

Bob Gilbert (00:00):

Welcome to Tourism Heads and Their Tales, a podcast series that explores with travel and tourism leaders their take on key issues of the day. My name is Bob Gilbert, General manager for the tourism and Destination marketing practice at the award-winning strategic marketing agency Alexander, who are bringing you this podcast series. I've had the privilege to have worked with iconic global brands, including Disney Choice Hotels, Yosemite and Shenandoah National Parks, Kennedy Space Center, Visitor Center, and Best Western International. Plus, served on the boards of the U.S. Travel Association National Tourist Association, and an elected commissioner for Visit California. Looking forward, I will be chatting with those that are helping shape the travel and tourism industry, all with unique tales to share that I know you will find both interesting and educational. So, without further ado, let's get started. Welcome to Tourism Heads and Their Tales, and I'm delighted to introduce Kristen Reynolds, who is the president and CEO for Discover Long Island. And the first question that I always ask is to learn more about you, your background, and your journey so far. So welcome, Kristen.

Kristen Reynolds (01:27):

Thank you so much for having me.

Bob Gilbert (01:29):

So tell us about your journey in travel and tourism.

Kristen Reynolds (01:33):

Oh gosh. You know, I, I started as a journalism major at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism at Arizona State University and thought I was gonna go into PR at the time, events management, started working for a PR agency and I wasn't sure at the time actually, I was interning and working both for an agency, a PR agency as well as for Senator John McCain. I was also very interested in politics and lobbying, so I was doing both to see which I liked best. And my tourism career just took off a little bit faster. Um, we had a couple of tourism clients at our agency, and next thing you know, I was working for the Arizona Office of Tourism and worked my way up through the ranks there before going to open up a luxury resort as their director of PR at the Sheraton Wild Horse Pass Resort and Spa, which was beautiful.

Kristen Reynolds (02:22):

I still just went back and stayed there a couple weeks ago. It was great. And, uh, and then I decided to take a little different route and I wanted to do more with the industry, kind of my political background coming forth and decided to leave the resort and go to the Arizona Lodging and Tourism Association, where I was the EVP for about seven years there. And went through a lot of different situations, crisis situations with the state and recessions and boycotts and, and really kind of, uh, cut my chops there on the political side of the industry and eventually became the lobbyist for the state tourism industry for Arizona. And then I'd been the number two for a long time, and I knew I kind of wanted to step into the leadership role and those roles don't come open very often in Arizona. So I looked nationwide and one day I saw this post for Long Island, New York and I thought, what is more epic than New York tourism? I love New York and New York City and, uh, Long Island was an incredible place to raise my two daughters. So I took the leap and became the CEO of, at the time it was a Long Island Convention and Visitors Bureau and, and Sports Commission. So, um, a year to the day of me coming here, we rebranded to Discover Long Island, and it's been an incredible ride ever since.

Bob Gilbert (03:39):

So with your position within, uh, Discover Long Island, and you mentioned your, uh, friendly competitors, I mean, you have to work very closely with New York, with Fred Dixon, I would imagine. How do you leverage those kinds of relationships that will that will benefit Long Island?

Kristen Reynolds (04:00):

Yeah, it's funny. When I first came here, people said that they were like, Oh, that we're competitors with New York City. I'm like, No, Long Island exists with New York City. I mean, we are, we started, you know, we branded ourselves as New York City's beachfront backyard. So yeah, I mean, it's one of the top bucket lists of any tourism destination of any visitor in the world. So we're lucky to live next to what I consider the greatest city in the world. It's part of Long Island life. We all love half of our residents, you know, work there. We all love going there and visiting there. And partnering with New York City also allows them to leverage us and our assets and resources. I mean, it allows them to compete with the LA's and the Miamis and, and you know, even Orlandos, other cities that have beaches and, you know, outdoor areas that are appealing in that mindset. So working together, uh, benefits both of us. And so there's, you know, and I'm, I'm really lucky to have a partner in Fred Dixon who understands that .

