

**MINUTES OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MEETING
OF THE GURNEE VILLAGE BOARD**

**GURNEE VILLAGE HALL
APRIL 25, 2021**

Call to Order

Mayor Hood called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Other Officials in Attendance

Patrick Muetz, Village Administrator; Austin Pollack, Assistant to the Administrator; John Kavanagh, Fire Chief; Ellen Dean, Economic Development Director; Dave Douglass, Battalion Chief; Jodi Luka, Management Analyst

Roll Call

PRESENT: 5- Ross, O'Brien, Balmes, Thorstenson, Woodside
ABSENT: 1- Garner

Pledge of Allegiance

Mayor Hood led the Pledge of Allegiance.

A. DISCUSSION
ITEMS

1. Lake County, Illinois Convention & Visitors Bureau and "Big Three" report on tourism, business developments and upcoming season operations:

Maureen Riedy – President, Visit Lake County

Maureen Riedy, President of Visit Lake County (VLC) Convention and Visitors Bureau, reviewed a Power Point presentation with the Board. She started by reviewing the Board of Directors for VLC, which includes representation from Gurnee. She stated VLC serves the entire County and as a regional service provider it is eligible for funding from the State of Illinois. VLC is also receiving some ARPA funding which has helped it to continue to market Gurnee and other communities. Ms. Riedy then reviewed VLC's shift in marketing strategies as a result of the pandemic. Adjustments included reaching out to support local hospitality businesses and workers, shifting to a more local focus, inspiring residents to rediscover their hometowns and neighboring communities, launching seasonal marketing campaigns and leveraging social media, blogs/its website.

Ms. Riedy then reviewed digital marketing campaign and statistics related to promoting Gurnee. She discussed social media posts created by VLC and the tie-in to Gurnee. As it relates to blogs last year, Gurnee was mentioned 198 times.

Next, seasonal campaigns were reviewed including Spooks & Spirits Fall campaign, Holiday campaign, Lake County Libation Trail, Lake County Restaurant Week and Summer Marketing campaign. Ms. Riedy also stated the Visit Lake County Visitors Map Guide will once again be published rather than a full Visitors Guide.

VLC continues to focus on Group Sales initiatives. This includes recruitment of sports tournaments, meetings, reunions and tour groups. Over the past year there were 68 referrals for Gurnee venues. She stated this is very strong given the uncertainty last year. Currently meeting planners are actively sourcing RFPs with 80% holding meetings in next 6 months.

Ms. Riedy said travel and hotel outlook for northern Lake County is trending in the right direction. She believes the summer season will be very strong and Gurnee is well positioned to benefit from that.

Ms. Riedy concluded by thanking the Village of its continued support. She stated Gurnee is a key partner and has been a strong supporter for many years.

Mayor Hood asked what more Gurnee could do to assist VLC and increase Gurnee's exposure. Ms. Riedy stated additional restaurants and restaurant participation would be beneficial. She stated the partnership with the Village and the "Big Three" has been excellent.

SIX FLAGS

John Krajnak – Park President, Six Flags Great America

John Krajnak, Park President Six Flags Great America, reviewed a PowerPoint presentation with the Board.

Mr. Krajnak stated 2021 was a very stressful, but strong year for the Park. He stated attendance and revenue exceeded 2019 figures. In 2022, the DC Universe will be a highlight in the Park. This newly themed section will include five rides which have been rebranded and improved. In addition, facilities that were previously not used have been removed to open up the area and improved the aesthetics.

He continued to state a focus in 2022 will be to improve and elevate the guest experience. This includes improving wait times with digital wait-time board and single-rider lines to eight attractions. Mr. Krajnak stated that Roaring Rapids, which has been closed since 2019, will be reopened this year. In addition, two rides will be run backwards in 2022 which is always popular with guests. There is also a new DC merchandise store which will be opened. New guest amenities include shade structures in midway and queue lines, new and additional benches, tables and deck chairs, additional funbrellas and trash cans, and a repaved parking lot. He continued to state that substantial landscape improvements have been made to help improve the appearance.

Another focus in 2022 will be to improve food quality and offerings. New culinary concepts throughout the Park include Dole Whip, Oreo funnel cake, buffalo chicken mac and cheese, pulled pork mac and cheese and hot Cheetos mac and cheese. Capone's will be rebranded and improved to include a full-service bar and outdoor patio.

Mr. Krajnak continued to state that there is a renewed effort to elevate park cleanliness and friendliness. Both of these are a priority for him. He stated these goals have been heavily incorporated into employee training and overall operations. Staffing will need to be increased before the Park opens for daily operations. Efforts are underway to hire additional staff.

He closed by expressing his appreciation for VLC and its dedication. He stated it is innovative and creative. Its efforts have greatly contributed to recovery in the area. He stated the partnership with VLC has never been more important than it is now.

