



PHOTO: GREG ZAFFKE

Charles and Pia Lobraico of Barrington Travel, pictured with Ursula and Greg Pearson of Travelex International.

## New Frontiers in Travel

TWO BARRINGTON AREA TRAVEL AGENCIES MERGE FOR STRENGTH IN A CHANGING WORLD

URSULA AND GREG PEARSON of Travelex International and Pia and Charles Lobraico of Barrington Travel are thrilled to announce a merger as of January 15, 2020. “The growth of all sectors, corporate, leisure, and group travel at Travelex opened the door for strategic partnerships and acquisitions. The merger with Barrington Travel makes sense,” says Travelex International Vice President Greg Pearson.

Opening its doors in January 1973, Charles Lobraico prides himself on building his business from the bottom up. An innovator at heart, Charles worked diligently; armed with only a few thousand dollars and a vision, Barrington Travel was born. Among its 47 years of accomplishments, Barrington Travel has the distinction of being the first travel agency to utilize a computerized airline ticketing and reservation system in the Northwest Suburbs, Sabre, still used today as an industry standard.

Ursula created Travelex International with a family member and another colleague in 1992. All three were on non-compete contracts from former

employers, bravely opening their doors without a single client. Born and raised in Germany, Ursula’s background aided her in seeing value in the increasing demand for luxury leisure travel. Working meticulously to grow Travelex from a small corporate agency in the ‘90s to the multi-million-dollar business that it is today, Ursula and Travelex are known as a renowned leader in corporate travel and an award-winning Virtuoso member agency.

### RESPONDING TO SEISMIC SHIFTS

On January 18, Travelex held its annual company holiday dinner party. The year 2020 held much promise—an ever-growing staff, booming book of business, incredible wine, and the recent merger had all in attendance in the highest of spirits. Then February hit, bringing rumors of a novel coronavirus coming from China. By March 1, it was clear to the industry veterans that ‘strategic’ was about to gain new meaning.

When 9/11 happened, time stopped for everyone, but travel agencies took an especially hard hit. Some merged, but most everyone folded.

Travelex International survived and so did Barrington Travel. Pia Lobraico’s key to survival: “A whatever-it-takes mentality,” she said. “We focused on our clients, and customer service. We did everything we could.” The answer was the same for Travelex. The Pearsons and Lobraicos share much common ground. Longtime Barrington residents, area small business owners, global travel experts, and formidable leaders. They are also survivors.

It is now the second week of April. We’ve been sheltering-in-place for one month. While we do not know what the future holds, we know that we are stronger together. The employees of Travelex International and Barrington Travel have been getting together for weekly happy hour meetings on Zoom. When they are not unweaving a client’s spring break, honeymoon, or summer in Europe trip, they are encouraging everyone to have faith, stay the course, and keep dreaming.

We will travel again, and when we do, I’ll continue to walk in the footsteps of the experts, my mentors. There is strength in numbers, and power in resilience. In the words of Greg Pearson, “The best is yet to come.” Let’s follow his lead. U



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