Bob Gilbert (04:57):

Nor Right, you know, and I'm, I have to say, you know, I, I actually lived in Long Island many, many, many, many years ago, and I, I remember living, it was in, um, my nearest station train station was Mineola and I would change in Jamaica and then get into, um, into Manhattan. But with the friends that I made, the residents are very passionate about Long Island. And there was a guy that I worked for some years later, and he lives in Montauk and would travel to the city every day. Now, that is a journey, so, you know, there and back, but it is that the, the passion of the, of the residents. And I guess, you know, if you read and believe from a DI perspective that recognizing residents as a D'S ultimate customer, how have you expanded, you know, your leadership role to engage with those communities?

Kristen Reynolds (05:58):

Yeah, it's no joke. I mean, Long Islanders are very protective of our Long Island. It's beautiful and it's a finite amount of resources and land, and they want it protected. Most people here are, you know, residents for generations and they want it to be preserved for their children. So it's really important, I came here with that mindset. I think being a lobbyist, you know, when you're lobbying and not necessarily promoting a destination, but you're lobbying on behalf of it, you have to communicate the impact of the industry to the residents. That's the only way to talk to elected officials is you have to make that connection how it benefits their constituents. And so I, I definitely already was ingrained with that mindset when I came here, but I, I can tell you, it was a very eye opening moment when I first came.

Kristen Reynolds (06:43):

I came with all my talking points like I would in Arizona and I said, you know, uh, tourism saves every household on Long Island, almost a thousand dollars a year in taxes. And the response I got was visceral. It was like, that's it, a thousand dollars. Where do I write my check to get rid of your visitors? I mean, long Islanders pay incredible amounts of taxes and they go up every year and they kind of expect it. So to say, a thousand dollars, that's, you know, that's a, that's a dinner bill for a lot of people here. So, uh, that was not enticing enough. So I had to immediately figure out what was important to the residents of Long Island and how I could connect the dots. And like I said, what, what I listened and what I heard

from the residents is they were worried about the sustainability of our economy and, you know, and yes, taxes going up every year and, and the expense to live here.

Kristen Reynolds (07:36):

And the fact that their kids weren't staying, that they wanted their kids to be able to stay here. And now, as a mom of a first time college student, I understand that so vividly that you want your kids to have the same experience that you've had and, and you know, your grandchildren have the same experience as your children. So that's really the way we approached it is what's important to you. And when we look at our branding and our marketing, it's, you know, Long Island is where I belong, and it's to create that emotional connection with the, with the visitors and let them know who we are as people, but also to say, Our kids belong here and technology belongs here and innovation belongs here. And, it transcends tourism into economic development and a kind of community pride message. So, you know, I've always felt like if the residents don't buy into what you're doing, if, why are we doing it <laugh>? I mean, what's the point if the residents don't want it? Cuz that's really the benefit of tourism is for the quality of life for the residents.

Bob Gilbert (08:34):

Right. So, you know, obviously everybody was impacted with the pandemic and some DMO s suffered more than others. You know, obviously if nobody's traveling and if there are no bed tax, there's no hotel, there's no funding, the DMOs you know, had to cut back. We are now in a full recovery mode. What did you learn from the pandemic? And you mentioned before you've been in other situations, not as severe, but other crises that you, you've, you've learned from. What changes did you make once you understood what the impact of, the Pandemic was having upon, uh, your community?

Kristen Reynolds (09:17):

Well, I, I'd like to first give credit to my board of directors for this because, you know, a lot of what we were able to do during that time and learn from and be successful from was because we had and still have an incredibly supportive and visionary and understanding board of directors. I mean, me coming in here and changing everything from the name of the organization, and one of the things I did is updated the bylaws, and this is the kind of like not sexy tourism stuff that CEOs deal with. But, you know, a lot of destinations weren't and still aren't allowed to carry a reserve. And, um, and we were the same boat. We were literally, when I first got here, paying payroll off of a line of credit for a certain portion of the year while we waited for our payments from the counties that were always delayed.

Kristen Reynolds (10:04):

And so we changed that and thank goodness we did, because we actually had a pretty healthy reserve going into the pandemic, which would've been a completely different situation had we not changed that process. And, you know, we were very lean and mean already with a very small budget, you know, one, some of the smaller destinations like myself fared better because we didn't have as much to trim and, and as many people that were potentially duplicative or, or, you know, that we could lose. So, um, and, and the other thing is our board, you know, at first my board chairman said, Okay, you know, Kristen, it's time to kind of batten down the hatches and lock down and let some people go furlough people. And I said, I disagree. I, I said, This is the time when our industry and our stakeholders need us the most.