Trustee Thorstenson asked what Gurnee could do to further help the Park. Mr. Krajnak stated the communication with the Village has been very strong and that is key to success. He stated he appreciates that and said keeping communication constant and open will help the Park prosper.

Trustee O'Brien stated when he worked at the Park 41 years ago friendliness and cleanliness was also a priority, though different acronyms were used. He is happy to see the renewed focus.

GURNEE MILLS

Randy Ebertowski – General Manager, Gurnee Mills

Randy Ebertowski, General Manager Gurnee Mills, reviewed a PowerPoint presentation with the Board. He started by saying Gurnee Mills has very strong customer traffic, retailer sales, occupancy and new and exciting stores opening. All of these areas are exceeding 2019 figures. Mr. Ebertowski then highlighted a few new tenants at the Mall including Top Shelf Ice Arena, 2nd & Charles and Hobby Lobby.

He then shared information about the 23rd Annual Fire Safety Expo and the Tunnels to Towers 9/11 Never Forget Mobile exhibit. Mr. Ebertowski stated this is a very big event for the property. The exhibit will be on display at Gurnee Mills from Friday, May 13th through Sunday, May 15th. The exhibit includes a high-tech, 83-foot

tractor-trailer that transforms into a 1,100 square foot exhibit to further educate people across the country about the events of September 11, 2001. The exhibit will be escorted by Illinois state Trooper and several fire agencies as it arrives at the property. It will be located in Parking Lot E.

Mr. Ebertowski concluded by thanking VLC for all of its support and efforts to market the Mall.

GREAT WOLF LODGE

Nadine Miracle – General Manager, Great Wolf Lodge (GWL)
Jim Franz – Director of Human Resources, Great Wolf Lodge Illinois

Nadine Miracle, General Manager Great Wolf Lodge, and Jim Franz, Human Resources Director, reviewed a PowerPoint presentation with the Board.

Ms. Miracle started by reviewing the keys to creating a successful brand for GWL which includes safe operations, satisfied people and sustained profits. The property navigated the pandemic by focusing on these areas for both guests and pack members. Staffing challenges have also been an issue for GWL. She stated closures resulted in the loss of employees. Ms. Miracle stated that Mr. Franz will share with the Village Board the efforts underway to ensure staffing is in place and retained to meet guest demands.

Mr. Franz stated GWL employs between 500 and 600 pack members and is strongly committed to this valuable resource. He stated the Gurnee property is utilized for company-wide initiatives since the headquarters are located in Chicago. This has been a great benefit to the property. Training has been expanded, inclusion and diversity programs have been improved and employee development initiatives have been expanded. In addition, marketing efforts for employment have increased. He stated there are currently 19 GWL locations, this will be expanding in the future. As it relates to wages, GWL Gurnee has invested over \$1 million in wage improvements, which is a dramatic increase aimed at attracting and retaining talent.

Ms. Miracle next reviewed efforts towards elevating the brand in 2022. She stated there are very exciting announcement planned for three weeks out, but she will share a few new initiatives this evening. Creating a demand to visit Great Wolf Lodge throughout the year is very important to the property. Events such as Spring Breakout, Summer Camp In and Howl-O-Ween are specialty occasions that attract families. Ms. Miracle stated as a brand Great Wolf Lodge is turning 25 years old this year. There will be a substantial amount of focus around this. Another focus is group sales initiatives. Group sales have been rebranded to “Reunite Your Pack”. Great Wolf staff members from across the county recently held a planning session at the Gurnee location to brainstorm ideas. This included catering to sports groups and corporate teambuilding. Birthday and bar mitzvah celebrations have also become a positive addition to lodge events in the past few years.

Next Ms. Miracle reviewed business performance, both pre- and post-pandemic. She stated staffing challenges, housing of navy recruits and a decision to not fully open the property impacted 2020 and 2021 performance. Compared to 2019, average rates and on-site spending have both performed very well. First quarter 2022 performance has met aggressive budget projections despite limiting occupancy due to staffing. Recruitment efforts as of late have been very good. She stated Great Wolf should be fully open at 100% occupancy by May 15th.

Ms. Miracle ended by recognizing the efforts of VLC. She stated it's important to communicate Gurnee is a destination location, especially since most people associate Great Wolf with Wisconsin Dells. VLC assists in these efforts.

Trustee Thorstenson stated she is excited to hear the updates and has a multi-family celebration coming up that she plans to book at Great Wolf.

Mayor Hood commended the leadership of Visit Lake County and the Big Three. He stated it is a strong relationship that relies heavily on strong communication.

Adjournment

It was moved by Trustee Balmes, seconded by Trustee O'Brien to adjourn the meeting.

Voice Vote: ALL AYE: Motion Carried.

Mayor Hood adjourned the meeting at 8:04 p.m.

**Andy Harris,
Village Clerk**