



Lawrence and Mark Bingeman

expense and increasing earned revenue.”

And Marskell, ever on the alert for threats to his beloved institution, warns that even a promised plus – two-way, all-day GO service – may hold a hidden danger for cultural institutions. “For me as a taxpayer, I hope our arts and culture is sustainable before 2WayAllDay, as we run a very real risk of workers living in Toronto and taking the train.”

Marskell has been fighting for THEMUSEUM since he moved from Toronto, ten years ago, to take on what many saw as a losing battle. So far, he’s won. He knew when he came that he would have to fight public perception, underfunding municipal governments, and a less than stellar reputation then being worn by downtown Kitchener. He did. And he still does. And he’s still loving it.

From his first day on the job at THEMUSEUM, he says, “It was very clear, by the books, that it was ready to close.” Operating solely as a children’s museum – the original mandate – was not going to be sustainable. However, Marskell wasn’t here long before he realized “the community wanted this to succeed.”

Public funding is an everpresent issue. “We are underfunded when you compare us to the other organizations in this region and in Canada.” Almost three quarters of THEMUSEUM’s budget has to be raised by the organization. A comparison of grants is a bit surprising – the Waterloo Regional Museum receives \$8 million a year, including capital grants; THEMUSEUM gets \$370,000 of its \$2.3 million annual budget. Marskell is not arguing for full funding, but he does make a strong case for fairness.

Bingemans has been a Kitchener entertainment landmark for 55 years. It is one of the region’s premier destinations, owned and operated by three generations of the Bingeman family. So it might come as a surprise that current CEO, Mark Bingeman, sees his attraction as a work in progress.

But it turns out that this is the key to 55 years of success in the volatile entertainment business. Bingeman’s recent success with new Oktoberfest ventures is a good case in point.

Bingeman’s has long been a primary destination for Oktoberfesters, but it is not in Mark Bingeman’s pragmatic nature to assume success. He says, “Oktoberfest as an entertainment product has gone through changes. It’s very much a mature festival and that’s not necessarily a bad thing, but it usually means that it’s time to be pushing the envelope and looking for change.”

Bingemans is very comfortable with change – fans of the destination will know there is something new there, every season. But their Oktoberfest-themed innovations set a new mark in entrepreneurial adventure.

It started with their renovations to their venerable Marshall Hall, creating “expanded convention space”.

“We knew that Oktoberfest couldn’t be in that facility,” in the future, says Bingeman.

The first step was a 3000-person capacity, 30,000 square foot tent. Bingeman recalls, “I was nervous as all hell, that first week beforehand, whether or not people were coming – can we fill the tent?” Short answer? Yes.

And there was a ripple effect. “That infrastructure investment was bigger than just for Oktoberfest... We were making upgrades to that whole area of our property... more power... washrooms... road systems, lighting programs.”

And Bingemans also got creative around their new Oktoberfest venue.

“We heard from [businesses] that they didn’t do a lot of Oktoberfest corporate entertaining, cause when you’re in a big space, everybody scatters. So let’s create a private lounge area, the Wunderbar Lounge.”

They doubled down on their Wunderbar Lounge experience, creating the JaegerMeister Lounge, “a VIP product” that was consistently a sell-out in 2015.

It didn’t stop there. In 2015, welcome to Oktoberfest Koolhaus. “The only way for us to test our future growth plan was to basically do it and start that direction... by increasing to this year’s tent –

45,000 sq. feet, with a capacity of just under 4500 people.

“We made the decision to go to a big tent, and actually our decision to do that is based on where we want to be in the future.”

Paul Salvini might be described as a living example of “the internet of things.” He became CEO of the Accelerator Centre in mid-2014 – and also is associate vice-president of research commercialization at University of Waterloo. He started as a photographer, went on to graduate from UW in math and computer science, worked on traffic control systems, moved to a software company, became CTO at Christie

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