



CEO Message: 2020 – The Year That Was

“Now is the winter of our discontent made glorious summer by this sun....”

After 12 long months of a Covid winter, we are now finally on the cusp of celebrating a glorious summer. We still have lots of questions, like, is there now going to be a full year of recovery and prosperity? What can we expect for our industry in the coming months, or years for that matter?

Upon further inspection of the crystal ball and another reading of the tea leaves, here is what we know for sure. Not a heck of a lot. Given the fluid nature of the virus and all its potential variants, we understand that the landscape can change from one day to the next, even one moment to the next.

Although uncertainty is never particularly helpful and can be downright maddening, we can now start to work with some incredibly positive developments and how they can assist in our recovery and increased resiliency.

First significant development, a real shot in the arm, several vaccines have been approved and are now starting to make their ways into our physical and economic systems. There is tremendous excitement at the prospect of beginning the journey back to “normal”, or “our new abnormal” as a colleague so aptly coined, and a returning confidence that we are going to make our way out of this desperate cold.

Second development, an army of co-conspirators have come together in an unprecedented way to combat the devastating effects of this pandemic. Working on behalf of the entire tourism industry, numerous groups, businesses, associations, and government agencies have banded together to find solutions to increase the survival rate of our operators and the thousands that work in our sector.

This army is working at every level of business and government. Nationally we have our very own Susie Grynol, at the helm of the Hotel Association of Canada, and working with national partners at the Tourism Industry Association Of Canada (TIAC), have managed to move federal mountains to find support for hotels and tourism. Without the herculean efforts of Susie and Charlotte Bell (TIAC), programs like CEWS, CERS and **Highly Affected Sectors Credit Availability Program (HASCAP)** would not have happened or been extended and many of us would have long ago succumbed to insolvency.

Provincially we have an incredible group of industry leaders who make up the Saskatchewan Business Council (SBC), a collection of individuals who have come together to offer advice to government on how to best deal with the pandemic and its remarkable impact on the Saskatchewan economy. From the first days of the pandemic, this group has been in constant contact with Minister Jeremy Harrison and his team at the Business Response Team (BRT) offering our insight and advise and this two-way path of communication has proven to be invaluable for all of those involved.

Just to be clear, the “tourism support needle” does not budge one inch without the persistent and unrelenting advocacy of Steve McLellan from the Saskatchewan Chamber and Marilyn Braun-Pollan from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB). With so many shared members and battlefields of commonality, they have effectively and successfully lobbied for many of the programs that our industry currently depend on.

With the blizzard of emerging challenges, many (but not all) groups and individuals have risen to the challenge and played their part in the struggle to emerge. Tourism Saskatchewan’s Mary Taylor-Ash and Jonathan Potts have been on the pointy end of the stick from the very beginning. Derek Lothian, the Insurance Brokers Association of Saskatchewan, has been incredibly helpful to our membership and those in crises trying to secure policies and manage soaring premiums.

Municipally, engaged in the trench warfare of survival, we have Destination Marketing Organizations across the province battling with almost zero resources and little empathy or understanding from local mayors and councils. Stephanie Clovechok, Tourism Saskatoon, and Tracy Fahlman, Regina Hotels Association, have been relentless in the almost insurmountable effort to sway their local governments regarding property tax. Undeterred by the inability of some of our elected officials to see the true scope and utter devastation of our urban, downtown hotels, they continue to fight the good, yet grueling, fight.

“The media”, often a polarizing topic, has certainly played their part in providing their viewers, readers, and listeners with the information they demand and in a way that they want to view, read, and listen to it. Whatever your personal thoughts on the media and the outlets you prefer to visit, or those you rage against, we as an organization are extremely appreciative to all of them for lending us their platforms to tell our harrowing story.

Reporters and pundits have been supportive and empathetic and have given us every opportunity to engage the public in an immediate, intimate, and powerful way. Gormley, Loucks, Woodward, Morgan, Remenda, Brown. MacPherson(s), Benning, Tank, the list could go on for days, without their compassion, empathy, and voice, I honestly believe people would be frantic if they were not able to access trusted information and add a level of calm in such a chaotic time.

We are supposed to be a non-partisan organization and have gladly taken some heat for our full-throated support of our Saskatchewan government. The strength of leadership demonstrated by Premier Moe, Deputy Premier Harpauer and Minister Harrison has been consistent, on point and unwavering. Their response to Covid and incredible support for our industry has been remarkable. Their willingness to engage, listen and respond has been unprecedented across Canada and I am proud to say that we are the envy of many of our colleagues across the nation.

Dr. Saqib Shahab is an all-star and we are very appreciative of his deliberate and methodical approach to the pandemic response. Although we may not have always agree with some of the tactics, we have never waived in our support of his actions as the leader of our medical community and undisputed epidemiological subject matter expert.

The collaboration that has occurred during this crisis is the silver lining of a very dark cloud. As we emerge from this long and bitter winter, we will embrace the coming months with a sense of renewal and hopefulness. The vaccine may not be a cure-all, but it is a great start to a glorious summer.