

I N T E R V I E W

Peddler's Village CEO Bob McGowan

As chief executive officer of one of the most-visited attractions in the Delaware Valley with over two million visitors each year, hospitality veteran Bob McGowan has secured Peddler's Village's enduring role as Bucks County's year-round dining, shopping, and entertainment destination. How does he do it? Read on.



PHOTO BY STACEY CRESCITELLI PHOTOGRAPHY

PT: Where were you born and raised?

BM: I was born in Philadelphia, in the middle-class Olney section. I spent my childhood there until my family moved to Holland, Pa., in Lower Bucks County as I was going into eighth grade.

PT: How did your childhood shape your career path?

BM: Who I am today relates closely to growing up in Olney in Philly in a three-bedroom row house with my parents and eight brothers and sisters. That's an experience anyone can only hope to have. For my parents, I can imagine it was torture. 11 people had to share one bathroom, one TV, and one phone! With that background, you learn a lot about humility. I don't get hung up on little things. My brothers and sisters always kept me grounded.

PT: Where were you before Peddler's Village?

BM: After graduating from Penn State, I worked for hotels in Philly and the surrounding areas in sales and marketing. After 20 years in sales, I moved to operations.

PT: What attracted you to Peddler's Village?

BM: I grew up around here and had been coming to Peddler's Village for decades. I've always loved it. The grounds are beautiful. I've never been much of a shopper, but I came regularly with my kids to walk around, to spend time at Gigglesberry Fair, and to enjoy the festivals.

PT: Where do your visitors come from?

BM: Southeastern Pennsylvania and central/south New Jersey, northern New Jersey and New York. More visitors are coming from central PA and from the DC region. On any given day, we hear a number of different languages being spoken by visitors from all over the world.

PT: So many malls and attractions come and go but PV continues to be successful. What's your secret?

BM: We're unique. We offer a kind of shopping that's almost impossible to find elsewhere—a variety of retail created by passionate owners

“I love it when I hear people say the Village has never been more fun.”

who really care about the customer experience. Also, Peddler’s Village is still family owned after 62 years. Unlike in many corporations, everyone is really invested in the business and on the same page.

PT: What’s the most popular thing to do or event to attend?

BM: The holiday season is really magical, starting with the traditional Grand Illumination in mid-November when Santa flips the switch to turn on a million lights, and continuing through early January when we host our Fire & Frost Fun celebration.

PT: How many events do you have a year?

BM: Probably close to 100, including our weekend festivals, murder mystery shows, seasonal competitions and displays, comedy nights, dueling piano and other musical performances, food truck nights, and outdoor movies.

PT: What do you like about your job?

BM: In hospitality, it’s always the people—the employees and the guests. And there’s a strong team aspect. I’ve always been a huge sports fan, especially of team sports—football, baseball, soccer—where you have your leaders and stars, but everyone on the team is as valuable as the next person. Anywhere I’ve worked, the most beautiful thing has always been the people who make things happen. Everywhere I’ve been, there have been good leaders who do the work to get their teams on the same page. I love it when I hear people say the Village has never been more fun, or that

the Village has never looked better. I didn’t do any of that myself, but I have the right people who make it happen time and time again. I value them and take care of them, making sure they are compensated fairly, helping them grow, and giving them the flexibility they need to maintain satisfying lives. When that happens, they give back to our customers and our businesses succeed.

PT: How do you maintain PV’s historic charm while attracting younger audiences looking for trendy places?

BM: We spent a lot of time and money to make sure we maintain our landscaping: pruning trees, planting flowers, cutting grass, and working on brick pathways. We are constantly touching up the property but not changing its character or layout. We maintain the integrity of the original design. When we have a cedar roof that goes bad, we replace it with cedar, not shingles.

To entice younger visitors, we bring in the types of shops that they will find interesting—experiential shops like The Cloak and Wand or Sticky Situations, or tasting rooms and eateries they prefer, like Free Will Brewing, Hewn, and Moku Bowls.

PT: What do you like about Bucks County?

