

## **Open Work Session**

**November 20, 2018**

### **Delmarva Shorebirds Update**

Mr. Chris Bitters, General Manager of the Delmarva Shorebirds, and Mr. Eric Sichau, Director of Marketing and Promotions, came before Council. Mr. Bitters said they stuffed 8,500 boxes yesterday with Mountaire Farms to feed 8,500 families throughout the Delmarva Peninsula, so that was their day yesterday, and today they are thrilled to be before Council. Mr. Cannon asked how they distribute them, to which Mr. Bitters responded, Mountaire Farms takes care of that. He said they have a network of churches and other community organizations that receive requests for meals, and then they have a network that goes out, so yesterday they stuffed all of the boxes. He said they, actually, have about 300 volunteers, and it is a lot of fun, and they have done this annually for the last 20 years with them.

Mr. Bitters said, as far as some of the updates around the ballpark, they had a great season. He said it was a cold start and a rainy summer, so that hurt them a little bit in terms of what they normally do out there, but, overall, they had a very good year. He said, as everybody knows, the Orioles are in the news after a bad season at the Major League Level last year with 100+ losses, but he thinks there is a lot of excitement in Birdland, as they call it, as of yesterday with the hiring of a new Executive Vice President and General Manager up there in Baltimore. He said he thinks they are still going to have some tough times for a few more years as they put in the new regime, but he thinks they will see an emphasis on the Minor League system, and continue to develop players from the Minor Leagues to help the Major Leagues as well. He said they had a lot of prospects on the field this year that he thinks they will really see contribute to the Major League Level in the next two to three years, and they always have to keep in mind that their guys are about at the two to three year away mark from the Major Leagues.

Mr. Bitters said, construction wise, the stadium has continued to move along with the renovations. He said the new fans are going in as they speak, and should be completed today. He said, as far as the 360 deck, he cannot give them a percentage as far as how much of it is done, but they will see the structural side of the deck going in if they drive by the stadium. He said they are making some decisions on colors and things like that shortly, so that continues to move along. He said some of the structural stuff they have been working on for the last couple of years continues to move along well, as well as some of the coatings and other things to protect the facility for another 20 years is going well. He said all of the things they are working on along with the City and the County to get done before the season seem to be going well, and, knock on wood, very little hiccups are happening at this point.

Mr. Bitters said Mr. Sichau passed out an in-house printed guide, and he will have a professionally printed guide of their community relations efforts printed after the new year, which he will supply to Council as well, but he really wanted to bring a printed copy for today. He said he will recap some of the things they did last year, some of the ongoing programs they have, and some of the contributions they make to the community. He said they believe in being very active in the community, as seen throughout the guide. He said he has provided one sheet that gives an overview of the highlights, but he will have Mr. Sichau walk them through some of the programming they do on an annual basis at the stadium.

Mr. Sichau said, from a community standpoint, they are very proud of what they have done, and the highlight to kick this off is that they were the South Atlantic League winner of the Community Award, and it was a great recognition from their peers throughout the South Atlantic League, and the other 13 teams, so they are proud to have won that award. He said because of that, they are up for the National

Award for Minor League Baseball, so they will see what happens with that. He said, either way, they are proud of the community footprint they have continued for the last 24 years, and it continues to grow.

Mr. Sichau said one of the things he would like to highlight is the Hit the Books Program, which encompasses a lot more than Wicomico County, but, of course, Wicomico County Schools are very active in this program as well as the Delmarva Peninsula. He said they had over 100 schools, and that footprint continues to grow with 47,000 bookmarks, so 47,000 kids are being touched with this program, and continue to complete not only the school requirements and the County requirements, but their own personal reading achievements, which are then recognized throughout the season in April and May. He said they are very proud of that program, and, having grown up with the team, having grown up here in the area, and having done the Hit the Books Program, continuing to work with this is awesome. He said they continue to see the results of the program as sometimes it does reach the lower income level families here in the County and throughout the Peninsula, and it is awesome to see them come out and really have an enjoyable time, and recognize the efforts and achievements they continue to accomplish in school.

Mr. Sichau said, from a monetary side, some of Council have been to the games and have seen the jersey auctions they do throughout the season with specialty jerseys, and specialty theme nights, and those continue to be very successful, and helps with the contributions they have made of \$35,000 to local non-profits. He said their July 4<sup>th</sup> jersey did very well, and that helped Operation We Care, which just had their packing party the other day, and that plays a very integral part in the community in Mardela Springs. He said they had a very large contribution from the VFW July 4<sup>th</sup> night, and that helps them do positive things not only here in the area but across the Country. Mr. Bitters added, with that jersey alone, they donated over \$10,000 to Operation We Care this year. Mr. Sichau said they also have a jersey that helps support Brooke's Toy Closet at PRMC, and the Cancer Center at PRMC, so all of those jerseys encompass the tremendous community support they continue to see. He said they made over 520 in-kind donations, and it seems they are doing two to three simple donation requests a day, whether it is simply donating a ticket prize pack, or vouchers of tickets, or just some promotional items to help a local auction or a local event, but, if that is the least they can do, then they are doing their job. He said he is not sure if it is the highest they have ever done, but it has seemed to grow over the last couple of years as folks do more charitable events in the community.

Mr. Sichau said, through their fundraising programs, specifically with local Little Leagues, once again, they did very well, and allowed local organizations to raise about \$33,000. He said they are very proud of the fact that their simple fundraising program allowed folks to come out and not only enjoy the game, but help their organization as well.

Mr. Sichau continued, and said their baseball camp always does very well. He said they had 100 participants, and that gives the kids an opportunity to work with the players who they see on an everyday basis, and try and get a little bit of interaction rather than just seeing them hit the ball or strike out on a nightly basis.

