

**What Really Happened at The Children's Museum** □ Published on July 10, 201

***Marlene Brown: Futurist, Author, Social Marketing at Marmel Technotouch***

**Marlene's Background:** A successful area teacher & professor for many years; Mother of 5 & grandmother of 8, Marlene traveled nation-wide/world-wide as a Business Futurist (was 1 of 14 to earn the combined degrees of CSP (Certified Professional Speaker) & CMC (Certified Management Consultant), In 2003, she & Earl Chartered 1 of 14 Rotary eClubs authorized by Rotary Int'l; Both are Major Donors (contributing to Polio eradication), Marlene was Elected 2007-08 District 7150 Governor (3rd CNY woman to hold this honor); Traveled to India at own expense to take part in ribbon cutting of Rotary woman's computer school (skills to go from begging to working to support children); Traveled to Haiti at own expense to begin water project.

**Marlene's Museum History:** The Children's Museum of History, Natural History, Science & Technology, located in Baggs Square East in downtown Utica NY, has 4 floors with 100's of interactive educationally enjoyable hands-on exhibits. In 1999 Marlene was asked to create a Children's Museum website, which she did at no cost to the museum. She was asked to join the Board, the following year she became Chairman of the Board of Director. The Board discovered there were no financial records being kept and the museum was nearly \$100,000 in debt. The former director was just bringing in enough money to pay himself & his staff, but not pay bills due. The Board fired him and appointed Marlene Executive Director. Through her tireless efforts over the 15 years she oversaw the Museum operations, Marlene secured over 60% of the exhibits, was instrumental in opening an additional floor, growing exhibits & offerings for school children, families & tourists; Marlene wrote/secured grants to renovate the building & add new exhibits; Marlene & Earl started a \$10,000 personal Endowment Fund at The Community Foundation for future use by Children's Museum. Initially hired at \$59,000. a year, when she learned how in debt the museum was from the previous director, she signed a Board contract that she would temporarily forgo salary - choosing instead to pay off debt inherited & grow the museum - until such time as the museum could give her all her back pay owed. She has not yet received that.

**Awards earned:** In 2001 Marlene was 1 of 20 recipients awarded the 1st CNY Outstanding Women in Business Awards. In 2005, Marlene was 1 of 20 recipients awarded the 1<sup>st</sup> Mohawk Valley Outstanding Women in Business Awards. In 2007, Marlene completed the paperwork to get the museum declared a NYS & Federal Historic Building. In 2011, Marlene was chosen YWCA's Outstanding Woman Leader in Arts & Communication. In 2012, was chosen Co-Recipient of Mayor's Ball & was recipient of Landmarks Society of Utica NY area Restoration award. In 2013, Marlene was inducted into the prestigious Seneca Falls Woman's Hall of Fame.

**The Issue:** In 2014, when Exec. Director Marlene Brown discovered C. Gordon, a museum Board member, had disgusting and unsuitable material on his Facebook page, she called him into her office for a private meeting and told him he had to take that material off (as if wasn't suitable for a children's museum). He refused and stormed out of her office, hurling curse words, heard by Visitors & the Museum Front Office staff! That's when the following started.

**The lies that hurt us:** Utica OD April 11, 2014, *'The board has split into 2 factions, each with its own chair, holding its own meetings & challenging the notion the other can exert any control. One faction, headed by Chris Gordon, suspended Brown and moved to obtain control over museum bank accounts & financial records. That was rejected by the banks because of confusion, Gordon said'*.

**The Truth.** He created a bogus letterhead, listing himself as Board Chair, took it to museum banks and got our accounts frozen! He also took it to our sponsors, the Community Foundation, the Utica Fire Dept. & the District Attorney! Christopher Gordon was never elected Museum Board Chair & *told the local OD his supposed Board was made up of himself, Christopher Gordon, his brother, Dave Gordon, Paul Miscione & Deanna DiNardo (all of that was also proven untrue in court).* Celia Domser, the official museum Board Chair, told the OD she fully supported Brown,

saying “When I think of all that has been done since she has been there, it would've closed a long time ago if it weren't for her.” Domser said she wants to restore control of the finances to Brown.