BM: I’ve lived in Bucks County since I was 13, for more than 50 years. I love it. I love the hustle and bustle of Lower Bucks, and the wide-open spaces of Upper Bucks. And I am lucky enough to live and work in Central Bucks, which has the combined charm of Peddler’s Village, New Hope, and Doylestown..

and the proximity to New York and Philadelphia.

PT: Can you tell us a bit about your family?

BM: Besides my five brothers and three sisters, I have my wife, Kate, our two adult kids, Sean and Kacie, and our Cairn Terrier, Max.

PT: What do you do for fun?

BM: I’m a huge sports fan and I love to play golf, but I don’t do it often enough! More than anything, I just like spending time with my family and friends. Hanging out and relaxing is as good as it gets for me. I do enjoy going to concerts, too; I recently saw performances by Kenny Chesney and Roger Daltry.

PT: Can you share a fun or surprising fact about yourself that not many people know?

BM: Besides being claustrophobic? Coming out of high school, I was offered a full football scholarship to Villanova. I didn’t accept it, but I didn’t tell my parents that until afterwards. I’d been playing football since I was eight years old, and I didn’t want to continue in college—although if I had, I would have been graduating with Howie Long, the NFL Hall of Famer. I went to Penn State instead.

PT: What motto do you live by?

BM: “Family First.” For me, that means my immediate family and friends and my work family. It’s so important to look out for the people in your life; the rest will fall in line.

PT: If you could wave a magic wand, what leader, past or present, would

you choose to take to dinner at PV, what restaurant would it be, and what would you order?

BM: My choice would be to invite Felice Barsky to dinner at Earl’s New American. I’m sure very few people would know Felice, but she was the director of sales at a Northeast Philly hotel who hired me out of college. I would ask her what she was thinking! The whole office was women. I was the token male. She was in her late 50s, and I was 21, with no clue about anything in the business. Felice had a sophisticated air to her: she was classy but also very funny. I would love the opportunity now to go back and thank her for all that she did. I’m grateful that she took me on as a project; I hope she would be proud.

PT: What new initiatives or projects are you most excited about?

BM: Our hotel room renovations, for one. We just completed one phase, with another planned for January 2025. And expanding our partnerships both for events and community benefits. This year, we teamed with the Central Bucks Chamber of Commerce to present a series of Bucks Fever events, including a talent show, art and sculpture show, and Friday afternoon musical performances. We’ve also partnered with the Bucks County Center for the Performing Arts to present “Tony n’ Tina’s Wedding” in August. Through other partnerships, we’ve helped to raise money for the Bucks County Audubon Society, Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, Bucks County SPCA, and other nonprofits. □

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– Janet Grove, ANA volunteer

through its mission budget, said Reiff, a DPC member who was a secretary there when ANA began.

The church began weeklong mission trips to New Mexico in 2010 “to help members of the congregation understand the needs of the Native Americans,” as well as why DPC was supporting the work of ANA through its annual mission budget, she said.

Reiff and her husband, Brian, lead the annual trips, which include time spent working at the Community Pantry as well as cultural excursions. DPC pays some of the costs but participants, not all of whom are church members, largely pay their own way.

The mission week is followed by a week of ANA-provided health screenings at reservation schools, and some of the mission trip participants stay to help the local student-nurses and professional medical providers who travel from Doylestown and elsewhere. In addition, two separate week-long trips, one in spring and one in fall, provide veterinary clinics at each reservation. Conducted by Native American Veterinarian Services, and largely funded by ANA, they are staffed by volunteer veterinarians, vet techs, Penn vet students and volunteers from NAVS.

Among the more than 130 volunteers who have gone on at least one

mission trip since they began are Janet Grove, a retired elementary school teacher from Chalfont, and Shaffer, who said she was struck by “how grateful they are for the generosity of our community.”