Kristen Reynolds (10:50):

And if we're not there for them and leading during this time, the dust will eventually settle. And if they didn't need us in their time of need, they certainly aren't gonna need us afterwards for recovery. And he, he believed in what we were trying to do and we had to, you know, we stopped. New York was very, very hard hit, especially Long Island. We were second only to New York City as kind of ground zero for covid deaths and, and infections. So we stopped all advertising. We were not welcoming visitors, we were not asking people to continue to go out and continue to do things. So we had to change and we changed from advertising to, you know, a of course being a resource to all of our stakeholders, helping them. We had webinars constantly. And this is where that political background kind of came in with our congressional delegation, what federal aid is coming down, how, what resources are there to help them and also switch to a lot of storytelling. And that's when we launched our podcast, Long Island Tea, where we spilled the tea on living your best Long Island life. And just talking about Long Island and our Long Island TV YouTube series, we created new content that has really changed the face of this organization and the way we approach destination marketing as a whole.

Bob Gilbert (11:59):

How long have you had "Belong" as that tagline, you know, "Plan Where You Belong"?

Kristen Reynolds (12:05):

Yeah, I think that was 2018 when we launched Belong on Long Island. So it was prior to, you know, all of this. But we spent a long time creating that messaging and making sure that this is what we wanted to do for our residents and our visitors. And I think it has legs and I have no intention of letting that go anytime soon. In fact, we have a lot of really cool ideas and how we're gonna continue to build upon that

Bob Gilbert (12:31):

In, in terms of storytelling.

Kristen Reynolds (12:33):

Yeah,

Bob Gilbert (12:33):

It does have a lot, it does have a lot of legs for sure.

Kristen Reynolds (12:36):

<laugh>. Yeah. In terms of storytelling, in terms of, you know, utilizing the destination to increase business attraction in terms of keeping our youth and next generations here and communicating to them about where they grew up in their home and how great it is and how lucky they are. Um, all of those things.

Bob Gilbert (12:57):

Right. I'd like to talk a little bit about the funding opportunities from, um, the recovery lens, you know, ARPA programs, different grant programs, which of those, well two questions. One is, which of those have you seen to, to resonate most and what is the process to divvy out the, the grants to the various communities?

Kristen Reynolds (13:22):

Well, we didn't receive the APA funds. Those went through our counties and so mm-hmm. <affirmative>, the counties would essentially select us to do those funds for them, basically to implement those funds for them. So Long Island is made up of two different counties, um, Suffolk County and Nassau County to be the region of Long Island. Most people don't know that. And we're actually within those counties and we have about 119 different towns, villages, and hamlets as you were talking about, Mineola and all the different, uh, Long Island Railroad stops. So, we actually have, you know, 900 politicians on Long Island. It's, it's kind of, it's very parochial and, and it's part of what makes us wonderful cuz it's our small villages that we love in very small town. But it's also can be very challenging when it comes to working with local communities. I mean, we have 120 different chambers of commerce on Long Island. So, um, we, we don't divvy those up as much. We try to provide our resources to all of our partners and stakeholders and we try to, if anything, create opportunities for them to get those grants directly from the counties. So we help the counties communicate and the state communicate the opportunities of those grant opportunities to our stakeholders, but we're not the ones distributing those funds to them

Bob Gilbert (14:40):

Directly. Right, understood. So that, that's a lot of stakeholders that you have to, uh, keep satisfied or at least informed. I mean, you have your internal board and then you have all of those different chambers across, uh, Suffolk and Nassau, uh, counties. How, you know, with your background in communications, that is a, a really key skill to be able to have because you need to be able to communicate. What's the mechanism, How do you communicate with them and, what do you communicate to them?

