFO David Marzo, and Music Is Art President Robby Takac. Present for the April meeting were subcommittee members Lacki, Bereson (proxy by Patrick Fagan), Casale, Dyster (proxy by Thomas DeSantis), Iannello, Lawson, O'Connor, and Percy.

New York State Music Fund:

The March meeting focused on closing out The Big Easy in Buffalo project. A final report was due to the New York State Music Fund on March 31, 2008 and so the subcommittee reviewed the draft report prior to its submission. Attached please find the final report – comprised of a narrative, music education supplement to the narrative, and spreadsheet.

Below is text of a memo distributed at the meeting, but not submitted as part of the final report:

"Instrument Donation Shortfall / Recommendation: As you'll see in the report, instrument donation was budgeted at \$69,000 and was based on ticket sales to the concerts. Actual ticket revenue was \$35,649. However, much of that needed to be diverted to covering shortfalls in sponsorships and unanticipated costs. Rather than simply buying an instrument with this, my recommendation is that this amount be donated to Music Is Art and act as the first component in their 2008 used instrument and new

instrument money drive. This drive can be called a creative solution to the shortfall in the grant.

Cost Overruns / Sponsorship Shortfalls: The gap between what we should have made and what we had left over can be attributed to a few key items.

- **Ticket Revenue:** We lost at least \$1,125 at the Pine Leaf Boys because of the Sabres home playoff game. The BNCVB anticipated being able to sell 400 ticket packages to the Preservation Hall Creole Christmas show for a total of \$9,200; they sold none. While we still sold well for the Mardi Gras Jam, bad weather probably cost us around \$1,250. One concert was canceled, costing us ticket revenue but saving us all expenses on the show, so we'll call that one a wash. **Total lost ticket revenue - \$11,575.**
- **Sponsorships:** All three organizations agreed to raise a total of \$55,000 in sponsorships or other income for the series. I personally raised \$2,250. Music Is Art through their partnership with Choco Logo raised \$435. Regional Coalition Co-Chair Kathy Konst donated \$100. This is a total of \$2,785. To be fair, Regional Coalition members did provide approximately 10 leads. Through one of the Coalition member agencies we solicited sponsorship from 50 additional companies/foundations, and I – along with the BNCVB Foundation – wrote an additional five grants. None of these efforts led to sponsorship. More troubling was the reluctance of any of the agencies or partners to personally solicit, citing conflicts with other funding efforts. While this is understandable, it is in conflict with the agreement made to raise sponsorship dollars. **Total lost sponsorship revenue - \$52,215.**
- **Unanticipated Costs:** The past executive coordinator of Music Is Art assured the group that she could secure the venues and backline for the concerts at no cost. This was not the case, resulting in venue costs of \$8,137 and backline costs of \$6,200. In addition, while the BNCVB was able to secure a greatly reduced hotel rate, no costs were budgeted for hotel leaving a gap of \$4,836. On the other hand we were able to keep transportation costs to under \$750 and keep catering costs down thanks to personal donations by Ted Kniazuk and others. **Total unanticipated costs - \$19,173.**

All the unanticipated costs except venues were totaled under the artist fee line, for which we were supposed to have \$110,000 (but remember half of this was from sponsorships). Even with those

costs, had we raised full sponsorships we would have finished over \$9,000 under budget. Since we did not raise the sponsorships, we finished over \$43,000 in the red. Additionally, venue costs came out of the ticket revenue line. It was anticipated that all other non-compensatory hard costs would come from the grant, totaling \$8,000. We spent an "extra" \$3,144 here, all of it on marketing.

So, we had to cut other expenses to finish in the black at all. Specifically, all three partners were only paid half of the amount budgeted to them. The Regional Coalition and Music Is Art lost \$5,000 each, while the BNCVB Foundation lost \$3,500. All agencies are to be commended for fully executing the program for half the compensation.

