



REPORT BY THE COMMUNITY RELATIONS COMMITTEE

December 2021

SUMMARY

The Lost Colony enjoyed one of its most successful seasons in 2021, after enduring one of the most challenging times of its 84-year history.

By every external measure, the 2021 season was a success. Revenue, ticket sales and audience numbers hit levels not seen in nearly a decade. Average nightly attendance increased almost 20 percent – to 646 from 540 in 2019. The audience averaged over 600 per night for the first time since 2013. Gross ticket revenue increased 25 percent, despite fewer shows than 2019 due to weather and the Covid-related cancellation of the final week of the season.

The Roanoke Island Historical Association recruited a new General Manager and a new Director. We began a partnership with the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina to make the show more historically accurate and culturally authentic. We recruited Native American cast and crew members. We began reimagining and refreshing the show to appeal to modern audiences.

Despite these successes, RIHA has received complaints and critical comments from some cast and crew members and other individuals in the local community involved in the 2021 production or in past shows. Negative comments have appeared online and in the local media.

The Community Relations Committee was appointed by the board's executive committee to review the comments and report to the board. We examined in detail the concerns raised by some members of the Lost Colony Alumni Association.

Here are our primary findings:

- There were operational and communications problems that must be remedied next season.
- There were a number of concerns and criticisms regarding creative aspects of the show. These should be communicated to the Director for his consideration in developing the 2022 production.
- Some of the allegations were unfounded. They did not stand up to scrutiny.

We concluded that Chairman Kevin Bradley, General Manager John Ancona and Director Jeff Whiting acted appropriately under difficult circumstances. The board can be proud of their performance. They

deserve our gratitude for their hard work and for making this season successful despite many challenges.

They were cooperative and responsive throughout our review. They were open to hearing concerns, criticism and suggestions. They should have RIHA's full support as we prepare for next season.

Our ship has survived storms and rough seas before. We can do it again.

BACKGROUND

RIHA has come through a difficult year and a half:

- Covid forced RIHA to cancel the 2020 season. Before this, the only time seasons were cancelled was during World War II.
- Financial challenges forced us to lay off most of the full-time RIHA staff.
- We hired a new General Manager and a new Director. They had to move quickly into their new positions at a time when everyone was required to work remotely because of Covid.
- During 2020, our board learned of allegations of abuse at The Lost Colony dating back to 1996-2002. We immediately began an investigation. When it concluded, we took strong actions to ensure that The Lost Colony is a safe workplace.
- For several years, ticket sales had been declining. The show's financial survival was in peril.
- Aging, time-worn and weather-beaten physical facilities in the Waterside Theater and at Morrison Grove, which serves as housing for company members, needed to be upgraded.
- The Director had to make a number of last-minute adjustments to the show to accommodate limited financial resources and changing circumstances.
- Limited financial resources also precluded RIHA from increasing compensation for cast and crew members, notwithstanding the aspirations of the Chairman, General Manager and Director.
- Covid cases among cast and crew forced the cancellation of the show's final week.

Tensions grew during the busy, stressful final weeks before the season opening. There were strong differences and disagreements about creative and casting decisions. Personality conflicts developed. The problems persisted throughout the season.

Some alumni of the show and members of the community were unhappy with changes made in the production. They felt dismissed and marginalized. They made their dissatisfaction with RIHA's leadership widely known.

These factors have caused great stress and distress. They have led to a deep divide in The Lost Colony community. We hope our report will contribute to healing the divide.

COMMITTEE REVIEW AND FINDINGS

On September 24, the committee hosted a two-hour Zoom meeting with the Alumni Committee co-chairs and three people from the local community who have been involved in RIHA over many years. Since then, the alumni co-chairs have forwarded to us more than 40 letters from individuals expressing concerns.

We carefully read and reviewed all of these letters.

From the letters and our meeting with alumni and community representatives, we identified four categories of concern:

1. Physical safety
2. Non-physical concerns from employees and contractors
3. Operations, management, customer service
4. Creative content

We relayed the concerns expressed and posed questions about these issues to General Manager John Ancona, Chairman Kevin Bradley, and Director Jeff Whiting.

Based on our review of the concerns expressed and information provided by Mr. Ancona, Mr. Bradley, and Mr. Whiting, we identified the following problems that must be addressed:

- There were barriers and breakdowns in communications in the company in 2021. General Manager John Ancona met every two weeks with a Company Council, composed of representatives elected by the cast and crew. But he reported that none of the concerns expressed in letters reviewed by this Committee were raised with him until a company-wide meeting was held in August, less than a week before the season's end. Also, no staff member or crew supervisor brought any of the concerns to his attention during the season.
- We paid special attention to concerns regarding safety issues, including Covid policies and heat protocols. We reviewed these matters in detail with the General Manager. We are satisfied that safety is a top priority with him. He committed to making sure that all cast and crew members will be informed about safety protocols in 2022.

We also concluded that some allegations were unfounded:

- Some statements regarding conditions at Morrison Grove were inaccurate. Between September 2020 and July of this year, RIHA spent over \$346,000 on repairs, maintenance, furniture and equipment at Morrison Grove. In addition, nearly \$101,000 was spent on those needs before September 2020.
- There was criticism of RIHA's response when part of ceiling drywall fell onto a tenant in one unit. But our review showed that staff responded quickly and appropriately. The tenants were relocated, and the unit was repaired within days.