Kristen Reynolds (15:14):

It is a challenge. I will say it's ongoing constant, cuz of course, every time, you know, there's elections on every different level, then there's new, it's constantly a hamster wheel of new people that is like, I don't know anything about Discover Long Island, what are you talking about? So our new content that we've generated that we did, again, a lot of it from Covid, um, during Pandemic, we launched two TikTok channels. We have over 10 different social media channels right now because we have separate social media channels for the podcast. We promote the podcast, we have separate ones for YouTube. And, um, so we have a, we're out there a lot in social media and it's, it's amazing to me on both ends. It's amazing to me how sometimes people will say, I've never heard of Discover Long Island. I'm like, how? I mean, we're everywhere.

Kristen Reynolds (16:00):

We're in every publication. We, we actually do invest quite a lot in local marketing and media and advertising because Long Island is, you know, 30% of our market share, you know, in a good day. And especially even more so now with visiting friends and relatives, there's a lot of opportunity here. We're in magazines, we're on tv, we're, uh, on social media, but in that realm we're promoting how great Long Island is and just discover Long Island. But as far as the stakeholders, I always tell my staff, anyone that reaches out to us, and it tends to be a snowball. You go and present at one, you know, rotary meeting or one library or one event of a regional organization, and then somebody on that sees you there. Once you speak it, another group that they're a part of and another group, somebody sees you. And I tell my staff that, you know, if, if I've got space on my calendar, book it, I will be there.

Kristen Reynolds (16:49):

I have my deck that walks through what we do and why we do it for them. And I've spoken at so many diners and again, um, Rotaries and, and senior centers and anyone that wants, and if I can't go, I send a member of our team. It's truly one of the most challenging parts in my position, but it's also one of the most gratifying parts is when I walk into a room and most of the time they think I'm gonna tell them all the great places to, to see on Long Island. And I go in there and I talk about what Discover Long Island does, why we do it, our funding, how we drive revenue, how reception drives business attraction. And they're blown away. They are blown away by what we do and everybody wants to like, you know, talk to you at the end. And it's so exciting. And that's really the best part of what I do, is I get to tell them what our staff does and, and why we do it for them. And it's, it's always so well received and everyone's so grateful to have us out there talking about how great Long Island is,

Bob Gilbert (17:50):

You know, the sharing of information. And this is one of those things that is always, I don't if I want to use the word amaze me or amuse me, but you have to publish a marketing plan. That's something that you do on an annual basis and it's there in, in the public domain. And, you know, my background before what I'm doing now was, you know, for many years in hospitality. And then the very notion of publishing my, my marketing plan for other hotel companies to look at just, it, it, it does bring a smile. There are so many DMOs that have to publish their plans. But is that something that you just take for granted and do you peak at what other folks are doing? Or, you know, what, where do you draw your inspiration from?

Kristen Reynolds (18:38):

Okay, that's a good question. I, I actually get so much inspiration from my peers and we talk about it a lot in this industry, how it's an industry for about sharing. And we don't see ourselves really as competitors because the reality is people don't just take one trip, they get the travel bug and they wanna go other places and they go there, they'll come here next. And there are so many incredible people in our industry that are doing really innovative work and I follow all of their accounts. I'm at, uh, you know, a lot of the conferences I'm, uh, lucky enough to be on the destinations International board of directors just recently, uh, pointed the CEO Summit, those kinds of things. But there's so much great work taking place out there. And, and again, uh, sometimes people come up to me and they're like, We liked your podcast. We're starting one just like it cuz we don't just have a tourism podcast. You know, ours is where we, we drink wine every episode, Long Island Wine, of course, we're sponsored by Long Island Wine Country and, and it's more of like a talk show where we talk about our lives and what we're going through and our families and then we sprinkle in some stuff. And it's been really receptive. And some of my colleagues say, We're gonna copy you. And I'm like, Great. That's awesome!

Bob Gilbert (19:49):

Well, I certainly, I certainly like the, the notion of having a glass of wine when I'm doing this podcast, so I'll have to make a note of that. So how many, what is your cadence? What is your regularity with the podcasts?

