NAME
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR MUSEUM EXHIBITION

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EXHIBITIONIST

Photo by Garry Chilluffo, courtesy of The Children's Museum of Indianapolis

Breaking the Mold:
Sessions from 2005 AAM Conference

from the president

by Phyllis Rabineau,
President

We are very proud to present this issue of *Exhibitionist*, featuring articles based on many of the NAME-sponsored panels at the 2005 AAM Annual Meeting. The diversity and depth of its contents impressively reflect our members' individual and collective expertise, and the inquisitiveness and creativity that are central to their successful exhibit-making. In these articles you'll see their wide-ranging curiosity and continual challenging of conventional assumptions, habits of mind necessary for the kinds of innovative thought and practice increasingly critical for museums of any type to succeed.

The articles presented here express many of the complex issues that exhibit professionals deal with today, including presenting controversial content; developing tried-and-true content in fresh ways for new audiences; new ways to structure project teams and to use consultants; and successful models for outreach.

Every year, NAME and our sister organizations that make up AAM's Standing Professional Committees generate a major portion of the programming at the annual conference. Each SPC's Program Chair works with potential session leaders to develop proposals that will survive a very demanding review process and become the conference's intellectual core. This year, NAME was particularly successful in presenting a strong set of programs, thanks to the efforts of Program Chair Tamara Biggs, aided by Past President Kristine Hastreiter and outgoing Program Chair Leslie Cohen. Finally, we are grateful to Eugene Dillenburg for outstanding work pulling this issue together.

Planning for next year's conference is already underway. By the time this issue is in your hands, the national program committee will have met to review the session proposals and make its final choices. Based on preliminary responses to the proposals that were contributed to NAME, we will again be an important contributor to the Boston program, and look forward to compiling papers from those sessions in the Fall 2006 *Exhibitionist*.

Meanwhile, as Gene is putting this issue to bed, Beth Redmond-Jones has begun working with the NAME Board of Directors to plan the Spring 2006 *Exhibitionist*, which will coincide with our organization's 25th anniversary as well as AAM's centennial. While we anticipate some content in that issue will commemorate highlights and achievements of the past, the overall goal of that issue will be to reflect the contemporary vitality and envision future opportunities of exhibitions. Drawing upon the variety of disciplines that make up our field, we will try to break the mold a bit, with contributions in pictorial as well as verbal form. To our knowledge, no other museum publication has yet presented its content in the form of a graphic novel—if not here, where? If not us, who?

from the editor

by Eugene Dillenburg,
Guest Editor

Crane calls in springtime,
Echoes off Mt. Fiji and
Is not heard again.

NAME puts a tremendous amount of effort into our presentations at the AAM conference. Every year, we have about a dozen sessions on the program—sometimes more. Our Program Chair and President put in hundreds of hours preparing, presenting and defending the submissions. The speakers, leaders in the field, slave over their presentations, offering valuable information on current trends, or reviewing the basics through the eyes of their experience. The program is then presented, once, to a couple hundred people, and is never heard again.

NAME puts a tremendous amount of effort into our journal, the *Exhibitionist*. Authors slave over their articles, distilling brilliant insights from the sweat of their brows. Editors put in countless hours soliciting articles, cajoling authors, reviewing text and shepherding the issue through to publication—a monumental task which I have only recently come to fully appreciate. And every six months, we start over again with a blank slate.

Two birds. One stone. You do the math.

With this issue, we begin a new experiment: printing articles in the fall based on AAM sessions given the previous spring. The valuable information from the sessions reaches a larger audience, and remains accessible on into the future. And we cut in half the number of new articles we need to produce every year. It's win-win.

But it's also a break with tradition. For the past six years, virtually every issue of the *Exhibitionist* has had a theme—"Meaning Making," "Technology," last spring's "Small Museums." On the surface, the only thing uniting the articles here might be the fact that they were all presented at a particular conference. Some pieces focus on design; others on development. Some are very abstract; others, more concrete.

However, reading the issue in its entirety, certain themes emerge. This may go down in history as "The Case Study Issue." I count more than 20 here: real-life examples giving flesh to abstract principles. There's also a lot of discussion about working with "outsiders"—visitors in general, specific audiences and communities, design firms and consultants, or museum colleagues outside the Exhibits Department. Repeatedly, concerns are raised about "cookie-cutter" exhibits (though I see no explanation as to why copying good ideas is a bad thing. Perhaps that's a topic for a future issue.) There are also a number of calls for training new professionals. I predict that several of these articles will be distributed in museum studies classes for years to come.

Members who couldn't attend the conference, attendees who missed a session, students and other future audiences—we hope you find these articles useful. For in that utility, the effort expended to create these sessions, and the subsequent articles, is justified.

NAME is deeply indebted to Jenny-Sayre Ramberg, who pitched in and edited about half of the articles here. JS, we couldn't have done it without you.

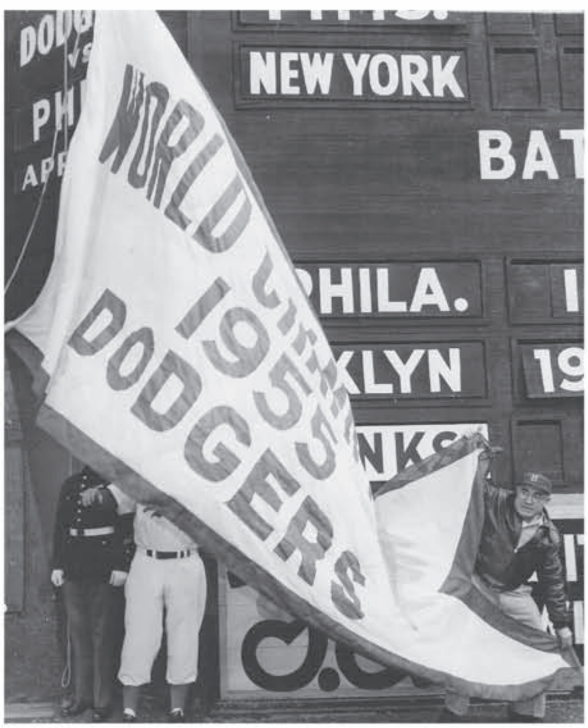
exhibits newsline

by Kevin Schlesier

Kevin Schlesier is Exhibits and Outreach Librarian at the North Carolina State University Libraries.

