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Executive Directors Message

Peaks and Valleys by Kristen Laird

"NOTHING GREAT WAS EVER ACHIEVED WITHOUT ENTHUSIASM."
- RALPH WALDO EMERSON

The year was 1962. JFK was president, John Glenn orbited the world in Friendship 7, the Cuban Missile Crisis had brought the world to the brink of nuclear war and the Russians had just surprised us with Sputnik. Americans everywhere started to question the status of science education in America. That same year, an ad was placed in a local newspaper that read, "anyone interested in organizing a Hands-On Science Museum on Long Island is invited to the home of Doris Leonard."

Leonard believed that a greater understanding of scientific principles was essential to meet the challenges of the time and the 22 people who showed up at her house in Sands Point agreed. All of them saw a cultural and educational need for a community wide facility dedicated to science enrichment. That meeting would be the start of the Science Museum of Long Island (then called the North Shore Jr Science Museum).

The founders were an energetic, talented, and determined group of people brought together by a common cause. Within a year's time they had formed an organization, became chartered by the New York State Board of Regents, and began to develop what at the time was considered avant-garde concepts for a hands-on Science Museum. They were willing to get their hands dirty and do the hard work, but they would still face many obstacles along the way.

They say that the greatest obstacle any organization faces is fear and when I first arrived at SMLI two years ago we were, in many ways, an organization that was crippled by it. In 2015, the Science Museum was dangerously close to closing its doors and the memory of that time still haunted our hallways.

In some ways the fear had prepared us to weather the storm we were about to face in March of 2020. Cautious spending left us in a considerably better financial position than we had been in 2015 and with the reserves we would need to survive the first year of the Covid pandemic.

In the first fiscal year of the pandemic, 2019-2020, SMLI suffered a financial loss of \$170,000 and the budget for the fiscal year of 2020-2021 was projecting an even greater loss of \$270,000. At this point in time, it would have been both easy and understandable for us to continue living in fear, but I am proud to report that we were able to put the fear aside and set a course for progressive change and growth.

The pandemic forced us to get creative and find different tools as a means of survival. Instead of fear, we approached these new challenges with innovation and a shared enthusiasm for the future. Instead of catapulting ourselves back into the dark ages we gained the self-confidence, inspiration and support necessary to forge ahead. We put in the hard work and long hours and propelled ourselves into what can only be called a renaissance or rebirth.

We found new and innovative ways to adapt and continued to provide science education that emphasized learning by doing, both virtually and in-person, with new safety protocols in place. We developed new programs and expanded some of our core programs. We rediscovered the value of the preserve as an outdoor classroom setting and safe place for the community to gather. Despite the challenges we faced over this last year, we continued to surpass benchmarks and reach new heights.

One of things I am most proud of is the rapid expansion of membership and the renewed interest in the Science Museum within the community resulting in numerous new partnerships and alliances. It is extremely gratifying to have attracted so many new and different people with so many talents, interests, and capabilities who are excited by our potential. They brought new life to our organization, enriched our efforts, and have enhanced our growth.

There are many parallels between our beginning and where we stand today. The pandemic and climate change have reminded the world that our future fate rests in the little hands of our future scientists. Once again, it has become clear that science ignorance is no longer compatible with responsible citizenship. Like our founders, we have an extremely dedicated & talented Board of Trustees who have put in countless hours and often backbreaking work to achieve our goals at a lightning pace. This growth would have not been possible without the time and effort extended by our enthusiastic, resourceful, and hard-working board and our imaginative, friendly, and energetic staff who bring science alive each day.



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There have been numerous peaks and valleys on this journey. That we were able to cope successfully with these major challenges and still achieve such high levels of performance is remarkable but with success comes new financial, administrative, and professional problems. If we have learned anything from trustee Ken Kamler, it is that as we get closer to our summit, the inclines will only get steeper, and the stakes will only get higher. I believe that if we can continue to stay inspired and progress both cautiously and steadfastly towards our goals that 2021 -2022 will be another year of dynamic growth surpassing anything we could have imagined two years ago.

It is true that it takes a village, and I am extremely honored to lead this village at this moment in time. I want to thank our awesome staff, unusually dedicated Board of Trustees, amazing fundraising committees and the many volunteers and friends of the museum for their support, encouragement, and faith in our mission and in me. If our founders could see us now, I believe they would be exhilarated by all the progress we have made and excited to see the future of the Science Museum of Long Island unfold.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kristen Laird". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'K' and a long, sweeping tail.

Kristen Laird
Executive Director
Science Museum of Long Island