

A Year of Growth in a Challenging Environment

The Empire Club Foundation continued to strengthen its Board composition in 2022-2023 with the addition of Karin Treiberg, Kristin Phillips and Ralph Nigro to its ranks, bringing the total number of Board members to thirteen. Karin Treiberg was elected as an Officer of the Executive Committee and assumed the role of Treasurer, replacing outgoing Board member Rachael Kelebay who's excellent work in setting up many of the Foundation's financial systems was greatly beneficial to relaunching the organization three years ago. As a financial executive at the Bank of Montreal, Karin brings to the Treasurer role years of expertise and experience, and has already made numerous system improvements which will position the Foundation well as it continues to grow. Just as noteworthy, the organization significantly increased its bench strength in education with Kristin Phillips assuming the role of Chair of the Education Committee, a role previously held by Nicole Miller who will continue to serve the Board as a member of that Committee after growing the activities of the Foundation through Teacher's Guides and other initiatives. Ralph Nigro, a senior executive with the Toronto District School Board, is the newest addition to the Board and will bring still further expertise on how the Foundation can most effectively bring the content generated both in the past and present onto the radar of school teachers and other educators across the country.

The Teacher's Guide produced for the Empire Club's Remembrance Day event was well received and used by several schools and colleges, and the Teacher's Guide related to the Coronation of King Charles- is expected to reach the largest number of educators the Foundation has reached to date. This is a once in a lifetime event which will be followed by many teachers and educators across Canada. Unlike the other Teacher's Guides produced to date, this document will not be tied to an Empire Club event but rather to the Coronation itself, and call on some of the historical speeches delivered at the Club over the years on the monarchy and Canada's role in the Commonwealth.

The preservation of the Empire Club's historical speeches and archives is one of the primordial roles of the Foundation, and this past year saw tremendous progress on that front. Firstly, the Digital Library is now completely up to date and the public can access speeches right up to the present. This exercise demonstrated, however, that some very important speeches delivered to the Club never made it into the Digital Library, an oversight that the Foundation is in the midst of correcting. An excellent example would be the 1917 speech delivered to the Club by Alexander Graham Bell which was only recently digitized and added into the archives. Under the leadership of Foundation Vice President Verity Sylvestre, many priceless artifacts from the Club's history have been retrieved from storage, archived and will soon be sent to the Thomas Fischer Rare Books Library for safekeeping and to allow the public to access them more easily. Besides numerous event advertisements and photographs, the historic "Chain of Office" worn by Past Presidents in decades past has now been retrieved and added to these archives.

Corporate Secretary MJ Perry has worked closely over the past year with the President and the Foundation's lawyers to bring the organization into compliance with the new provincial regulations that must now be adhered to by all Charities operating out of Ontario. Known as the "ONCA Regulations", these new guidelines and operating requirements affected the Bylaws and the Articles of Incorporation of the Empire Club Foundation and have now been produced, reviewed by the Board and will be officially ratified and put into practice by the end of the 2022-2023 fiscal year. The Corporate Secretary also worked with members of the Board to post a lot of background material and legal documentation

related to the Foundation onto a shared Google Drive site, allowing full access to the organization's governance to all Board members.

Now that the Foundation is fully operational again and has put in place strong governance procedures to protect and strengthen it as it continues to grow, the Board will engage in its first Strategic Planning exercise in the Spring of 2023 to ensure that the Foundation is optimizing its value and making the most of the limited operating budget. Both short and longer-term goals will be established so that the organization can fully meet the objectives of its mandate and continue to provide value added to both the Empire Club of Canada and to the country's educational sector.

The biggest challenge faced by the Foundation relates to fundraising. Since there are an almost infinite number of ways to get information in today's world, its mandate puts it in direct competition with many other organizations. As a result, the vast majority of funds are raised from Past Presidents and current Board members of the Empire Club of Canada, with the remainder of funding coming from "friends" of the Club, those people who actually attend Club events either in person or virtually. Reaching a larger donor base has proven to be challenging, but it is important to continue outreach and growth in this area in order to remain in a position whereby it is possible to make a real and sustained contribution. This requires a very careful deployment of activities that reach the greatest number of people possible within the constraints of a limited budget.

Going forward, the Foundation will look at new ways to achieve its mandate and reach educators and students while striving to convince all Canadians that the Empire Club holds a unique and relatively undiscovered source of original historical documentation which will enrich anyone who delves into it. In the longer term and as funding allows, the Digital Library must continue to grow and be made user friendly and aesthetically-pleasing as possible so that this treasure trove of Canadian and international history reaches as many people as possible and adds to the documentation which makes up our collective memory and identity as Canadians. The challenge is not in convincing people of the value of the product, but getting on the radar screen of educators, researchers, policy makers and journalists/authors who now seek and obtain information from a vast multitude of sources.