**More lies:** The following was reported in the Utica OD April 13, 2014, “A *small group of members of the Children’s Museum Board of Directors have suspended Executive Director Marlene Brown. Gordon has made allegations about possible financial improprieties. Brown has adamantly denied the accusations. Sunday, Gordon called a meeting of the board. He said 3 of the board’s 9 members showed up: Gordon, his brother David Gordon & Paul Miscione. Miscione, a New Hartford Town Board member, has been a Children’s Museum board member for 3 weeks. He said he is concerned that the museum’s finances are not being properly managed. Under the museum’s bylaws, a board quorum is one third of the total number. The bogus Board assigned David Gordon and Deanna DiNardo as the new signers on the museum’s bank accounts. Brown says Gordon’s meeting was illegal - he never was chairman and had been formally removed from the board. Brown said she is not suspended & accused the group leader, Christopher Gordon, of “committing fraud. Chris is trying to get the building,” she said. “He is trying to get us out...get the keys, & if he does, he will ransack it.”* NOTE: all Gordon’s accusations were later proven untrue.

**A March, 2014 OD article said,** “the Children’s Museum Board of Directors gave a 60% share of its building to museum Director Marlene Brown. Brown said she took on the building in an effort to save the museum from developers who were eyeing it. Its Bagg’s Square location is viewed widely for such endeavors. Brown said she was awarded the controlling share of the museum’s property by a unanimous vote of her board in an effort to save it. Her story is corroborated by then-Board of Directors Chairman John Nogas. Brown supplied a 2011 letter, signed by Nogas, in which Nogas states Brown is being awarded the share in lieu of \$250,000 in back pay (Brown has a similar letter by later Board Chair Dan Trevisani). Brown said she has not collected a paycheck from the museum for many years and spent her own money on items for the museum. We would form an LLC, the building would be a spin-off into a trust that would be deed restricted, couldn’t be sold for commercial purposes & would stay a museum in perpetuity,” the letter states.

**Codes:** The Board decided to close the building and bring it fully up to code, which they did (code was changed in 2008 by the state & the municipality didn't promote it or inform our Board, as the municipality said in an OD article, they didn't have the manpower to do so). While it damaged hers & the museum's reputations, Marlene survived numerous falsified lies told about her by Gordon which were published by the paper, on TV & a radio station.

**Our Atty’s Advice:** As it was an ongoing case, our Attorney's told us we couldn't talk to the media about it. Because we couldn't share the truth, the media-written & air, especially a reporter from Utica's largest newspaper) kept publishing and airing articles from the lies he kept sending them. (Then, 2 Board members hired, without Marlene's knowledge, another person to take her place so it would appear Marlene was entirely responsible for codes not met, even though it was a Board & ED.) That hurt, especially after all we had done for the museum the past 15 years! It was a year long fight & costly with attorney's fees, but in the end we were found innocent of all charges!

**Our Greatest Accomplishments:** Keeping the doors open (even though some people tried to get the building for its uniqueness and great location), bringing in more school & daycare & family & tourist groups & visitors, adding new & exciting exhibits or building improvements each year with grants Marlene secured, including in 2001, paying off debts she inherited; in 2002, opening our 4th floor (which originally was merely a storage area with no electricity, etc.) to include a real donated airplane kids can take a ride in w/museum staff help, as well as several NASA exhibits with the help of then Congressman Boehlert, hosted several NASA officials, including their Director, and was declared adopted by NASA & Dept of Energy's Office of Science; in 2003 installed new furnaces & air conditioners on most floors; in 2004 updated our front entranceway, including a new front door; in 2005 installed new energy efficient windows throughout the entire building; in 2006 , cut the ribbon on a new commemorative brick sidewalk & added a Play Space

gate to our 1st floor toddlers area but left the life size train open for all age of kids to enjoy; in 2007 worked on & completed required paperwork to get our museum building officially certified as a NYS & Federal Historic building (in historic Baggs Square East); in 2008 installed new energy efficient lighting throughout the building + installed new roof signs; in 2009 installed an LED Play Dance floor on the 2nd floor & Touch Screen History Quizzes & an interactive train on the 3rd floor; in 2010, we redid our leaking roof (going from 25 lbs psf to 5 lbs psf), Setup a donated ceramic village and musical light show timed to the village; in 2011, under the guidance of Earl Lewis, and with several volunteers & donated train exhibits, we setup an amazing interactive train exhibit; built & equipped a 4th floor Theater Room, installed 3rd floor handicapped bathrooms; in 2012, installed a Wind Turbine on our roof, opened a sustainable Science Energy room & added to our popular Living Science Room (containing fish, gerbils, Hank the Snake. a live Beehive & butterfly metamorphosis video); in 2013 our Erie Canal exhibit on the 2nd floor was enhanced with an interactive 'boat going down the canal' exhibit; in 2014 we tore up & replaced the entire 2nd floor carpeting with new carpeting & enhanced our 2nd floor Musical Stage (containing my grandmother's piano!). The Board honored Marlene by awarding her the prestigious title of "Executive Director Emeritus" at an event attended by the Board, sponsors, friends, Utica Mayor Palmieri & former Congressman Sherry Boehlert. View event on museum historic original website: <http://www.museum4kids.net> \*

