

## Executive Director Annual Meeting remarks, July 27, 2020

Thank you Stever, I want to echo your heartfelt thanks to Phil Wallis, without whose vibrant energy and gregarious warmth, we could not have opened our new Museum last year.

I am humbled by the staff and Board's trust in me to serve the Museum as the interim Executive Director in these, shall we say, unusual times. I'll admit that looking back at 2019 has been an almost dizzying experience – it feels like a lifetime ago on a completely different planet. You can see it in the surreal images of 600 people enjoying a concert in the Bodman Courtyard, of 534 huddled under a tent hanging on Steve Ewing, Michele Norris and David McCullough's every word and of 819 kids on a windy Halloween night, including my own Queen Elsa, exploring the Museum's galleries in search of tricks and treats. Not 6 inches never mind 6 feet between us. A lifetime ago. A different planet?

It's clear that none of us knew what was to come, and yet – in the extraordinary success of 2019, we sowed seeds, built community, earned trust and gained recognition that is sustaining us in these strange times.

So I want to touch briefly on the seeds of success planted in 2019 that will continue to bear fruit for MVM as we navigate our new normal – whatever that phrase might come to mean.

1. We learned how important it is to be open to feedback. It probably won't surprise you to hear that a few of you had opinions to share as we opened our new Museum. And we recognize how powerful that is – 100s of people in this community were invested enough in our success to reach out and say "I was delighted by, I was surprise by, I was disappointed by..." By fall, we formalized the process and sent out surveys to staff, volunteers, docents, Board and members. We spent hours each week in September and October analyzing the feedback, honing in on the trends and patterns we discovered, and formulating an update to our strategic plan. You'll hear more about that soon, as covid has sent it through the blender again, but the themes we identified will shape the future of who we are as an institution – inclusion, excellence and sustainability.
2. The second seed of success was a recognition early in 2019 that we wanted to ensure our Museum was as accessible as possible for everyone in our community. We worked with, among others, the Mass Cultural Council, Museums for All, Island Wide Youth Collaborative, Vineyard Health Care Access, and the Island Disability Coalition. And staff and volunteers spent a day long (in person – not Zoom, imagine that!) workshop discussing implicit bias and exploring how to continually live up to our diversity, equity and inclusion goals. Cronig's and Cape Cod 5 helped to ensure that price was never a barrier to visiting. In the 25,438 visitors, we saw in 2019 – we know the demographics don't map directly onto the demographics of the island's seasonal or year round population and we've started to take steps to change that. What excites us though is that there is only room to grow. We had a 365% increase in visitors to the Museum in

2019. And if everyone who could or would ever visit the Museum came in 2019, our future trajectory would be pretty flat. But as we move forward, even with social distancing restrictions in place, our potential for growth is enormous and remaining focused on access will allow us to live up to that potential.

3. Our third seed of success is the role we play in sharing Vineyard history with island schoolchildren. Two thirds of year round kids visited the Museum at least once during the school year for a total of 2,479 interactions. As many of you recognize, this might be one of the most important ways we carry out our mission – giving children growing up here in the summers and year-round a connection to their community, a sense of place and a sense of identity. The Museum builds both compassion and empathy and teaches children that our Island's stories are complex and nuanced. Throughout 2019 we could hear the happy sounds of 1<sup>st</sup> graders singing the lighthouse song, middle schoolers learning the heath hen mating call and high school kids dressed in their Gatsby-era best exploring the Museum's galleries. 71% of student interaction with the Museum was through field trips, so obviously, our education program will look different this fall – but our education motto remains the same: touch the past, play in the present and shape the future. And shaping the future they are - as throughout 2020, we've seen island children deeply committed to making the world a better place and calling out injustice and inequity whenever they see it.

In conclusion, I mentioned the themes of our strategic plan: inclusion, excellence and sustainability. I'm confident that even as we adapt and pivot and grapple with complex issues of community and belonging, throughout 2019 (and now 2020) we have strengthened our capacity to deliver on every one of them. We are so excited to reopen the Marine Hospital building next week, our second "opening" in the last year and half. I encourage you all to come visit. Not only do art and culture nourish the soul in challenging times, but the history within our walls will remind you that the Vineyard has lived through hard times before, adjusted, and turned trials into an opportunities to thrive.

Before I turn it over to our Treasurer, Dale Garth, I want to thank our members and donors – our Annual Report was 8 pages longer for 2019, reflecting the huge increase in the number of supporters that we saw...we need you more than ever, so please be as generous as you can in 2020!