



Let's Not Give Up and Continue the Fight for an Increase in Tourism Funding for Connecticut!

As I write this, it's hard to believe that June is already here and the busy Summer tourism season is on our doorsteps.. With the legislative budget process now behind us, it's a good time to reflect on where we ended up and what we need to focus on for the future. To say I am disappointed is an understatement as both the funding for the Roadmap and America's 250th fell short of expectations despite all of our advocacy efforts and relentless time spent educating our leaders on the economic impact and return on investment for tourism . As we round out the 2024 legislative session, we reflect on the lack of increased tourism marketing dollars, but remain committed to improving the tourism industry in Connecticut moving forward.

This year posed significant challenges for Connecticut, as the legislature navigated a complex budgetary process. Instead of reopening last year's budget, the legislature opted to find additional funding through other means, avoiding a vote on budget adjustments. Leadership managed to secure funds for various projects using remaining federal money from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). However, these funds were allocated for specific groups and intended for one-time use, not for recurring expenses. Consequently, additional funding increases were not possible, meaning FY 24-25 will remain the same as was budgeted in the 2023 bi-annual budget.

Despite the lack of increased funding this year, we are optimistic about next year's session, where our advocacy efforts have a better chance of success. Moving forward, increased advocacy targeted towards the Administration may help as we move forward.

We must always remember that advocacy efforts are noticed, even if not acknowledged. Next year, the legislature and the administration will draft a new budget for the next fiscal cycle, presenting an opportunity to refocus our efforts.

I hope everyone shares their concerns and disappointment with our legislators and continues to push for the investment we desperately need for adequate Statewide tourism marketing. We will be reaching out and continue to welcome your input and strategies as we get ready to mobilize once again.

As always, I am forever grateful to our officers, board and membership for their commitment and support as we move through the busy summer tourism season. Our exemplary Executive Director Frank Burns, with support from Christine Dagata, continue to work tirelessly to keep this organization focused and on track for success. We will continue to meet and talk to industry and state leaders from all regions on a weekly basis and our reach, membership and industry engagement will continue to grow! I look forward to working with all of you as we continue to provide statewide leadership in tourism advocacy. Stay safe, healthy and have a great summer!

Paul Mayer



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT:

DANA NEVES

**Regional Vice President &
General Manager,
Gray Television**



Neves is a veteran of Channel 3. She began her career as an intern in 1995, and worked her way up as an assignment manager, managing editor and assistant news director. She was named News Director in 2006. When Dana Neves began her career at WFSB TV as an intern 25 years ago, viewers were not watching the news on their smartphones, and podcasts didn't exist.

Now, as vice president and general manager of the station, Neves oversees every form of news delivery.

To that end, Neves has helped expand Channel 3's coverage with the addition of Eyewitness News at 4:30 p.m., which was rated the No. 1 source of breaking news in the state as soon as the half-hour newscast launched in September and has remained in that spot.

Work had just started on a new live-streaming news app at the station when Neves became general manager two years ago. She said the launch in early March required constant work on a daily basis, including retrofitting the station's transmission tower in Avon, so viewers can now watch Rocky Hill-based Channel 3 live on their digital devices without cable connection.

During Neves' tenure as general manager, the station also initiated several podcasts such as Kara's Cures, Something's Brewing and The Joe Zone.

Part of her job as general manager is developing relationships with the station's key clients. Having been at Channel 3 since 1995, Neves said she already knew most of them but, in her new role, went from content relationships to business partnerships, which she maintains and strengthens "the old-fashioned way," such as meeting in person to talk and playing golf.

TOURISM CHAMPION:

DANIEL O'KEEFE

**Commissioner, Department
of Economic and Community
Development
Chief Innovation Officer,
State of CT**



Dan Was nominated by Governor Ned Lamont as Commissioner of DECD in November 2023. He has served as the State's of Connecticut's first Chief Innovation Officer since July 2023, and will continue in this additional role until a successor is found. Dan serves as a passionate advocate for the economy and communities throughout Connecticut, focusing on economic growth, workforce development, vibrant communities and job creation.

Prior to entering public service, Dan was a technology investor for 25 years, investing in high growth, innovative companies in the software, consumer and fintech markets, companies that went on to create tens of thousands of jobs.

Dan also serves as a Board Member and Chairperson Emeritus of The Opportunity Network (www.OppNet.org), an education and career-skills focused non-profit reaching over 40,000 high-potential students from historically marginalized communities.