Mr. Sichau said, collectively, with the value of their tickets and how that relates to Hit the Books, they also do a summer reading program with the local libraries, and, of course, Wicomico Library is very active. He said they bring players over, and that always seems to be their best appearance every year. He said, collectively, 45,000 tickets are donated to schools that, of course, encompasses directly to games. He said, in general, the community footprint they continue to have with these programs, and all of their community programs as they browse through the booklet, is really just a snapshot of everything

they have done. He said, of course, they participated from a staff level with Mountaire, they have the hectic Christmas parade season coming up, they will have their Hot Stove Banquet in January, and just throughout the year they are constantly finding ways to be involved not only with their current partners, but with other organizations. He said there is always going to be something else they can do, and they are always active and open to do so. He said they appreciate Council having them this morning, and will be happy to answer any questions as far as the community is concerned. He said they continue to be very proud as a front office in all they do, and they are glad to be a great community partner in this area.

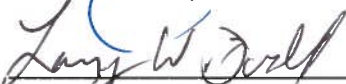
Mr. Dodd said he has a few of those jerseys in his closet. He said he has a young boy who loves baseball, and when he sees a player or a number he likes and wanted that jersey, he had to invest. He said it is nice to have those jerseys, and it is great to have them here today. He then asked when the Hot Stove Banquet is, to which Mr. Bitters responded, it is Thursday, January 24, 2019. He said they have booked Tim Curtain from ESPN who will be there to speak to their fans, and that is a fundraising event also with a portion of the proceeds going to the local United Way here in town.

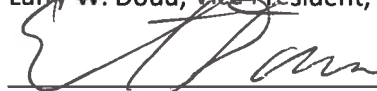
Mr. Cannon asked if they have a float in the Christmas parade, to which Mr. Bitters responded, they usually have a vehicle that Sherman participates in, but not a float. He said they probably participate somewhere between nine to ten Christmas parades a year. He said some of them are on the same night, and can be hard to get to, but they try to be at all of them that they can. He said they are always in Salisbury, Ocean City, and Pocomoke, and from time to time they try to mix up some of the smaller towns that are maybe on the same dates, or at the same times as others, and rotate every other year, whether it be Delmar or others that have parades. Mr. Cannon said he does not do as much social media as he knows some of the other Councilmembers do, and he wants to try to get a little more active in that. He then asked if the Shorebirds have a very strong social media presence because they are talking about all of these things they do, and all of the places they are going, and the first thing that came to his mind is whether they have somebody there to take pictures of these events and post them to get it out there to the public, to which Mr. Bitters responded, they have a very strong social following. He said they have over 33,000 fans on Facebook, and 27,000 on Twitter. He said he does not do Instagram and Snapchat, and all of those other things. He said, when they talk about coming before Council on an annual basis, he really just looks at doing good just for the sake of doing good, but he has learned over the last 12 years that it is important to share their story. He said he always looked at it as bragging, and he does not brag because he does not like to do that, but the fact is that they do need to share their story. He said they have never really even shared their story well within their league members, and they won the award this year when they shared their story. He said he looks at it that they live here, they play here, they are all here every day, and his kids go to school here, so they do a better job of sharing what they are doing. He said they are actively trying to do a better job of sharing those things on social media. Mr. Cannon said he knows exactly what Mr. Bitters is saying about not wanting to brag about things, but he would be surprised to know that so many people out there really want to know that, and enjoy seeing that interaction. Mr. Bitters said they have tried to do a good job on Facebook and Twitter particularly, and Mr. Sichau on Instagram. Mr. Joe Holloway added, it also makes it easier on Council when they have to make decisions about funding priorities when people know how good things are out there, to which Mr. Bitters responded, he appreciates that, but, hopefully, for the next three years they will only see him when he comes before Council to do this annually. He said they like to do right by who they are in the community by doing these things, and sharing it with their local dignitaries, others in the community, and stakeholders, and that is why they are making the conscious effort to do a better job. He clarified, they are not just doing right for doing right, but, again, they are using the term share their story versus bragging because that makes him feel a little better saying it that way.


Mr. Dodd said they are fortunate to have the Shorebirds here because they see so many great players and superstars, like Manny Machado, and Dylan Bundy, and then they see children and grandchildren of stars, to which Mr. Bitters responded, he thinks they will see some excitement again this next year. He said he really enjoyed the previous regime, and he had a great working relationship with Danny Cade and Buck Showalter, but he thinks with the changes, that will bring some excitement as well. He said he thinks they will continue to see those changes, and, relating to the field side of things, realize how that trickles down to them as well.

Mr. Cannon said he took a tour of the stadium with his wife a few weeks back, and he was very impressed with how things are coming along. He said the stadium looks great, and the real key is that they take care of it to where they do not feel like it is an old stadium. He said they have been modernizing it constantly, and looking out for it, and the place looks fantastic, to which Mr. Bitters responded, he appreciates that. He said they get that comment a lot, particularly from folks from out of the area when they come here and ask how old the stadium is, and they tell them 23 going on 24 years, but they really would not know it. He said that has been part of the plan of trying to maintain the place on a regular basis, and over the last three or four years the work they have been doing to modernize it so that, hopefully, in another 20 years it still looks and feels good, and is current. Mr. Dodd said he is so glad they got rid of those aluminum bleachers and now have individual seats, which are more comfortable. There was no further discussion.

  
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John T. Cannon, President

  
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Larry W. Dodd, Vice President, District 3

  
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Ernest F. Davis, District 1

  
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Marc Kilmer, District 2

\_\_absent\_\_\_\_\_  
John B. Hall, District 4

  
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Joe Holloway, District 5

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Matt Holloway, At-Large

  
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Laura Hurley, Council Administrator