Contributions to Newsline are always welcome! Send them to: kps529@msn.com.

On one of the hottest days this summer, I got to touch an iceberg. I was fascinated as a child when the *Titanic* was located on the ocean floor, so I was eager to see the *Titanic* exhibit at the Maryland Science Center in Baltimore. The exhibit displayed artifacts in interesting ways, including some vitrines that let visitors discover the artifacts on the ocean floor as the divers did. Tools found at the wreck site were displayed alongside photographs of workers building the ship—and lent an ominous foreboding. The show interpreted the different classes on the boat by using state room re-creations alongside original artifacts. The personal effects of passengers were laid out in the next gallery, with biographical details including the stories of how they wound up on the ship. A blackened starry-skied room, meant to evoke the night of April 14, 1912, had several monitors showing computer animations of the ship sinking and the touchable iceberg. (In all honesty, touching the ice made me less interested in the cold of that night and more interested in trying to figure out how the museum was preventing the ice from melting.) The last gallery featured the toll of the tragedy, listing the passengers and telling their fate. The show saved me from feeling like a voyeur by telling human and humane stories. Unfortunately, I lost this feeling in the gift shop where visitors were funneled as they exited. The shop featured such items as the "Titanic Iceberg Rock Candy," and water-filled paperweights that featured a small *Titanic* model and an iceberg, allowing one to recreate the accident over and over again.



The World Championship pennant is hung at Ebbets Field, 1956.
Photo courtesy of the Collection of National Baseball Hall of Fame Library.

A recent trip to Brooklyn allowed me to explore the underground world of the subway system and one of the world's most beautiful suspension bridges. The New York Transit Museum is a perfect example of how location can make all the difference. Located in a historic 1936 IND subway station in Brooklyn Heights, the air quality, smell and lighting are perfect for its subject. It takes advantage of its underground space by featuring interpretive galleries on the upper floor and old subway cars on tracks below. When you enter the museum, you walk through a re-created subway tunnel under construction. My father, who is over six feet tall, looked uncomfortable and almost hit his head several times. The effect was perfect. At another point there's a shaft that visitors can look up, as if they're looking to the street above through a maze of pipes, roots and wires. The exhibits continue with train models, decommissioned subway signs and a row of turnstiles lined up to show their evolution. Visitors enjoyed walking through the turnstiles without having to pay the fare. Downstairs, visitors can walk through decommissioned cars (including some old ones with wicker seats) and sit and linger as long as they like.

At the Brooklyn Historical Society I saw *Beauty Suspended*, their exhibit on the Verrazano Bridge. It was a fascinating look at both the engineering of the bridge and the impact it made during and after construction. A small monitor featured interviews with people whose lives were affected by the structure, including those who lived in neighborhoods bisected by the bridge at the Brooklyn approaches. I felt like I was sitting at their kitchen tables and wanted to listen to every story.

Another Brooklyn Historical Society exhibit, *Dodgers Do It! Celebrating Brooklyn's 1955 Big Win!*, explores the excitement of the 1955 World Series. Developed in cooperation with the National Baseball Hall of Fame in

Cooperstown, the exhibit commemorates the underdog Dodgers' famous 1955 victory over the Yankees. Reminiscent of the excitement around last year's Red Sox triumphs, the show captures the agony and excitement that permeated Brooklyn during the summer of 1955. Complete with the winning pennant, the show includes radio broadcasts, photos and oral histories. As you read this, the playoffs should be in full swing. Catch this show if you still can.

If baseball isn't your thing, maybe you'll enjoy the New England Carousel Museum in Bristol, Connecticut. Executive Director Louise DeMars reports they've expanded the first floor of their magnificent building, a 33,000 sq. ft. restored hosiery factory. They've added two fine art galleries, created a Museum of Fire History, expanded their Carousel restoration department, and have the office space for the Hartford Bushnell Park Carousel, which they manage, on the second floor. They're completing an open gallery space for large temporary exhibits, and by the end of the year they'll complete a new Museum of Greek Culture. Whew!

After all that work we could use some relaxation. Eugene Dillenburg suggests checking out the museum of the American Cocktail in New Orleans (www.museumoftheamericancocktail.org). Dale DeGroff, one of the museum's founders and the world's premiere mixologist, describes the museum's goal "to establish a self-sustaining, non-profit museum and tourist attraction that celebrates and preserves a truly rich aspect of our culture: the American Cocktail." Their latest exhibit opened in January 2005 at its new temporary home on the second floor of the New Orleans Pharmacy Museum in the heart of the French Quarter. The exhibit takes visitors through the rich and colorful history of the American Cocktail, its ingredients, inventors and evolution. Graphically presented Vintage cocktail shakers, bottles, Prohibition-era literature and music, tools and other cocktail memorabilia are on display. The artifacts cover over 200 years of the cocktail experience. This amazing exhibit, curated and designed by Ted "Dr. Cocktail" Haigh, kicked off Carnival season with a special media event featuring turn-of-the-century cocktails and presentations.

(After this article was written, Hurricane Katrina swept through the Gulf Coast, killing hundreds and causing billions of dollars in damage. Many museums and cultural institutions were affected. AAM has assembled resources for affected museums, and for others who wish to help. Please visit their website at www.aam-us.org.)

The world's happiest exhibit staff: Curator Ted "Dr.Cocktail" Haigh stands amid 1940s displays with the museum logo in hand. Photo courtesy of Jill DeGroff.

Continuing down the culinary path, Betty Teller wrote from Copia: The American Center for Wine, Food & the Arts (www.copia.org). Located in downtown Napa, Copia offers changing exhibits throughout the year in addition their permanent exhibit, *Forks in the Road: Food, Wine and the American Table,* which examines contemporary American culture through food and drink. The exhibit offers a lively menu of interactive experiences that explore different aspects of American food culture. As visitors enter, they're greeted by a wall of copper pots from the kitchen of Julia Child, and conclude their visit with scenes from major motion pictures showing the most important ingredient in any meal, the people we share it with. Throughout this tasty repast, you can test and expand your knowledge, share personal food and wine memories, and delight in "playing with your food." Other exhibits this year include *Everready Working Woman: Harriete Estel Berman's Family of Appliances*, in which master metalsmith Berman deconstructs, cuts, folds and reassembles metal scraps into extraordinary art. Her work makes pointed commentary on issues surrounding our consuming identities, including the roles of women in our society and the dreams we buy into with "satisfaction guaranteed." In a unique combination of museum, exhibit and charity, Copia will be the North Bay host of *Canstruction: We CAN Build a Solution to Hunger* starting this October. *Canstruction*® challenges architects, engineers, designers, contractors and students to design and build colossal sculptures using canned food. Each year, in 50 locations around the country, the designers compete to create funny and fabulous can-based artworks, using the colorful food labels as their palette. At the close of the exhibit, all of the food used in the sculptures will be donated to local food banks.