- It has been alleged that management knew in advance that key actors would not be available the final week of the season. But the General Manager said that isn't true. He reported that the actors had signed contracts committing to work through the end of the season. Some members of the company may have known the actors planned to leave early, but management wasn't informed. This highlights RIHA's need to improve internal communications.
- There was an allegation that the Lumbee Tribe gave a quilt to The Lost Colony and that Chairman Bradley took the quilt home as his own. In fact, it was a gift to Bradley from the tribe in recognition of his work establishing the Lumbee-RIHA partnership.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Better communications:** Improving communications within the company, up and down, must be a top priority in the 2022 season. The Board should direct the General Manager to implement the recommendations that were developed earlier by the board's Personnel Committee and Executive Committee:
 - Update organizational chart to reflect lines of communication to be used during pre-production, rehearsal, and production periods for staff to raise artistic and logistical concerns about the production itself, and concerns pertaining to workplace conditions.
 - Develop protocols (e.g., agenda, minutes) for regular meetings of management and representatives of TLC cast and crew to identify, discuss, and resolve issues pertaining to production logistics.
 - Revise policies and procedures governing resolution of concerns to afford Board flexibility needed to respond to issues of varying complexity (e.g., differentiate between grievance and general complaint, timeline for response).
 - Inform staff of new communication protocols, policies and procedures governing pathways for dispute resolution.
2. **Allow public comments:** We recommend that the Board set aside time during board meetings to allow members of the public to make comments. This will provide an outlet for concerns, and it will give board members the opportunity to hear them directly. Speakers should be required to sign up in advance and adhere to time limits.
3. **Community Relations:** We recommend that the Board appoint a permanent Community Relations Committee – consisting of board members and non-board members from the community. This will provide an ongoing vehicle for hearing and discussing concerns. The committee can help restore trust and mutual respect. Like our committee, the permanent committee will relay recommendations to the Board.
4. **Nepotism Policy:** We recommend that the board's Personnel Committee consider adopting a clear, consistent policy regarding the hiring of family members. We obviously should not bar the hiring of family members in all situations, but RIHA needs guidelines here.

5. **Creative Concerns:** The General Manager should share concerns regarding the script, production and creative content of the 2021 show with the Director for his information and consideration as he develops the 2022 show. Our committee has no expertise here; we trust the artistic judgment of the Director and General Manager. But our committee, and the permanent committee, can help them understand community concerns.

6. **Leadership Support:** The Board should reaffirm its support for Chairman Kevin Bradley, General Manager John Ancona and Director Jeff Whiting for the 2022 season.

7. **Statement of values:** The RIHA website should have a strong, clear statement on our commitment to ensuring a safe workplace and to protecting everyone from any harm, including abuse and unwanted behavior. RIHA should constantly and consistently reinforce and communicate our policies, procedures and protections. The community and the general public deserve to know the steps we have taken and the commitment we have made.

8. **Alumni:** The board should address the relationship that has developed between RIHA and the Alumni Committee's current leadership. RIHA needs healing, not continued division. The committee and RIHA should work in a constructive and collaborative manner. The committee and RIHA should build closer connections with the estimated 5,000 living alumni and alumnae of the show, involving as many of them as possible as volunteers and financial contributors.

9. **Strategic Assessment:** The Board should give renewed attention to the 2018 Organizational Assessment of RIHA.

STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT

The Organizational Assessment was developed in 2018 by Armstrong McGuire & Associates of Raleigh, working with the Board's Leadership Committee. The assessment included interviews with seven then-staff members and 27 stakeholders, including past and current board members, donors, volunteers and partners. The resulting 29-page report is a candid and comprehensive look at where we are and where we need to be.

The key finding was a consensus that: **"The things that got us here will not sustain us going forward."**

The report also concluded:

- "RIHA not only needs a unified vision, but it also needs a bold, innovative vision."
- "RIHA lacks a culture of gratitude and relationship building across and within its constituencies."

The report contains observations and recommendations regarding organizational structure, strategic relationships and fundraising. The assessment also addresses the role of alumni.

Many of the changes introduced in the 2021 season resulted from insights gained from the 2018 Organizational

Assessment. Going forward, we believe, RIHA can greatly benefit from its analysis and recommendations.

CONCLUSION

The Roanoke Island Historical Association was chartered in 1932 – almost 90 years ago. Its mission, as stated in the original charter, is to “celebrate and depict...the birth of English-speaking civilization on Roanoke Island, Dare County, North Carolina, by Sir Walter Raleigh, and his Colonists in the years 1584 to 1587.”

For 84 years, RIHA has celebrated and depicted this story through America’s first and oldest outdoor symphonic drama. The work began in the depths of the Depression. The show went dark during World War II, then returned in 1946. It has lasted for 75 years since, through generations of change.

North Carolina’s Paul Green pioneered the first production in 1937. In 1964, Joe Layton brought the show up to musical-theater standards of the day. The *Virginian-Pilot* said in 2007 that “Layton, a Broadway choreographer, got Green to rework the script, creating more of a dramatic arc and spicing the piece with music and dance.”

At the time, Layton’s changes were controversial and much-criticized. But they were much-needed.

We face the same challenge today. We must make this 84-year-old show appealing to diverse audiences in 2022 and beyond. We must make it financially viable for the future.

We call on everyone who loves *The Lost Colony* to move past the difficulties and differences of the past season, to come together in a positive and supportive manner and to work together to keep this great tradition alive.

In 2037, just 16 years from now, we hope to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the show. Anyone who has raised children knows how fast 16 years can go.

Let us resolve to reach that milestone, to carry on the tradition of America’s first and oldest outdoor symphonic drama, and to continue to tell the story of America’s first English settlement and the birth of the first English child on American soil.

Respectfully submitted,

Tess Judge, Chair

Lucy Inman

Gary Pearce

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