Contributions and Thanks: Despite all these issues, overall I truly believe we had a very positive impact through this project. That is thanks to the hard work of all of our member agencies. While not comprehensive, the following is a snapshot of some of the efforts made by each group:

BNCVB Foundation:

- Fiscal management
- Poster printing for three shows
- Flyer distribution for two shows
- Logo design
- Loan for final show
- Chairmanship of Regional Coalition Tourism & Culture Subcommittee
- Web presence
- Marketing of Creole Christmas package
- Attendance at shows
- Securing hotel at reduced rate

Music Is Art:

- Ten music education programs
- Web presence
- Mailing (printing and postage) to over 100 schools
- Attendance at shows
- Revenue donation through Choco Logo partnership
- MC at Mardi Gras Jam

Niagara Erie Regional Coalition:

- Project management
- Flyer printing at reduced cost for eight shows
- Four mailings (printing and postage) for sponsorship, media
- Interns from UB, NU

Flyer distribution for all shows
Website design, hosting, and maintenance
Oversight of project
Staff assistance for mailings, printing, etc.
Attendance at shows
Group sales for two shows
Sponsorships
Securing volunteers for driving, day of show prep, etc.
Advancing of payments for hotel, catering, ground transport, etc.

Finally, Ted Kniazuk was thanked for his efforts to help make the project successful. Without taking a dime, he put in 18 hour days on show days driving the bands, hauling in the catering, and doing anything and everything else needed – not to mention putting up flyers, using his own car to save a rental, and doing things like making up our own deli trays to save some money on catering. Of course there were many other people who helped along the way, but quite simply without him this would have been next to impossible.”

Issues regarding expense reimbursement and outstanding accounts payable were discussed and resolved. The three partnering agencies agreed to forgo the third and fourth quarter payments due to them, and with that the project will finish in the black.

The overall sentiment of the subcommittee was that the project was a success and was a positive thing for our area. Subcommittee member Iannello stressed that we need to continue doing things like this for the region, and that we should do this again bigger and better – and smarter. The group also thanked Coalition Executive Director Tod Kniazuk for his efforts.

At the April meeting it was shared that Music Is Art is indeed moving forward with their instrument donation drive, and that they will be seeking funds for “The Big Easy in Buffalo 2nd Annual Mardi Gras Jam.”

The Niagara Erie Regional Coalition Tourism & Culture Subcommittee, Buffalo Niagara Convention & Visitors Bureau Foundation, and Music Is Art agreed to donate net proceeds from The Big Easy in Buffalo to Music Is Art as part of their 2008 instrument donation drive.

Tourism Infrastructure:

On March 13, 2008 several Regional Coalition members attended a roundtable with the new executive director and board chair of the New York State Council on the Arts and with area mayors. At the meeting it was noted that there is a portion of the state’s upstate

economic development fund earmarked for culture and tourism. Discussion at the meeting turned to using a portion of the money for tourism infrastructure such as signage or transportation. The NYSCA representatives were receptive to this idea, and so it was taken up by the subcommittee.

One of the key points coming out of the NYSCA meeting was that tourism infrastructure, while important, does not have a single “responsible” entity for its implementation. Signage, for instance, is the responsibility of a myriad of localities, counties, the state, and agencies. There are agencies responsible for public transportation, but not focused on the visitor and their unique needs. This is an area of opportunity for the Regional Coalition as there is a clear need for coordination and for one agency to steer the projects.

It was cautioned that signage especially is a complex problem and one that is not easily solved. As such, it was suggested that one or two pilot communities be chosen, while also working on an overall plan. Likewise, for transportation it may be right to try to implement an immediate solution like our past Tourist Express while ultimately working toward a long term solution such as express rail.

A strength of the Regional Coalition is that it has almost all of the important players together already. We need to continue to work with NYSCA, and need to bring NYSDOT to the table.

Other issues may be added to the agenda as well. Adequate parking and turnarounds for buses was one issue raised. Even the new inner harbor project in Buffalo lacks this important feature.

One issue that was stressed by the subcommittee is that we will not pursue this funding if it is in competition with the funding pools of the priority lists of the two counties. So, the next step is to contact NYSCA to clarify funding, then if it’s a go develop modeling for signage, short term ground transit with a long term rail plan, and design signage to connect the two counties.

The Niagara Erie Regional Coalition Tourism & Culture Subcommittee is seeking concept approval to develop a tourism infrastructure proposal in conjunction with NYSCA, pending clarification of funding sources.

Other Topics:

Other topics discussed included developing the agenda for the May 9 general meeting, Niagara Falls’ national historic park designation, and the strong attendance at the subcommittee meetings this year.