Kristen Reynolds (20:02):

It's every week we film every week and then it launches every tee time Tuesday and on YouTube as well as, you know, anywhere you get your podcast Apples, Spotify, Audible, Amazon, and it's great. We have quite a devoted base of listeners that will email us and write to us. And we actually did a social media contest to name our fan base and, uh, they call themselves the "Hoty-ees" <laugh>. And, um, we have merch, you know. That we give, we've done live remotes and it's been one of those things like we, you

know, there's no right way to do it. Right. We cast a really wide net on social media with our talks and our Instagram and we're out there just broad. And then sometimes this is just really a smaller audience, certainly, but a very loyal and dedicated audience that listen to what we're saying and really go and do the things we tell them to do. And I think both are important.

Bob Gilbert (20:57):

Uh, I'd like to talk a little bit about economic development and talking about economic development. You know, breaking news at least of a couple of weeks back was the announcement of the proposed Midway Crossing. 2.8 billion dollar development in Ronkonkoma which would include a planned convention center, a new hotel, and a new terminal at MacArthur Airport, Long Island MacArthur Airport to give it its, uh, full name and that's gonna take about a dozen years. Tell me a little bit about the genesis of that, because that is, um, that's a big deal.

Kristen Reynolds (21:33):

I am so excited about that. Thank you for asking. You know, when I first came to Long Island, they asked me as an outsider, not that many people move here. Right? I said, It's generational. So they were like, as an outsider, what, what are we missing in tourism? And I said, Well, we're missing two things. We're missing a luxury destination resort. We have gurneys, which is incredible, but it's all the way out in Montauk. And I'm talking about more of like a three to 500 room JW Marriott with our proximity, New York City that's off the train station somewhere, mid island that has meeting space. Because again, I came from a corporate resort and I know the benefits of those groups and meetings. I mean, that's why most of those resorts in Arizona exist. They're not for you and me, they're for the conferences. Then I said, you know, it's really, it blows my mind that we don't have a convention center on Long Island anywhere.

Kristen Reynolds (22:21):

I mean, our, our biggest meeting space is like, I wanna say it's like 28,000 square feet, which is just crazy. Not only because of our proximity to New York City and the fact that we could be a very economical, you know, alternative to those that can't afford access to the city, but also because of the industry that is here right now. I mean, we're the global headquarters of Estee Lauder and Cannon, and you know, I'm sitting here in Hauppauge Industrial Park, which is the second largest industrial park in the nation, only second to Silicon Valley. So there's incredible industry here right now, and it's just one of those mindsets that people are like, Oh, why would anyone come here? And then we started talking about where it would go. And again, I'll give the credit to this, to our, our Suffolk County County executive, Steve Bellone, because he has been just open arms listening to, you know, what the thoughts are.

Kristen Reynolds (23:12):

And he's had me at the table every step of the way for this concept, which is incredible and making sure that if we're gonna do it, we do it right. And I said, I can't believe we don't have a convention center. I just, I don't understand, and where it should go. It should go right by Long Island MacArthur Airport, which is also connected right next to the Long Island Railroad, the Ronkonkoma train station. So from a meeting planner's perspective, you could fly into the regional airport and go right to the convention center and you're equidistant by public rail to the heart of Manhattan or the Hamptons. There's so much opportunity here and, and Long Island doesn't really have our downtown, so we're kind of creating that. But it's a really exciting time and the Long Island Railroad, in addition also is getting ready to open for the first time when the new connection to Grand Central Station. So you'll now be able to connect from

Penn Station or Grand Central Station all throughout Long Island. And that is such an incredible asset. So it's really a pivotal time for Long Island right now, and I think it's going to open up the eyes to the world as to why not, You know, they should only live and, you know, visit and live on Long Island, but it's a great place to move your business.

Bob Gilbert (24:22):

So from an economic development standpoint, clearly you are working, uh, hand in hand with the economic development, uh, folks, you know, in some destinations that relationship is challenging, you know, but then on the other hand you have destinations like Orlando that merged the tourism, the DMO with economic development. Do you have any thoughts on that and what that, that future may look like?