Phyllis Rabineau sent in a clipping from "News of the Weird" announcing that The Village People's "The Indian" donated his gold record for the group's 1978 hit "Y.M.C.A." to the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C. According to the band's web site, Felipe Rose is a native New Yorker, raised in Brooklyn. He reflects his Puerto Rican and First People's (Lakota Sioux) heritage and his association with First People's groups in his performance outfit. Evidently the rest of the band's outfits **are** just costumes, so don't look for the Construction Man's hard hat at the National Building Museum any time soon.

Jennifer Colaguori, Visual Arts Coordinator for VSA arts (www.vsarts.org) recently contacted me. VSA arts is all about accessible exhibits and universal design—they only book in accessible spaces and they offer all of their materials in braille and large print. They hang artwork lower to accommodate wheelchair users and provide AD discs and headsets for the visually impaired. She shared news about several of her exhibits. Last year VSA arts put out a national call for children's art, entitled "Discover What Art Is..." to 75,000 art and special education teachers around the country and to affiliates in Guam, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. From hundreds of submissions they selected one image per state/country and mounted the show with quotes from the students answering "what is art?" In addition, they developed two audio description/tactile tours of *Discover What Art Is*. The exhibit is a poignant view of how art enhances the lives of children with and without disabilities across the country. It's currently touring the country; check out their website to see the web version and the touring schedule. Another exhibit, *Shifting Gears*—part of *Driving Force*, a collaboration with Volkswagen of America, Inc.—features artists with disabilities, ages 16-25, and will open in September at the Smithsonian Ripley Center. Volkswagen provides the prize money at a critical time when these students are deciding whether to pursue art as a career.

Eugene Dillenburg sent in an article about a new museum of communism in Warsaw, Poland. I spent some time poking around their website (www.socland.pl/main.html) and found video clips, photographs, scanned documents, speeches and music clips. Some of the video was amazing, and I found the website easy to navigate even with the language barrier.

Also from Eugene, be sure to check out the Toilet Museum online at (www.toiletmuseum.com) where the curator, Burt Stark, encourages you to "click your way through every exhibit in the 'real' Toilet Museum, and then some, without actually having to use my bathroom. You can even send an electronic toilet postcard to a friend using Post-A-Toilet. If toilet knowledge is what you're after, then check out our FAQ page." He goes on to note that "the 'real' Toilet Museum remains closed to the public, unless, of course, my application for a grant from the National Foundation for the Arts goes through."

And finally, I stumbled across the NAMCO Museum while on-line. The NAMCO Museum is not a building or a web site. It's a video game collection of six 'classic' video games, including *Pac-Man, Ms. Pac-Man, Galaga, Galaxian, Dig-Dug* and *Pole Position*. A museum indeed.

Courting Controversy in Museum Exhibits

by Kimberly Louagie, Saudia Muwwakkil, Diane Perlov, Ph.D. and John Russick

Kimberly Louagie is Curator of Exhibits at the Outagamie County Historical Society in Appleton, Wisconsin. She may be reached at kim@foxvalleyhistory.org.

Saudia Muwwakkil is Public Information Officer at the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site. She may be reached at Saudia_Muwwakkil@nps.gov.

Diane Perlov is Senior Vice President for Exhibits at the California Science Center. She may be reached at dperlov@cscmail.org.

John Russick is a Curator at the Chicago Historical Society. He may be reached at russick@chicagohistory.org.

Some exhibits intentionally push buttons and challenge attitudes. Others evoke a completely unanticipated public outcry. But the risk of controversy should not dissuade us in our work. On the contrary, museums are one of the few public venues that can tackle complex issues and difficult subjects that otherwise might not be addressed. Perhaps more importantly, controversial exhibits provide opportunities to reconfirm the museum's purpose, re-invigorate staff to see the impact their efforts can make, and strengthen and expand the relationship between museums and their constituents. The four exhibits featured here all courted controversy, which, in the end, worked to their advantage.

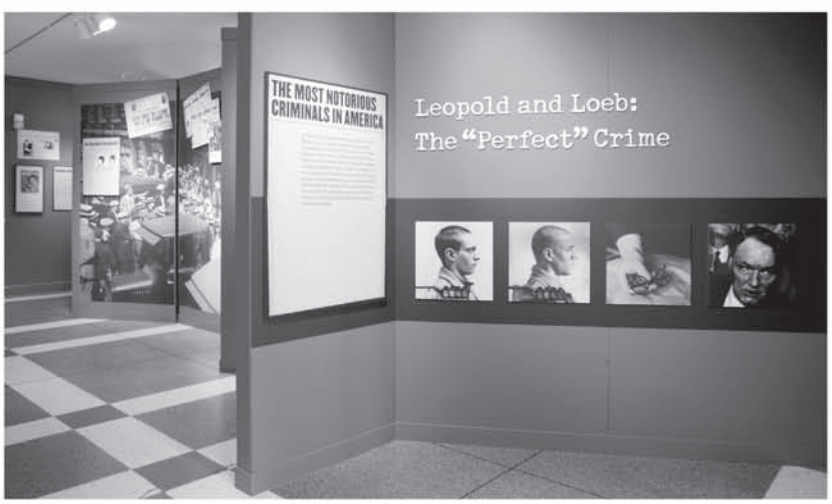
Leopold and Loeb: The "Perfect" Crime at the Chicago Historical Society

by John Russick

On May 21, 2004 the Chicago Historical Society opened *Leopold and Loeb: The "Perfect" Crime*, an exhibit about the senseless and brutal murder of a fourteen-year-old boy at the hands of two teenagers out to commit the perfect crime. Their horrific act made the front pages of newspapers across the country. People wanted to know why and how Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb carried out this terrible plan, and why famous attorney Clarence Darrow agreed to defend them. The vicious nature of the crime and the killers' lack of remorse, combined with their youth and privilege, shocked and fascinated the nation at the height of the Jazz Age.

