

BTA BOARD MEETING (Virtual)

10/1/21

Present: President Chris Riehl (Rent-A-Tour), Treasurer Mike Haynie (Maryland Center for Hospitality Training), Secretary Dana Kirn (Maryland Zoo), Membership Chairs Allison Bruce (Fogo de Chao) and Dana Twardowski (McCormick & Schmicks), Marketing Chairs Jen McIIwain (Miss Shirleys) and Caitlin Feeley (Event Select Group), Outreach Co-Chair Danielle Emich (Fairfield Inn), Community Outreach & Engagement Mia Blom (Visit Baltimore), Advisors Rich Gilbert (Office of Maryland Tourism) and Eric Masterton (Visit Baltimore)

Absent: Vice President Scott Barr (National Aquarium), Outreach Co-Chair Rebecca Gisriel (Hotel Monaco)

Open Seat: Legislative & Bylaws

Chris called the meeting to order at 10:16am. First on the agenda was the approval of last month’s meeting minutes. Mia noted that her last name was misspelled and commented that it is Blom, not Bloom. Caitlin always noted that her name was also misspelled and commented that the misspelling has a “y” instead of an “i”. Chris asked for a motion to pass. Mia made a motion to accept pending the corrections. Dana will make those corrections. Rich seconded.

Next on the agenda was the Visit Baltimore and BTA FAM tour taking place this upcoming week. Chris thanked Danielle and Rebecca for all of their hardwork to get it pulled together. Chris presented the FAM’s itinerary. Chris said that the four tour operators will be arriving at Baltimore Penn Station. RMA Transportation will provide transportation during their stay. Chris plans to escort them as much as he can but urges the board to try to attend as many events as possible while they are in town. Eric commented that Visit Baltimore does have a budget for the FAM but he is grateful for the amazing hotel rates that the partners have provided for their stay. Chris noted that the only thing that may still be up in the air is lunch on their last day. Eric commented that he would like for it to be one of the markets but after discussion R House may be the better option since he can provide gift cards for them to use and R House is closer to Penn Station for their departure. Chris asked Mike if he could obtain the BTA debit card to use if needed. The budget for the FAM is $2K but if additional funds are needed BTA does have the funds to cover. Mike will make arrangements to meet Chris. Chris and Eric commented that attraction sites are comped but food and hotels will be compensated accordingly based on group rates. The tour operators will be given some BTA bags provided from the BTA collateral stuffing. Eric added that the FAM will also have a disclaimer and that a covid condition clause should also be accompanying the disclaimer. Chris concluded that he has spoken to the tour operators and they are excited about visiting Baltimore.

The last item on the agenda was Board Elections. Rich is the chair for the Nominating Committee and Nora Campbell (National Aquarium) and Deacon Vito (St. Mary’s Spiritual Center) are the committee members. Mike made a motion to approve the Nominating Committee for board elections and Mia seconded it. Chris next reported that the current Executive Board meets to recommend the incoming executive board: Dana Kirn – president, Allison Bruce – vice president, Mike Haynie – treasurer, Jen McIIwain – Miss Shirleys. Rich acknowledged that the Nominating Committee has received and has approved the recommendation by the Executive Board. Rich will present the ballot at the next BTA General Meeting on October 14. Rich will also announce at the meeting that floor nominations are also accepted. Chris thanked Rich for all of his help and chairing the committee. Chris also thanked the current executive board who is rotating out and those who may be rotating in. Chris said BTA is going to be OK.

Committee Reports

Vice President – In Scott’s absence, Chris reported that the next meeting will be held at the Babe Ruth Museum. Chris noted that Maryland Sports Director Terry Hasseltine was expected to speaker about upcoming sports events coming to Maryland but unfortunately he is currently dealing with a private family matter and will not be able to speak that morning. Chris suggested a packaging workshop instead. Rich commented that Ashley Kudrow may be a good replacement for Terry so Chris will reach out to see if she is available to address the group. Allison reminded that board that the Babe Ruth Museum has not signed up as a member yet. Chris said he will get with Shawn Herne to take care of that.

Treasurer Mike presented the Treasurer’s report. BTA currently has $28,754.56 in the bank and $417 was spent in the month of September. Chris stated that a meeting between Finance and Membership is expected to occur to see if BTA could receive Cares Act funding. Mike thinks BTA fits the profile and it may be a great way to provide an educational scholarship or another good cause.

Marketing chairs Jen McIIwain and Caitlin Feeley provided the Marketing report. BTA is seeing more engagement with LinkedIn and Instagram than Facebook. Emails via Mail Chimp is also still receiving great open rates and clicks. Jen commented that the emails also now have been authenticated which keeps emails from going to spam accounts. The marketing team is also meeting with Liz Caprini who helped BTA with its new design. The board asked if any changes should be sent to the team but marketing asked for everyone to wait and review BTA’s website once the current changes on the list have been made.

Membership Chairs Allison Bruce and Dana Twardowski was thanked by everyone for throwing a great membership drive at the Canopy. Allison thanked Marketing for making the website adjustments so the membership renewal link can be sent out to everyone. Allison noted that some folks are getting new jobs and this is rotating into new members. Dionne Wilkes is going to the new Springhill Suites at 400 Fayette Street and Michelle Torres will be at Guinness. Rich added that Renee Ullman is the contact for the new Marriott that is getting ready to open at Owings Mills next to the Metro Station. Allison thanked Chris for being the host of hosts at the Membership Drive at the Canopy. Chris confirmed it was a great night with great prizes. Chris also presented that he was given a framed Governor’s Citation for Charmtastic Mile.

Outreach Chair Danielle reported that they were at MMA this past Monday. Danielle said it was a great group leader show. Danielle thanked Rich for all of his hard work. Danielle reminded everyone that they will be at the Greater New Jersey Motorcoach Association show next Thursday, October 7. Danielle said that they may need to stuff more bags but that is a good problem to have. The MARS show in Myrtle Beach will be about 30-35 bags of the blue bags. Chris asked about the mood of the show and Danielle said that the tour operators are ready to go! Rich said that most operators are providing tours at outdoor sites like Ocean City. Rich said that Superior Tours requires all passengers to wear masks but other companies are not following that policy. Toby’s Dinner Theatre is operating along the policy of Broadway asking everyone to show proof of vaccination. Enthusiasm is starting to build. Chris thanked Rebecca and Danielle again for putting the FAM together.

Community Outreach & Engagement Chair Mia Blom, provided a link in the chat for Baltimore City Public Schools and Business volunteers. Mia reported that she and Allison are meeting next week to form a student BTA membership. Mia commented that there are less than 600 students in the hospitality industry. Mia said there will be more updates to come. Mia also reminded everyone that the ban on plastic bags in Baltimore City is now in effect. There was discussion about what BTA can do moving forward to accommodate tour operators but with solutions that were sustainable. Allison suggested a thumb drive but Rich commented that too many operators fear cyber viruses and other prefer paper. The board will continue to pursue better options.