Kristen Reynolds (24:50):

Well, I think that there's a lot of opportunity for synergies between tourism and economic development, and there's a lot of opportunities still here on Long Island. So our new development was done really by the county, and they're internal team of economic development. And again, you know, we've been kind of like chicken little down there. Like first it was gonna be a, an arena, a 17,500 square foot arena, and then it was gonna be used sports there. And I've been like, it needs to be a convention center. And now it's, you know, finally we created enough data and information and excitement around that concept that it is going to be a convention center, which is awesome. So, um, and again, the county is, we work so closely with them, but Long Island doesn't really have a Long Island economic development organization. We have eight different IDAs around Long Island, and it's the town of Islip and the town of Hempstead and the town of Brookhaven.

Kristen Reynolds (25:40):

A lot of places that they don't do, you know, they focus almost solely on retention and not any kind of, you know, attraction. So we actually, one of the other things we did during the pandemic is we brought all eight ideas together. In fact, they all wanted to work together. They've all worked really well together, but they didn't have the one kind of centralized resource that could represent all of them. And so we started the Long Island Economic Development collective where we can kind of help market a long island for economic development, again, through our belong branding, and then comes back to our website and then funnels through to the IDAs. So I do think that working hand in hand and utilizing the branding and the marketing that tourism offers to benefit economic attraction is the model that destinations should be using.

Bob Gilbert (26:25):

So we've used the word data a few times and there is such a proliferation of so many data sources. Where do you go to find reliable and actionable level data

Kristen Reynolds (26:39):

Everywhere? <laugh>

Kristen Reynolds (26:41):

I go everywhere and I think I have pulled data from almost every single one of our vendors. Um, we've done, one of the things we really struggle with is because we are so divided, you know, oftentimes we still battle with the counties, uh, I wanna be Nassau County, or I wanna be Suffolk County, and you need

to market our names. So we actually did a perception study and with Long Woods, which has been instrumental, that shows that Long Island is the brand and it, you know, it's not coming from me. We did a study of executive business travelers, and that's what they told us. And, and we just did a resident sentiment survey, but I pull data from destination analysts to help justify different campaigns that we do. We've had all the dashboards, I've had Symphony, I've had Voya, and now I have Zardico. I'm just a total data nerd, and I take data from everywhere because that's what it should be driving the decisions.

Kristen Reynolds (27:32):

Some of it is gut and instinct. Yes. And, and just looking at trends. But when it comes to validating those things and measuring them, we use Adara, we have a campaign going right now to support a New Breeze Airline route into Long Island MacArthur. And so of course, Adara does more than just KPIs as far as engagement and click throughs and CTRs, but we can actually say this, many people booked a flight and this was the spend when they came into the destination. And the more data you have at your fingertips, whether you're pushing it out all the time or whether you haven't, when asked, it just raises the credibility of everything that you do, and it builds that confidence in people supporting your decisions. So I'm a big data nerd for sure.

Bob Gilbert (28:13):

Yeah. You know, but you also raise a very important point, and that is, you know, you can be an MBA student with your PhD and you can look at the data, but what is important is the ability to translate that data, and that is wisdom. Um, you need to be able to, as they say in England, read the tea leaves. You need to be able to, to understand what the data is actually saying, which if you don't have the experience, that intuition, that gut feeling, you could be going down the wrong track. So you do need to have that level of wisdom to balance the intellect, if you will. You know,

Kristen Reynolds (28:50):

I think you're right. I think the reason I, I like so many variations of data is because again, talking to elected officials in, in my previous roles, and really still in my current role, if it's not believable, you can have all the data in the world. You know, for every \$1 you spend, you get a million dollars back in revenue and, and they don't. If it's not believable, then it, it has no value. So you're spending a lot of money on something that nobody cares about. Every single industry provides their ROI to elected officials. They get numbers from everybody. And some of it is like on the podcast, you know, we have enough emails and DMs and people, you know, people that write to us that tell us all the great things. And sometimes it's just testimonials and sometimes it's in market spend and sometimes it's CTRs and sometimes it's engagement. If we get a TikTok that blows up. So it really is the full package and you have to know what information to present at the right time to the right person.

Bob Gilbert (29:45):

So what are your greatest challenges or issues in achieving your objectives, your recovery objectives, let's say?