"The exhibit provoked the encounter with the family."

The case of Leopold and Loeb is one of the most important events in American legal history. The exhibit featured the same compelling themes that propelled the story into the national spotlight in 1924: random-yet-calculated murder, a sexual relationship between the killers, a celebrity attorney, Pulitzer-prize-winning reporting, and one of the first uses of psychoanalytical testimony in a criminal case. In the days just before the exhibit opening, CHS received an unexpected call from the family of one of the murderers. They were very upset that we hadn't consulted them before we developed an exhibit that once again tied their name to this terrible crime. In an effort to meet this potential controversy head-on, we invited the family to tour the gallery before the public opening and discuss their concerns with us.



Entry graphic for *Leopold and Loeb: The "Perfect" Crime*, featuring mug shots of the two murderers. Photograph by John Alderson.

Two days before the opening, nearly ten family members and friends visited the museum to tour the exhibit and meet with the Curator and the Deputy Director for Collections and Research. Several of these visitors let it be known before they entered the gallery that they were unlikely to find the display acceptable. After roughly two hours of looking at objects and images, reading label copy, and exchanging many whispered comments, one member of the group offered to share with CHS personal correspondence from their infamous relative. Until now, the family had kept the existence of these documents to themselves. Based on our meeting with them and their comfort with how we presented this complex and disturbing story, they were now ready to share these letters with us.

The exhibit provoked the encounter with the family. The family provided us with access to new, important historical documents. The new documents gave CHS an opportunity to better understand and interpret this part of Chicago history. The experience also offered CHS a chance to test our ability to respond decisively and effectively to criticism. Most importantly, the project provided CHS with a powerful exhibit that attracted large numbers of visitors over its four-month run. For CHS, the risks were clearly outweighed by the benefits.

Hosting *Body Worlds: An Anatomical Exhibition of Real Human Bodies* at the California Science Center

by Diane Perlov

From July 2004 through March 2005 the California Science Center hosted the American debut of the highly successful yet controversial European exhibit *Body Worlds: An Anatomical Exhibition of Real Human Bodies*. (See *Exhibitionist*, vol. 22, no. 1 for a review of the exhibit in London.) The anatomy and physiology exhibit developed by Dr. Gunther von Hagens features more than 200 real preserved and dissected human specimens, including entire bodies as well as individual organs, body parts and transparent body slices. After seeing it in Germany, we became convinced that the exhibit had tremendous educational value. We were also well aware of the potential controversy in exhibiting human remains. The subsequent steps involved in reviewing the exhibit and opening it at the Science Center illustrate some of the special challenges and the powerful appeal of hosting controversial exhibits.

Central to our review process was an Ethics Advisory Committee composed of religious, medical and bioethics leaders in our community. Following their initial recommendation, we contracted with an internationally recognized bioethicist for an independent review of the exhibit's body donor documentation. The bioethicist traveled to the Body Worlds' offices in Germany and reviewed all body donor consent forms, matched the donor forms with death certificates, verified that the body specimens were properly donated for the purpose of public exhibition, and verified that the donor forms met established informed consent standards. In addition, the Committee reviewed other aspects of the exhibit, including its educational merits, controversial and culturally sensitive aspects, its appropriateness for young viewers, the respectful nature of the design, and specifics of exhibit presentation.

At the same time we conducted the ethical review, we secured Board approval and support for the project and met with major donors and additional community leaders. As a part of the contract negotiations, we mutually agreed on the main educational messages, and on media messages and strategy. Once the contract was done, we met with a crisis communications firm who provided very valuable (if not a little scary) advice. Finally, we specified a small number of spokespersons for the museum and conducted intensive hostile-media training. Six months after our first visit to Germany, with our preparation done, we opened the exhibit and held our breath.

Visitors to *Body Worlds* at the California Science Center. Photograph by Leroy Hamilton, courtesy of the California Science Center.

From the opening night, the exhibit was overwhelmingly successful from every perspective. In 8.5 months, over 930,000 people attended the exhibit from all over the United States. In terms of educational goals, 71% of our visitors polled said they were inspired to pursue science learning on seeing the exhibit, and 91% said they learned new information about the body. Our membership doubled, school group attendance grew 80% from the same period last year, and visits from teens and seniors increased five-fold.

"...we met with a **crisis communications firm** who provided **very valuable** (if not a little scary) **advice.**"

The experience of courting such a controversial exhibit has made a lasting impact on the Science Center in ways that we hope are useful for all of us. Like our sister institutions, we work hard to be cognizant of the sensitivities of our audience. In hosting *Body Worlds*, we did not want to intentionally inflame controversy. At the same time we could not ignore or deny the controversy dogging this exhibit. Nor could we deflect potential criticism simply by saying "our ethics panel has endorsed the exhibit." We knew we had to recognize and be prepared to address the major controversial issues. Key to our accepting the exhibit and preparing for any potential controversy was the recognition that **the thing that makes this exhibit so controversial is the very thing that makes it so educational and compelling.** In other words, the controversial aspects of the show—the fact that these are real bodies, and that they are presented in active, lifelike poses—aren't gratuitous. They are essential to the exhibit's educational power. They're the reason that visitors connect with them so profoundly: the plastinates let us get close to ourselves, to examine and to understand our own bodies. One of the lasting lessons of the *Body Worlds* exhibit is not only that controversy is often unavoidable, but that it is often integrally linked with learning. And when we are prepared and can make those links clear to ourselves and to our public, visitors become more open to the educational messages of the exhibit, and we gain profound insights into the potential power of the exhibit medium.

A.K.A. Houdini at the Outagamie County Historical Society

by Kim Louagie

On March 26, 2004, the *Today* show aired a segment on the controversial exhibit *A.K.A. Houdini*, due to open two months later at the Outagamie County Historical Society. Host Matt Lauer moderated a debate between magician David Copperfield and my museum's director, Terry Bergen. The controversy revolved around an interactive version of a quick-change magic illusion called Metamorphosis. Copperfield expressed disapproval of the interactive because it breaks the magicians' code of ethics, showing visitors the inner workings of the trick. Both sides presented their arguments. Bergen talked logically and objectively about an educational component of an exhibit. Copperfield showed emotion and frustration in his attempt to preserve the mystery of the illusion.