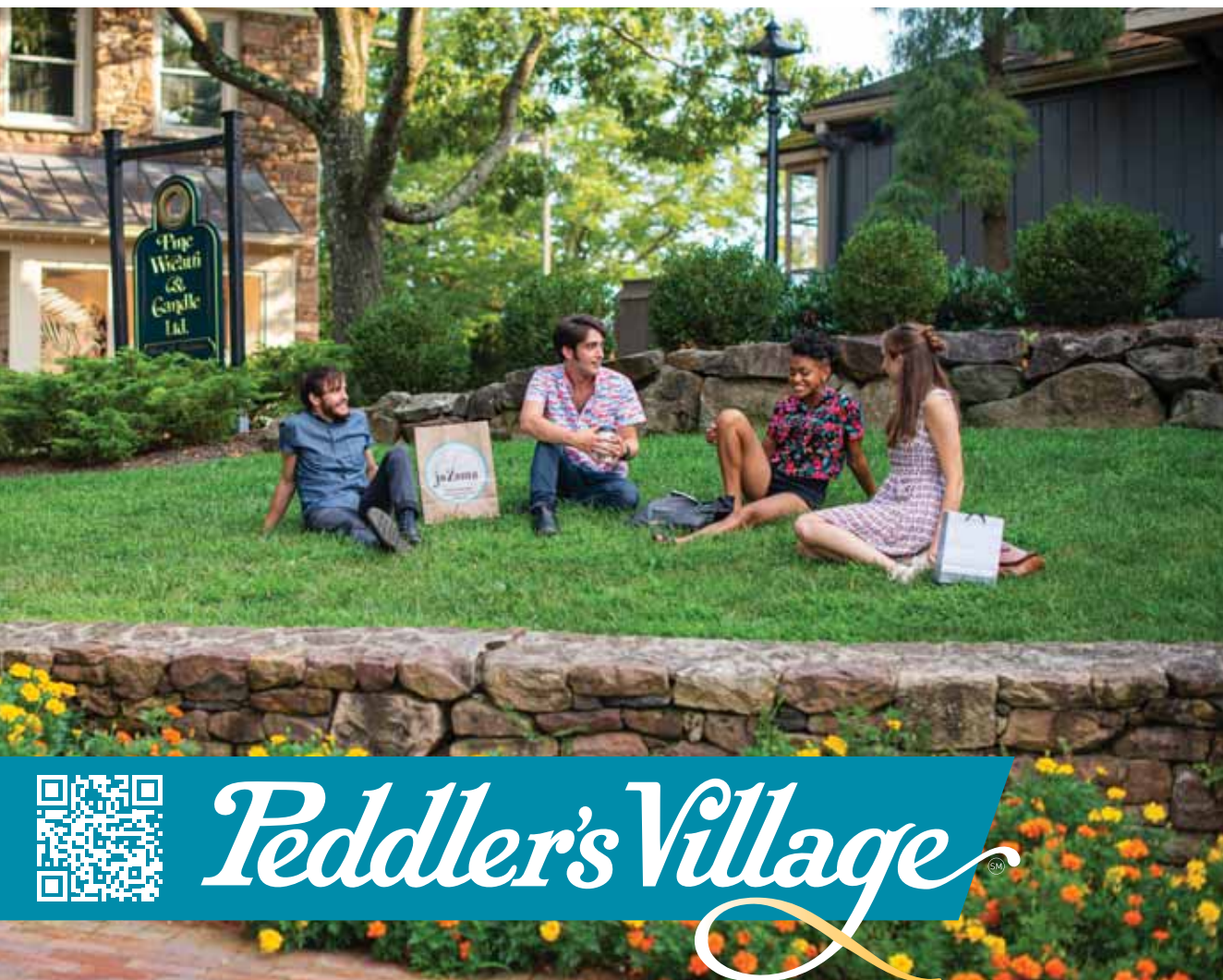
“I believe 2010 was the first year I went on one of the mission trips,” said Grove. “I was so inspired by everything, I said to Mary Lee, ‘How can I get involved?’”

Since then, Grove has become the ANA board recording secretary and coordinator of the volunteer shoppers who purchase what reservation schools tell ANA they need. She has been on approximately 20 mission and health-screening trips.

“I just find it very rewarding. The people are lovely. They’re very grateful,” she said. “I feel like I’m helping people who need help.”

For information about the Garden Party, donating to or volunteering with ANA, or going on a mission or service trip, visit americansfornativeamericans.org or email americansfornativeamericans@gmail.com. □

Jodi Spiegel Arthur wrote about Tina and Jim Greenwood in the May/June Issue of Prime Time.



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