

THE SOLOMON EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE CENTER

2016 Directors Report – Interim Executive Director Bill Soileau

Quite a pivotal year it's been for the Solomon Center as the Board of Directors and the Bishop paused a few months in the Spring to reflect and then held a Strategic Planning Retreat in May. From this, came a stronger Board commitment to refocusing on our mission of hospitality, renewal, and education. In a SWOT analysis. We determined that we have many strengths such as a dedicated and committed core staff. With astute, cheerful, polite, and productive guest services management, we have grown in new group clients this year and our attendance is good. Anyone who has been to the Solomon Center within the last year, is well aware that our Food Services has made a 360degree turn with our Brennan's trained Chef. Not only is his product exceptional but our food cost expenses have gone down from previous years in these times of ever rising household food costs. We buy local seafood and have experimented with and have plans to expand our gardening of fresh herbs and produce. Housekeeping continues to perform well in keeping our guest rooms neat, clean, and fresh. And lastly maintenance keeps the property looking pristine and once you arrive, the presence of the sacred awakens the soul.

With the abundance of blessings, it is also gravely important to note that our 23-year-old facility suffers from extensive need of repair. The sidewalks' safety has become quite a challenging issue. This is the most prioritized and it is a very costly project that is in the works. We have some donors offering to help but it will take a significant amount of effort to see this to completion. Therefore, raising funds will be imperative. Also, the individual room air conditioners, which most are original, have long been in service and are falling on the job. Our beautiful quaint Chapel of the Holy Cross has a few leaks way up in the windows and getting lifts to that high of a point will also be another substantial cost to tackle. Several of the planks on the bridge and several building leaks have also kept us ever vigilant in replacing them. But with optimism and faith, we believe all things are possible in HIS sight.

Speaking of funds, the two horrendous storms of March and September damaged us in costly cancelled events. However, we were quite spared with little physical damage, especially when compared to the neighboring homes and businesses of the Northshore. With these occurrences, it was concluded that the Solomon Center Sunday 2nd collection of the Diocese was cancelled. This has been of significant help and support in the past so the new Interim Executive Director has been steady at work.

So, lastly I introduce myself, Dr. Bill Soileau, of Christ Church Cathedral parish in New Orleans. I have served on the Board of Directors for three years following participation on the 20th Anniversary Celebration and was appointed by Bishop Thompson as Interim Executive Director. After scaling back my 27 year of Chiropractic practice, with a background in Marketing and Business Administration, and with my passion for the Solomon Center I expressed interest in leading us forward. I began on September 1, after several months of discernment and in depth study of the Center. With full force, I began analysis of our groups of youth events, church related (Diocesan and

non Diocesan) and benevolent Non-profit corporate events to see where we could expand and devise a formal Marketing strategy to implement and pursue new groups from all areas. Quickly, I have become actively participating in local Chambers of Commerce events networking and spreading the word of our ministry. And, the result of this effort is coming to fruition. Another development is the repurposing of the Executive Directors House. The master en suite is ample for my needs so the rest is available for use for small groups with a great focus on vestries or for family rentals. With two large living rooms, fireplace, breakfast area, large open kitchen, and a large open patio and beautiful tranquil back yard, an ample conference set up accommodating 16 has been installed, with available catering from the dining hall, and will handle sleeping arrangements for 8 in its 2BR, 1.5BA with two sofa sleepers. Cook for yourselves or feel free to dine at the hall if available. But stay a few days or a week if you like and get away for a bit. Hike the trails, ride bikes, play basketball, beach volleyball, swim fish or have quiet moments in the chapel. It's a perfect vacation destination.

As I continue to learn as much as I can as fast as I can, while studying trends of Episcopal Camps and Conference Centers, new possibilities and ideas are enlightening strong confidence that the ministry of the Solomon Center will flourish and the original goal of building a Youth Center is within great realm of possibility. But as we expect, funds will be needed to create this and serious organization and development is in order. And I am on it asking our diocesan family to participate as stewards of our precious ministry.

This year, we are planning on a renewal of development of the Friends of the Solomon Center and invite participation. Holding a nice dinner and cocktail party event in the lodge highlighting several folks who, through the years have been Angels in the Spirit of the Solomon Center is in the planning phase and we expect it to be lovely. We are a self sustaining ministry and one with great ability to continue to renew people's lives through education and enlightenment at a sacred place in the most hospitable way we know. Come join us!