Kristen Reynolds (29:55):

I think funding is always the biggest challenge. We we're trying to get a tourism improvement district. We were leading the charge on that in New York state, and it seemed really positive, but then, you know, the downside of Midway Crossing and the convention center is then we needed to raise the hotel motel tax to help create a funding source for that. So, uh, obviously they're not gonna do both at the

same time. So we had to kind of forego our TID dreams for our convention center dreams, at least for now. But we did get a funding increase with that, which was great, but it's still not, you know, when you're funded through government entities, there's still a lot of challenges there because you're trying to educate people in government about a private sector industry. So funding is difficult. I think on Long Island, we actually have recovered faster than a lot of destinations.

Kristen Reynolds (30:46):

Again, our proximity to so many urban areas, New York City, Philadelphia, Boston, dc, a lot of people come here and it's a balance. It's almost like what we talk about for, you know, working moms that work life balance and how it's always gonna be a struggle. And I think it's the same for our industry and our residents. What is enough tourism? What is the right amount that's not going to impede the quality of life for the residents? And how do you maintain that and how do you control that over variety of seasons and, and industry issues like the economy? So it's, it's very complex and it's always keeping your ear to the ground, making sure you have open connections with your stakeholders and your residents, and you have ways for them to voice those concerns to you. And then you listen <laugh> to those concerns once they voice them to you.

Kristen Reynolds (31:34):

And if you can show them even a little bit of, you know, small wins or gives, it goes a long way to letting them know that they're part of the process. So our industry's facing a lot, I worry about it sometimes about the future of our industry and as social media becomes the new marketing tool, you know, it's not like the olden days where it was all about the travel guide and we were the ones that did the travel guide and people came to us. Now people go to a lot of different social media influencers for their travel ideas and what makes us better than them. So, you know, we don't, we can't just employ and engage those influencers. We have to be the influencer that people look to more than anyone else for their tourism information, which is why we have 10 different social media channels. But it's an ongoing, it's a disruptive time. And for those who, yeah, I mean for those of us who love innovation, disruption is exciting

Bob Gilbert (32:25):

You know, you're exactly right. Um, disruption, chaos. There's a lot of good that comes out of that because it makes one think a little bit more. I love what you say about the influencers and then becoming the influencer. Are there any other trends that you see?

Kristen Reynolds (32:43):

I think, gosh, that's a good question. I mean, podcasting was a huge trend. Everyone's doing that now. I honestly think that people aren't paying enough attention to YouTube as television goes more and more to streaming and people don't wanna pay for the streaming services. Like the younger generations they watch only YouTube <laugh>, unless their parents are paying for the streaming service <laugh>. And if you look at most DMOs YouTube pages, you've got, you know, a few hundred or maybe a few thousand subscribers where we should really be creating content that is engaging that channel. Um, yeah, I think that God knows what the future's gonna bring, but, um, but it's fun to be out there and to be in the mix. And I, you know, another trend I don't know is are, are we going to act more like agencies and become more privatized so that, you know, it's not a DMO hiring an agency or a DMO engaging with the influencer, but a DMO acting is that agency and being that influencer. So that's an interesting thought.

Bob Gilbert (33:44):

There's a lot of food for thought, uh, for sure. So what are you most excited for in 2023 and beyond for Long Island?

Kristen Reynolds (33:54):

I am really, really excited about the future of Long Island. We've been working with clarity of place on our, we're calling it not a strategic plan, but an evolutionary blueprint for Long Island. And we've got, again, the new connectivity to Grand Central, a third track. We just built the New Islanders Arena, the UBS arena, which is incredible. We've got really exciting things happening here with wind energy and a lot of natural energy resources looking to Long Island as their home based, as well as, you know, the convention center, it's gonna be all hands on deck and they say a dozen years, but I think it's gonna go faster than that. And I think there's a lot of political will right now, and we could really see things move quickly in getting our convention center and hotel development. So it's an exciting time to be here for sure.

Bob Gilbert (34:43):

That's excellent. You know, Kristen, you know, clearly I can see why you belong in Long Island and you've been a great guest today and Tourism Heads & Their Tales thanks you very much so I wish you continued success, Kristen.

Kristen Reynolds (34:58):

Thank you so much. Really appreciate having me on.

Bob Gilbert (35:03):

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