Additionally, Copperfield said the museum had refused his help in developing an exhibit that could satisfy both magicians and visitors. But Copperfield had never offered to help build a less-controversial exhibit. Instead, he had told Bergen in a prior telephone conversation that he had nothing at stake with the exposure, and only took up the mantle of the opposition as a matter of magician politics. But the public did not know this, and e-mails streamed in that day chastising the museum for not accepting Copperfield's generosity:

- "the woman on the *Today* show should be FIRED. . . . [She] continued even though David Copperfield offered to assist in finding an alternate [way] and yet he was turned down."
- "I saw you on t.v. this morning Terry!!! What a loser you are!!! You should be ashamed of yourself!!! Try to get some sleep if you can!!"
- I was not overlooked. I was called an "administrative STOOGE" and a "self-serving scum-hole."
- My favorite, though, was an e-mail by a woman who wrote that she would like "to express her disappointment and anger in the Wisconsin Historical Society [sic]."

The Background:

The *Today* show coverage came just one day after a front page article in *The Wall Street Journal* introduced the story to the nation. But magician opposition had started almost eight months earlier with a disgruntled collector named Sid Radner and his supporters. The museum had just ended a fifteen-year relationship with Radner, who had rented his collection of Houdini memorabilia to the museum for exhibition and research. His and his supporters' anger about the end of the lease eventually distorted itself into a crusade against the future Houdini exhibit. They found out about the interactive version of Metamorphosis through the local press. Radner and supporters quickly took to magician chat rooms and bulletin boards. The museum got hundreds of e-mails from around the world asking it not to break the magician code of ethics and, more to the point, not to hurt the livelihood of magicians who still perform this trick. The critics firmly believe that any exhibit about Houdini should memorialize him and protect his magic secrets. But the museum's focus was the visitor and not Houdini. The team had designed the exhibit, including the interactive Metamorphosis, so that visitors could connect to the subject matter. In the end, the philosophy of public trust outweighed what Houdini may have wanted and what a special interest group expected. Besides, the exhibit team felt that the exposure of Metamorphosis was not a true exposure since its secret is already available publicly in library books.

Visitors perform the Metamorphosis illusion in *A.K.A. Houdini*.
Courtesy of the Outagamie County Historical Society.

The Response:
The museum had a staff of eight, most of whom were busy putting up an exhibit. Our Marketing Officer had just had surgery and was off work for several months. We went through a year-long fight with on-again-off-again attacks, mostly in the form of e-mails, letters to editor in the local press, telephone calls, and some snail mail. Some of these critics put heavy pressure on the exhibit's funding sources (the local convention and visitors bureau and IMLS) to cut money to the project. The museum's early attempts to explain the exhibit's goals were paraphrased, taken out of context, and resurfaced in new form in the media and online. The Board of Directors decided that the museum would not answer any more mail.

Instead of quickly jumping into a public fight, the exhibit team sat down and re-evaluated the hands-on activities. All the reasons for including an interactive Metamorphosis still rang true and the team stood behind it. Management and the Board supported the team and trusted in its members' experience and professionalism. For the most part, this was the same team that had successfully opened an exhibit about the controversial Senator Joseph McCarthy two years before. When a mediated deal with the Houdini Club of Wisconsin fell through, staff decided that any further compromises would affect the integrity of the exhibit. Instead of searching for never-to-be-had support in the magician community, the museum sought and received a letter of support from NAME, to show that it was upholding professional standards and abiding by its own code of ethics. The museum ran articles in its quarterly newsletter and in the editorial section of the local paper to explain the controversy and our position.

The museum had at first been surprised by the unanticipated controversy, but decided to embrace it and developed a public strategy. Front-end surveys already showed that a majority of people wanted to know how Houdini accomplished his escapes and magic tricks, and the team pushed this point. Magicians responded with a paternalist argument, saying that people who learn the secret to a magic trick are disappointed. While that may be true for some, the team decided it was not the museum's job to make that decision for visitors. The museum took the side of personal freedom and responsibility, putting the magicians in an awkward position.

It was also difficult for magicians to rein in their more extreme members. Some of them started to make the controversy personal. They used derogatory and sexist language and made threats of lawsuits, sabotage and blackmail. The museum made this information known to the police and the press.

The fight splintered into an internal battle within the magicians community. The famed magic bad boy team of Penn and Teller supported the exhibit. Surprisingly, so did The Pendragons, the husband and wife team who are well known as the premier performers of Metamorphosis. They contacted the museum and offered to perform a benefit show on opening night. The controversy finally imploded on opening day. The museum invited students from the local Houdini elementary school to visit and pose for the press. The press aggressively photographed and videotaped these kids performing Metamorphosis and spread their images across newspapers and airwaves. The smiles on the kids' faces shot down the magician's last argument that the museum's exhibit would ruin the experience of magic for children.

"...the museum sought and received a letter of support from **NAME,** to show that it was upholding professional standards..."

What has this done to the institution?
The controversy had some effect on everyone at the museum. It started out as a battle to end an uneasy relationship with a vendor who had too much influence over museum operations. It helped Board members and staff realign themselves with the institution's mission. Board members were so engaged in the issue that most wanted to extend their terms, although none wanted to run for Board President that year. The Executive Director lost almost a year of work because she was constantly putting out fires and strategizing with staff. A few donors requested the return of their collections in protest, but the museum refused to deaccession any materials. (Their requests were quickly dropped anyway once staff noted that the IRS would get involved if they had taken a tax deduction for the donation.)

The exhibit team felt vindicated: summative evaluations confirm visitor satisfaction, and attendance has been above average since the opening over a year ago. The team also instituted its own code of ethics, adapted from codes from the AAM and AASLH, but with more emphasis on intellectual freedom and visitor needs. Marketing will never be the same. The museum fell short by not having prepared a press release. The exhibit team supplied Matt Lauer with an internal memo about the controversy. It was surreal to hear him ask questions of Bergen and Copperfield that came directly from that document. It worked only because magicians did not have a written response of their own. But the best feeling came well after the exhibit opened when Arthur Moses e-mailed a research request asking me to expose another of Houdini's tricks. Moses, a famed Houdini collector and magic buff, asked about the inner workings of Houdini's spirit cabinet, a piece of magic apparatus that he apparently had just purchased at auction. This same man had criticized the museum earlier in the year and called magic exposure "vulgar." He wrote "As your curator believes it is the museum's position to teach, I then hold you also to have live sex demonstration . . . I will not support you any more." But he did. He paid $17.10 in research fees to the museum for my vulgar explanation on the inner workings of Houdini's spirit cabinet.

Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America at the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site

by Saudia Muwwakkil

The exhibit *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* at Atlanta's Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site was not an easy display to stomach. The photographs and artifacts depict the horror of a not-so-distant period when lynchings and mob violence pervaded

Visitors pen their reactions to *Without Sanctuary*.
Photo by Joe Cook/National Park Service.

the American landscape. The collection amassed by Atlantans James Allen and John Littlefield chronicles documented American lynchings from the 1880s to the 1960s, as the practice became a tool of oppression, injustice and racial terror wielded primarily against African-American people. Such a stark and visual reminder can be tough, particularly in the American South where most lynchings occurred.

As the Allen-Littlefield collection sent shockwaves across America in the revelatory book *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* (published in 2000) and complementary New York exhibits, some in Atlanta began to weigh the options for bringing the public display south. Debates ensued. Was Atlanta, and by extension the American South, ready to face this shameful past? Would displaying the material prove racially divisive? Who would stand to benefit?

To the credit of those parties directing the initial discussions, they decided to solicit community input. Forums conducted in diverse neighborhoods favored an Atlanta exhibit. The community acknowledged the pain inherent in *Without Sanctuary*, but was convinced of its potential to advance authentic dialogue about racism and similar injustices. The community's counsel would later help frame the project's blueprint for interpretation, programming and communications.

Dissatisfied with lingering debates—even after the community's mandate had been issued—and meaningless compromises proffered by some local leaders, the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site entered into the nationally publicized controversy. Management offered to convert a bare, white-wall meeting room into a 1,500-square-foot gallery designed specifically for *Without Sanctuary*. Yet of greater value and consequence would be the site's philosophical conversion from insular traditions to a broader contextualization of its mission. Established as a unit of the National Park Service in 1980, the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site preserves and interprets the historic community in Atlanta which nurtured Martin Luther King, Jr. as a child and civil rights leader. For 20 years, the site's work had focused on the American civil rights movement proper and the campus consisting of King's adolescent neighborhood, home church, burial site and surrounding community.

In 2001, however, the independent National Park Service Advisory Board encouraged national parks to rethink their charge for the new century. The Board urged parks to actively "tell the whole story" of America's history, acknowledging both the noble and ignoble aspects.

The park educates and inspires 600,000 annual visitors by helping people fully understand the environment that gave birth to Dr. King's leadership. However, King's relevance extends beyond the restricted time period and city blocks the site interpreted. The context of his legacy is greater. Dr. King rose to leadership at the apex of a 340-year journey defined not just by segregation, but also by the enslavement of African people, the American Civil War, Reconstruction, lynching and Jim Crow laws. Therefore, to truly understand King's legacy and enduring influence would require that one understand why there was ever a **need** for his leadership.

On this premise, the King Historic Site would nestle its fledgling philosophy into *Without Sanctuary*, itself a critical storyline in the larger narrative. The Site, together with co-presenter Emory University, independent curator Joseph F. Jordan, collectors James Allen and John Littlefield, and countless community groups and citizens, labored to make the *Without Sanctuary* project a transformative experience for all who encountered it.

Approximately 180,000 people experienced *Without Sanctuary—Atlanta* through the exhibit and ancillary community programming, which included film series, interfaith services, public programs, facilitated dialogues, educational outreach, theatrical performances, conferences and symposia, artistic responses, service projects and more. The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* labeled *Without Sanctuary* "one of the most extraordinary exhibitions in Atlanta history." Descendants of lynching victims reunited with "lost" family members as a direct result of the exhibit. Descendants of lynching perpetrators spoke openly about their efforts to ensure that "the sins of [their] fathers" not visit future generations, by actively engaging in racial reconciliation initiatives.

A new organization, Southern Truth and Reconciliation (STAR), formed in part because of *Without Sanctuary*. STAR seeks to help communities where lynchings and similar acts of violence occurred bridge racial divides by adopting truth and reconciliation processes. Further, *Without Sanctuary* helped solidify the expanded focus that leaders of the King Historic Site envisioned for the park's future.

Perhaps the most critical signs of success, however, come from patrons like eighth grade student "S.P." from Rhode Island who wrote:

"Though the exhibit was horrifying, it was important that we see it… If we try and cover our eyes from the blinding light of truth, then this type of thing will only continue to happen, and nothing will be done. Terrible things still are happening today, but we, as the young people of this country can do something about it. By educating ourselves, and learning the many mistakes made in the past, we can be sure that these mistakes are not committed again."

We, as stewards of the world's heritage and culture, are obligated to those we serve to not cower away from "blinding light[s] of truth," even when steeped in controversy. Go forth in that quest for truth with integrity, preparation, consultation and accountability. But, by all means, go forth.

"Though the exhibit **was horrifying, it was important** that we see it."

Preparing for controversy:

1. Get the support of management, Board members, third-party experts and community leaders.
2. Engage a diverse committee of advisors or scholars in the interpretation of the exhibit.
3. Conduct front-end visitor surveys to find out the best way to present controversial information to the public.
4. Create a media strategy with a strong message that everyone sticks to.
5. Develop a message from the President, Curator or Exhibit Team in the gallery.
6. Develop a security plan.
7. Plan for structured visitor feedback.

Responding to unanticipated controversy:

1. Revisit interpretive and design elements to assess educational value and weigh that against institutional mission and museum codes of ethics.
2. Get the support of management, Board members, third-party experts and community leaders.
3. Be willing to make compromises to address the legitimate concerns of critics.
4. Create a media strategy with a strong message that everyone sticks to.
5. Develop and re-evaluate strategies as the controversy progresses.
6. Institute a security plan.
7. Don't take it personally.
8. Plan for structured visitor feedback.

What the Heck is Experience Design?

by Donna Braden, Ellen Rosenthal and Daniel Spock

Dan Spock is Head of Exhibitions at the Minnesota Historical Society in St. Paul. He may be reached at Daniel.spock@mnhs.org.

Donna Braden is Lead Experience Developer at The Henry Ford in Dearborn, Michigan. She may be reached at donnab@hfmgv.org.

