

Ford Bell -- It Was Worth Waiting Eight Years -- Welcome To The Jell-O Museum

by Lynne Belluscio

Today I was sitting in the library talking with George Henry and his wife, and Terry came in and gave me a business card and said "This man is here to see you." I think I said something like -- "You've got to be kidding. Ford Bell is here?" and I ran out into the hall. Sure enough it was Ford Bell! I don't suspect anyone in LeRoy knows him or knows who he is, but in the museum world, Ford Bell is "the man." He is the President of the Alliance of American Museums -- AAM in Washington, D.C.

Eight years ago, I was at the AAM annual meeting in Chicago, representing the Association of Living History, Farms and Agricultural Museums. I had to attend the Council of Affiliates meeting, which includes the presidents of a variety of museum organizations -- art museums, zoos, science museums, history museums, botanical gardens, railroad museums, and museum volunteer organizations.

In the evening, hundreds of AAM members boarded buses for tours of museums in Chicago. I boarded a bus, and as I climbed aboard, this man stuck out his hand and said, "Hi, I'm Ford Bell. I'm the new president of AAM." "Glad to meet you. I'm Lynne Belluscio -- the Director of the Jell-O Museum in LeRoy, New York. And, if you're ever in Western New York, I hope you'll stop to see the Jell-O Museum." "I sure will. My wife's family is from that part of the state."

I have to be honest, AAM, in my mind, had always been an association for the "big guys" -- the Smithsonian, the Getty, the Met. They were the museums that carried the clout in Washington. Even by AAM's definition the Jell-O Gallery barely fits into the category of a "small museum." But Ford Bell came to AAM with a vision and an appreciation for all museums, big and small. He understood the importance and contributions that museums were making. I watched as AAM, under his guidance, grew to embrace all of us.



Two years ago he did an interview with CNN and commented on the status of museums in the United States. The statistics are overwhelming: "Museums invest more than \$2 billion in education programs each year. Museums in this country welcome some 90 million school children each year... these field trips are extensions of the classroom. Museums are also economic engines for communities large and small. One statistic I never tire of citing has been cited by the U.S. Conference of Mayors. They say that, for every \$1 a municipality invests in cultural organizations, including museums, \$7 are returned to the public coffers. That's a return that would make Warren Buffett swoon." But the importance of museums went far beyond the financial impact and Ford Bell understood that too.

I was elated to see that he had agreed to be the keynote speaker at the Museum Association of New York's meeting in Corning last month. I knew that his presentation would be insightful and

profound. I planned on meeting him and inviting him to LeRoy again but could only get away for one day and reluctantly decided not to attend the day he was there. So it was astounding today that he said to me, "Hey, I thought I might see you in Corning," And I had to apologize. "I really wanted to be there, but I was in the middle of school programs."

It has been announced that

Ford Bell has retired from AAM. Yesterday was his last day on the job, and today -- his first day of retirement, he came to the Jell-O Museum -- just for the fun of it.

I am going to miss knowing that "my friend Ford Bell" isn't in Washington advocating for all of us -- big and small. I know he is heading home to Minnesota, where his grandfather founded General Mills. Where Ford followed in the family tradition of public service. He was a teacher and holds a Doctorate of Veterinary Medicine. He served on the advisory board of the Museum of Natural History at the University of Minnesota. He serves as chairman of the James Ford Bell Foundation and has been a trustee of the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. He has also served as President and CEO of the Minneapolis Heart Institute Foundation. He was a candidate for the Senate in 2006.

As a board member of the Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches, he helped build a center for families from West Africa in need of job training and housing. "Mr. Bell's many public service endeavors underscore his commitment to developing organizations and strengthening communities."

Sometimes when you least expect it, something or someone comes into your life that gives you a kick start. No doubt about it, today was one of those days.

LeRoy Historical Society

Chicken 'n Ribs Barbecue

Sunday, June 14th
on Trigon Park, Le Roy

11:00 am Til Sold Out!

BBQ 1/2 CHICKEN - \$10.00 • BBQ 1/4 CHICKEN & RIBS - \$12.00
w/salt potatoes & cole slaw, roll, cookies

THE CHICKEN & RIBS SELLOUT EARLY!!

Carry Out Only
"Drive Through" On Trigon Park

Prepared By
Phil Tooze

