

We've Come A Long Way...



Greetings, Friends & Supporters,

Over 17 years ago, with my induction as Hershey-Derry Township Historical Society's first full-time executive director, I drafted my initial member newsletters. In the first, I introduced myself; in the next edition, I announced my temporary absence due to my son's impending birth, literally as I exited the office and proceeded to the hospital. Since then, we adapted to a digital publication, and my son now has his driver's license.

This began a new era in the history of the Historical Society and, thanks to the tireless efforts of those who established a substantial foundation of members, volunteers, and supporters, the organization was poised for promising growth and transformation.

Today, I write to announce my departure from the remarkable organization we now identify as the Hershey History Center - a nexus for activity, learning, and engagement like no other in our community. Even with a vested interest in advancing programming and increasing participation at the outset of my tenure, we could not have anticipated the vast accomplishments that abound today.

I recall the removal of a few small trees to initiate first-impression improvements, and the adoption of a new mission to redefine objectives and intent. From there...we launched a capital campaign to renovate the basement from idle storage to a broad capacity community event space and to update utility infrastructure. Next, we removed some walls and added old barn timbers to evolve the museum and render a new footprint, an aesthetic which reflected the history of our barn and celebrated meaningful, adaptive preservation. Synchronous with the changing physical attributes, we devised a thoughtful narrative, authentically matching mission to presentation. A new roof, new exterior lighting, a new parking lot, and the renovation of our historic Milk House followed. Another campaign assured the completion of a new outdoor event space from the shambles of a former barnyard, enhancing our presence and enlivening countless social events.

Equally inherent in our physical growth was a conscious investment to create innovative, signature events. From the regionally renowned Hershey Artfest to La Festa Italiana, from the B'ars to Bears documentary to Jazz in the Barnyard, we have nurtured programs that reflect the Town's people, places, and things, as defined by mission and dictated by community. Our annual Preservation Gala grew from a

small reception to a heritage-rich, themed celebration of everything from Hershey, Cuba to hockey, from the smokestacks to the sounds of Bennie Goodman and big bands in the ballroom, and later Bob Dylan under the Stadium sky. Today, the focus of that celebration aligns with protecting our streetscapes and iconic landmarks for generations to come.

Through these tangible transformations, large and small, we have built experiences, opportunities, and expanded understanding, operating with the philosophical premise that we are committed to our community. Our unique brand, the Hershey History Center, was adopted amid a pandemic and heralded the dynamic change from a typical historical society persona to the enterprising center of activity and engagement we envisioned for the benefit of the community.

I am proud to have called Hershey my adopted home, and to have seen our family of volunteers, members, donors and community friends grow as we accomplished amazing things together. As I shared with our Board of Directors recently, I feel profoundly fortunate to have been a part of developing this remarkable organization.

I would be remiss if I failed to acknowledge that all we have accomplished has been possible because of the support and significant contributions of every one of our volunteers. Period. For some of you, your direct participation on a daily and weekly basis has been the critical factor to enable my work and success. To say, "I couldn't have done it without you," is a gross understatement; more importantly, I would not want to have done it without you! For this, my thanks and gratitude are immeasurable.

Though it is a bittersweet departure, it is one perfectly fitting as HHC evolves to its next chapter. Marked by a period of progress unique in HHC's history, our focus will turn to identifying a successor who will contribute their time and talent to sustain and build on the legacy of those who, since 1991, have ensured our history continues to have a place in the future. We hope that you join us.

Cheers to so many incredible years making history happen here!



Nikki Soliday

Executive Director