Ellen Rosenthal is Executive Director at Conner Prairie in Fishers, Indiana. She may be reached at erosenth@connerprairie.org.

Theoretical underpinnings

by Dan Spock

This article will to attempt to make "experience design" more than just another fashionable buzzword. I hope we will provide some real theoretical and practical departure points. "Experience design" is such a wonderful, squishy, expansive term. In a vague sense, we can all recognize that "experience," as it applies to the work of museums, has something to do with "learning by doing." But I'd like to suggest that we pull back at first, just enough to remind ourselves where this preoccupation with experience is rooted. This will help lend depth to the term "experience design."

The idea that life experience is the greatest teacher is deeply rooted in our tradition. But one of the earliest thinkers to sketch out a useful framework to begin to grapple with experience design is William James. One big idea is James' insight that human consciousness is active, not passive; that to be human is to **make** and **take** meaning from the world. This also presumes that "truth" is largely a construct of human experience. From James we can say that any real experience design treats a visitor as an active, voluntary learner, a maker of their own meaning.

Another key idea from James is that it is senseless to split thinking from feeling in human experience. By melding the cognitive and emotive responses together into an experience James famously describes as a "stream of consciousness," he challenged the prevailing Cartesian dualism that truth is arrived at through cool and dispassionate reason, uncontaminated by feeling. From James, experience designers can take the idea that forthrightly engaging the realm of emotion isn't mere sensationalism. Indeed, it is integral to cognition and should be embraced wholeheartedly.

To this John Dewey added entirely new dimensions, particularly through his preoccupation with the connection of experience to learning. Building on James, and on Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, Dewey described a naturalistic theory of learning. He saw the propensity for making meaning from experience as **intrinsic** to our biology, and defined learning as an evolving process of an active human intelligence in continuous "transaction" with its environment. Central to Dewey's ideas is a notion that "facts" represent provisional understandings that learners use until they no longer have practical value. Learning, Dewey thought, is the product of a kind of "perplexity" that occurs when our perception of reality no longer squares with our previous, provisional understandings.

"Human consciousness is active, not passive."

So experience design may see learning as an ongoing, lifelong process with an evolving iteration and reiteration of knowledge, attained through enactment and reenactment of experience. Experience designers then should seek to better understand how a person's interaction with an environment facilitates the conditions for active learning.

In Dewey's view, humans are also fundamentally social animals. He saw the cultivation and encouragement of an active intelligence as key to enhancing an individual's role in a broader community. He reasoned that a participatory democracy could not be sustained without a community of engaged, self-directed learners. An important dimension of experience design, then, may be to provide natural opportunities for social interaction, not only between museum visitors and museum staff, but also for visitors to engage with each other. Beyond this, museums may seek to develop ways to support civic dialogue. An experience design may include the creation of situations where visitors can explore contemporary or historical issues of social import in ways that are directly relevant to a learner's prior experience.

Another key component in any experience design should be the opportunity to play. Jean Piaget defined play as an activity one engages with **for its own sake**. In other words, play is intrinsically motivated, voluntary in nature. This harmonizes so strongly with Falk and Dierking's definition of free-choice learning that one can easily see museum-going and museum learning as variants of play.

The other key distinguishing factor for Piaget is that play is pleasurable. But pleasure isn't just fun, fun, fun. It can get a lot more complicated than that. As Johan Huizinga has argued, another residual dualism of the Western canon worth rejecting is the solemn notion that play is the opposite of seriousness. Huizinga and Piaget point out that much play is engaged in with the utmost earnestness. Play isn't frivolous for being pleasurable. Piaget observed that all play is purposeful. Huizinga reasoned that all play is inherently meaningful.

Huizinga argued that one of the defining characteristics of play is that it is distinguished from the routine, the ordinary. Play is an exalted activity, inherently special to our experience. He also saw play—the process of enacting, through ritual or contest—as the wellspring of human culture, the activity that makes experience meaningful.

So experience design may encourage a kind of playful interaction of people with each other, the content of the museum, and the museum environment taken as a whole. An element of make-believe can bring a visitor's imagination into play. Ritualized enactments, involving simulations of real situations, or game playing, are powerful ways of deriving meaning through play.

More recently we have the example of Joe Pine and Jim Gilmore's *Experience Economy*. Like the rest, Pine and Gilmore see experience learning as active in nature. But they also step outside the realm of traditional education to articulate a constellation of other experiential desires. A concentration of these desirable experiences in one place, they say, makes a "sweet spot," an irresistible destination that, on reflection, looks a lot like museums, zoos, historic sites and aquaria. What is peculiar about their model is that it comes, not from the museum field, but from the private-sector world of themed amusement parks and retail attractions.

To many, the slightest whiff of the marketplace raises an instinctive sense of skepticism. My view, however, is that Pine and Gilmore may have better understood what it is the public desire from us than we do. While we tend to pitch our focus rather narrowly on collecting, display and information delivery, the experience economy encourages us to deliver on virtually every aspect of the human experience. They also warn us not to neglect the aspects of human experience that typically fall outside of our range of concern. As they are fond of saying, the easiest way to make a memorable experience is to provide a bad experience. Yes, even the restrooms are a part of the experience design.

"All play is purposeful."

Because it has become such a red herring, it's worthwhile to draw some distinction between what we do and theme parks do not. There isn't really any useful distinction between education and entertainment. This is another false dichotomy that blinds us to the desires of the visiting public. I disagree with those who claim that visitors learn nothing from theme parks. Disneyland is redolent with message and meaning. We may learn there that times were better and less complicated in the past, that our leaders have been uniformly noble, that marriage completes us, that animals are a lot like people and that certain people are a lot like animals. To the extent that the medium is the message, I think that theme parks are different only to the degree that they indulge in junk content.

So, how to summarize some useful principles from all these ideas that can guide the design of compelling experiences?

First of all, we need to plan around the idea that our visitors are proactive, free agents who control the tenor and quality of meaning they derive from the experiences we provide to them. The tricky part of this is that, though we may spend a great deal of energy devising an experience, the nature and meaning of the experience is formed within each individual visitor. This requires a different mindset than, say, meeting visitors halfway. If visitors really get to take the lead in deciding how the experience will be personally meaningful to them, then our understanding and acceptance of this should show in the design.

