

Why I want to be on the board

By

Gary Dennis

When I was nominated for the board by former president Michael Dillinger back in 2023, the first words out of my mouth were “you son of a bitch”. Obviously, I accepted the nomination. What is maybe not so obvious is that I did apologize to Michael for calling him a son of a bitch. What is also not so obvious is that I love our organization and this industry.

I did come from a psychotically competitive family of “know -it – alls”. My father was from St. Louis and when he moved here in 1951, he never left and he decided to learn everything about this town. Our bibles became The Columbia Guide to New York City, Lost New York and (especially for me) a reprint of the 1904 book released by the Interborough Rapid transit Company entitled The New York Subway – It’s Construction and Equipment. The only way to get some parental attention was to be funny (for my mother) and to know something about New York (for my father). It was like living in a New Yorker magazine but without cartoons.

After losing my movie rental store, I was aimless. I did become a stay-at-home dad, and although rewarding, there was something missing. How could I be a better parent if I always feel that there was something missing, a missing piece of me. Discovering this profession gave a sense of purpose and basically filled the missing piece. I took my much discussed in therapy childhood and made it into a career. A career that I am more than grateful to have.

I sort of fell into this life by accident. I was on 96th and Broadway one day, one of the double deckers was making a turn. I heard what the guide was saying, and I did not think it was good enough. My wife said, “if you think you can do better, shut up and do it”. After a minimal amount of research, I very luckily happened upon an ad on Craig’s List posted by a man who became very important to me, Lee Gelber. He was looking for guides for City Sights. I responded, we met and the rest is history. I started on the double deckers and was hoping to bring better content to this platform. Do not misconstrue what I am saying here – there are (or were) some fantastic guides on those buses. However, the majority were pointing out the world’s largest Red Lobster.

As I began to feel my way through the process and what it meant to be on the board, I was bestowed with the honor of heading up a committee. Originally, I was a co-chair of the NYC 400 Committee. I began to plan our logo and our slogan (It All Started Here). To prove a point with other co-chairs of the committee, I went and got the tattoo that most of you have seen. That tattoo has become the logo and the collector item worthy pin. I was given a budget that I spent under 25% of.

My job on the board has been primarily to support the rest of the board, to contribute to discussions that eventually become policy, and to bring member issues to the board. My time on the board has been something that I really enjoyed and am incredibly proud to be a part of.

However, my goal, different from my job, on the board is that the name GANYC becomes synonymous with New York City Tourism. What has become one of the important things for me is recognition of our organization. The fact that the City of New York does not have a Mayor’s Office of Tourism is unconscionable. Through the NYC 400 initiative, I believe our “brand awareness” has gone up. The response time from the Manhattan Borough President’s office as well as Council Member Gayle Brewer’s office became noticeably quicker for the second set of tours offered on October 25th. I am hoping to keep the momentum going with a second term.