



Nadya Kessler
Director, GlobalPittsburgh

Global Connectivity

GlobalPittsburgh Director Nadya Kessler and Babst Calland Attorney Susanna Bagdasarova discuss the benefits of ‘citizen diplomacy’ and opportunities for local and international business leaders



Susanna Bagdasarova
Attorney, Babst Calland

by Daniel Bates, Contributing Writer

Peace on earth – perhaps wishful thinking during this holiday season in the midst of such extreme global turmoil. But not for the likes of the ever-optimistic GlobalPittsburgh and its local business supporters.

Together, they’re working hard these days to foster international peace and stability by bringing countries and cultures together right here in Pittsburgh, “one handshake at a time,” according to Nadya Kessler, director of GlobalPittsburgh, a nonprofit that has been serving the Pittsburgh community since 1959.

“For almost 65 years, GlobalPittsburgh has been developing and fostering educational, cultural, and business relationships between the Greater Pittsburgh community and international citizens,” said Kessler, a one-time attorney who emigrated from Russia in 2009 and has been leading the nonprofit for the past year. “GlobalPittsburgh is very important to the local business community because it creates long-lasting relationships between local and international community members, giving an opportunity for local businesses and academic institutions to meet international leaders whom they might have never had a chance to meet otherwise.”

Kessler shared the mission of GlobalPittsburgh, alongside Susanna Bagdasarova, an attorney with Pittsburgh-based law firm Babst Calland who serves on GlobalPittsburgh’s board of directors, during a recent interview with the Pittsburgh Business Times.

At ‘the same table’

The organization’s mission, Kessler said, couldn’t prove timelier today, as it “reaches across divides to bring people of diverse backgrounds and perspectives to the same table, forging opportunities for both the international and Pittsburgh communities to learn from and inspire each other.”

GlobalPittsburgh was founded in 1959 as the Pittsburgh Council for International Visitors. Early on, the United States Department of State designated the nonprofit as a regional liaison for the State Department’s International Visitor Leadership Program. With that designation came grant funding that continues to fund the organization today, along

with support from local businesses and other local community members, as well as event sponsorships, according to Kessler.

In 2022 alone, GlobalPittsburgh hosted 344 representatives from 91 countries and brought them together with 460 local professionals for what the organization calls “Global Intersector events.” The topics of the visits range from entrepreneurship and economic development to cybersecurity to energy issues to higher education and much more.

Babst Calland’s Susanna Bagdasarova said that mission – and those Intersector events – are what drew her, an attorney focusing on emerging technologies, to the organization in the first place.

“GlobalPittsburgh does these really fantastic informal networking events where they have their delegates from other countries who are government cabinet members and executives come and essentially provide an opportunity for local businesspeople to meet and greet and just chat and connect over our similarities and our differences,” said Bagdasarova, who herself emigrated to the United States from Armenia as a small child with her family.

“It’s just a fantastic organization,” she added, “and I’m very excited as it moves into the future here.”

Cultural diversity

Bagdasarova was quick to note that Babst Calland was drawn to the organization because of the diversity of its own clients, which includes international clients as well as domestic clients with international business lines or affiliates.

“I think it’s very important both from a cultural and personal perspective to be well versed in communicating with the folks outside of the United States and to really be able to understand global trends in the law,” Bagdasarova said. “We’re in an ever more-connected society, and it’s only going to become more and more connected. Having that diversity of thought really allows you to have a different perspective on legal solutions and become more proactive in the kinds of legal services you can provide to your clients.”

Generally, though, Bagdasarova suggested that Pittsburghers should “look outside the region of Western Pennsylvania and really see how we can fit

Pittsburgh into a greater global context. All of this is going to require more and more collaboration on a global scale.”

Citizen diplomacy

At the core of GlobalPittsburgh’s altruistic philosophy is what Kessler refers to as citizen diplomacy. It’s a concept that, when official relationships between countries are hard to foster, every citizen – every average individual – has the right and responsibility to be a representative of their country and help shape U.S. foreign relationships, as we like to say, one handshake at a time.

“Citizen diplomacy can be a vital tool of crafting those relationships, and anybody could be a citizen diplomat,” she continued. “It doesn’t mean that two parties have to negotiate directly. It could be a hosted meal. It could be attending a gathering and networking event, as well as having professional interactions. Bringing countries and cultures together contributes to peace and stability in the world and connects us all as a global community.”

Choosing delegations

Kessler also pointed out that local businesses can work with GlobalPittsburgh in ways that allow the organization to identify the right matches with regard to foreign delegations.

Our goal is not only to showcase Pittsburgh to visiting delegations, but we also have a way to select delegations that we bring to Pittsburgh,” Kessler said. “We would like to learn more about the needs and interests of local businesses. This way, we can help them meet their needs. We have these delegations already coming to Pittsburgh, so why don’t we do all the work for you, which doesn’t cost you anything to bring those emerging and established world leaders right to your doorstep? If anyone has any questions, I’m more than happy to talk more about it.”

To view the full video interview with Susan Koeppen, visit “Business Insights with Babst Calland” at pittsburghbusinesstimes.com/babstcalland. For more information on GlobalPittsburgh, go to GlobalPittsburgh.org. For more information about Babst Calland, visit babstcalland.com.