**D. A. Finds Brown Innocent** Feb. 11, 2015 an OD article declared “Oneida County District Attorney released the results of a months long investigation into how the museum handled its finances. “The investigation into the Children’s Museum has been completed and based on our findings, I do not see any viable charges that we can pursue before a grand jury,” DA Scott McNamara write in a release about the report. McNamara said the investigation involved a “lengthy review of each and every banking transaction” of the Children’s Museum over the past 5 years. “While our investigation revealed that there may have been some issues with record keeping, we confirmed the expenditures from the numerous bank accounts were in fact made on behalf of the museum, McNamara’s report said. Museum Board Chairwoman Celia Domser said she was not surprised by McNamara’s findings, especially since Brown had put some of her own money into running the museum over the years. “We knew all along that that’s what the outcome would be,” Domser said. “None of us had any doubt Marlene would be exonerated.”

**State Supreme Court Justice Rules for Museum** Feb. 18, 2015 Utica OD: “State Supreme Court Justice Samuel Hester ruled Wednesday that Gordon was properly removed for ‘conduct unbecoming.’ Neither Gordon nor his attorney, Linda Sullivan Fatata, were in state Supreme Court when Justice Samuel Hester ruled that "Gordon was properly removed from the board". Museum Board Chair Celia Domser continues to support Brown. “Marlene Brown kept the museum open for 15 years, and took lots of money out of her own pocket to pay for this, that the other thing,” Domser said. “She deserves to go out – when she does –with all due respect, because that museum would have gone away 15 years ago but it stayed open because of her.”

**Recommendations:** While I & my Board should have done so VET THOROUGHLY all Board Members, all employees & volunteers. I wish the Media & all those who were so eager to believe his charming lies, had also vetted him. They'd have found everything he was eventually arrested for! Gordon caused us such grief that, even though we proved him wrong & were exonerated, it drained me. So we retired. *But the Board needs to keep track of exhibits as I've received emails that several of our costly & irreplaceable exhibits are missing from the museum! Many of them were mine & several others were donated to the museum to be left there!*

**Breaking News** : the former Board Member who wrote false letters pretending to be us, causing us to lose a year's income, finally got bit by Karma! He was found in a boat in the Iliion Marina & arrested for several counts of Grand Larceny for what he did to a number of other businesses!



**View Oneida County District Attorney's Office Press Release here:**

**Oneida County (NY) District Attorney's Office May 18 at 3:50pm Press Release**

**Oneida County District Attorney's Office Contact Person: Luke Davignon 315-798-5578**

**On May 17, 2016 Christopher J. Gordon, 36, of Utica was sentenced to two consecutive terms of 1 1/3 to 4 years in State Prison (total of 2 2/3 to 8 years), a \$5,000.00 fine and ordered to pay restitution in the amount of \$10, 150.54....**



**Mr. Gordon was convicted, after trial on March 16, 2016, of two counts of Criminal Possession of a Forged Instrument in the Second Degree, and one count of Criminal Impersonation in the Second Degree. The conviction stems from incidents that occurred in January and February of 2015 when Mr. Gordon presented himself as a representative of a local construction company and received payment to do renovations for a local business.**

**In order to persuade the business to hire and pay him, Mr. Gordon made several misrepresentations. Specifically, he presented a forged Certificate of Liability Insurance indicating that he possessed worker's compensation and commercial liability insurance and provided the victim with a forged invoice from a building supply company as proof of payment for supplies he claimed to have purchased for the renovation. *(Gordon is currently in jail)***

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**View documents here: <http://www.museum4kids.net/AboutUs.htm> WKTV article: [http://www.wktv.com/news/Ilion\\_man\\_charged\\_with\\_grand\\_larceny\\_impersonation\\_following\\_contractor\\_fraud\\_investigation.html](http://www.wktv.com/news/Ilion_man_charged_with_grand_larceny_impersonation_following_contractor_fraud_investigation.html)**