We need to suffuse our work with an ethic of flexibility and responsiveness that values the authority a visitor brings to their experience, even to the extent that this may demand that we ramp down our own desire to be authoritative. This is an ethic that can celebrate and encourage imaginative leaps and freedom of choice and eschews strategies that smack of the physical, didactic or polemical coercion associated with formal education. Our role as experience designers does not entitle us to monopolize the meaning of everything.

This does not mean, however, that our efforts are inconsequential. On the contrary, I believe every visitor comes to us with the expectation that we will show them something special, that the museum experience will somehow transcend the ordinary routine of life. Isn't this the nascent hope of every visitor? But our role in the design of experiences should be to provide a rich set of conditions, redolent with possibility.

"Our role as **experience designers** does not entitle us to **monopolize the meaning** of everything."

This ethic doesn't seek to reconcile conflict by providing the authoritative "last word." An experience design should, like good storytelling, embrace dilemma and moral ambiguity. It should allow visitors to explore contrasting and conflicting perspectives in ways that are more than purely intellectual, but are both dramatic and personal somehow. It should seek to tap into the natural delight people take in contending with these problems, as they so often do already, through reading fiction, going to the theater or watching film. Experience design should convey and elicit passions.

This requires some courage and perhaps an attitude adjustment on our part. If visitors come to us with already-evolved operating schemas of understanding, and these preconceptions are sometimes at variance with our own understandings, we have to learn to see these as more than obstacles or stupidities, but as potential engagement points, as experiential gateways to the formation of new conceptions. Understanding that a visitor need not form a completely new understanding within the bounds of their experience with us may help. But, if an experience proves really relevant to a visitor, the meaning of it mutates and gains value through the life experience that follows. So make it relevant!

Another avenue of valuing the active learner is, as Freeman Tilden said, to engage the **whole** person. This means engaging all the senses, a challenge to us to go beyond, say, gratuitous interactives for the kids, or relegating all content to label text. It means expanding our repertoire of visitor participation to every dimension that the meaning of the word "participation" makes possible—through imagination, simulations, enactments, role-play, games and immersion.

Fundamentals of experience design

by Donna Braden

These personal reflections are based on several years of working on exhibits at The Henry Ford. So, what is Experience Design at our museum? First, it's a department that includes project managers and experience developers.

But it's also an approach and a philosophy. I'm going to try to summarize it, or at least my thoughts on it, in four categories: Who? What? How? and Why?

Who? Experiences are about engaging people

Experiences can be thought of as memorable events, occurring over time, that engage individuals in an inherently personal way. They are not just about being entertained, nor are they about being taught something. These are inherently **passive**. Experiences imply **active** involvement—of the heart, the mind and the senses.

So, what makes an engaged visitor? Many of us are quite familiar with the strategies and put them into practice. We already take to heart all of the scholarship and best practices relating to visitor learning and meaning-making. From this wealth of information, we've come up with a few "mantras" that we use in experience development at The Henry Ford—I'll call them "tools from our toolbox":

Start where visitors are

Although memorable experiences can—and we probably want them to—encompass mystery, novelty, surprise and elements of the unknown, engagement starts with the familiar. We know that learning is an active building process. Our brains can only make sense of current information and experience in light of our previous understandings and experiences.

People seek order and pattern. . .

. . .in their environment. They try to make sense of the chaos, the sensory and information overload. Do not underestimate the usefulness of letting people know, as often as possible, where they are and how they can find their way.

One size does *not* fit all

Everyone is different. We try to include variety and choice in our experiences.

Visitors are on *their* time, not ours

People are on their feet, they have schedules, they have comfort and other physical needs, and they have to consider the needs of others with them. Focusing on our exhibit may

Admiral Byrd and crew preparing for North Pole flight, in *Heros of the Sky: Adventures in Early Flight*. Photo from the collections of The Henry Ford.

be the last thing on their minds, even though they're walking through the space.

Not all visitors come to museums to learn
Some visitors come for relaxation, personal reflection, a chance to socialize, or any number of reasons. We can't always assume some "learning" will happen, or is even desired.

Show, don't tell
We try to use a variety of artifacts, images and sensations to tell the story. We don't just give visitors the facts and expect them to understand or even care.

Tell one story at a time
We try to focus on just one thing, if possible. One single strong story has more lasting value than a whole lot of input. If that's not possible, we consider what's the first thing visitors need or would want to know? We try to tell them that first.

Visitors are highly visual
The more visuals and less words we can use, the better. Even labels are visuals to visitors. If they **look** dense, chances are visitors won't read them.

Less is more.

What? Content choice enhances engagement
The key here is finding the links, right from the beginning of concept development, between what we museum people identify as important and the hooks into this content that we feel will be accessible and engaging to visitors. A lot of this can be revealed through visitor studies. This involves making choices, sometimes unpopular with other museum staff. But we feel that, if visitors glaze over or otherwise don't engage, then what was the point of the exhibit anyway?

"Experiences imply **active involvement**— of the **heart**, the **mind** and the **senses.**"

So, how do we make content choices? We have used different strategies, including:

- A certain lens or approach through the topic. For example, in *Your Place in Time*—an exhibit about the 20th century and technology—we chose to approach it through the lens of the experiences of different generations who came of age during that period. In *Heroes of the Sky: Adventures in Early Flight*, we chose to upgrade our early airplane collection by using the lens of people and adventure.
- Smaller "content chunks" within the areas of the exhibit. For example, based upon the findings of visitor studies

for *Heroes of the Sky*, we chose to focus more on women aviators and what it would have been like to fly in different planes than we might have by focusing strictly on what was historically significant.

How? The power of storytelling as a technique

There are many "how's" in Experience Design, but they often relate back to this simple idea. Here I'm not talking about the word "story" in the way a lot of museum people use it, when they really mean "topic." I'm talking about the age-old tradition of telling stories in a narrative format. Techniques like labels, media, vignettes, hands-on activities and even barriers can help tell or reinforce stories.

Why is the narrative format so engaging and memorable to us? In their book *Learning from Museums*, Falk and Dierking tell us that recent brain research suggests that we humans are hard-wired to be attentive, become engaged or inspired, understand and remember an idea or set of concepts more effectively when it is communicated to us in the form of a story or narrative.

Museum staff decided upon a generational approach in *Your Place in Time*, as shown here in this 1980s teen bedroom. Photo from the collections of The Henry Ford.

We naturally look for patterns and personal connections (people as opposed to abstract concepts). Stories have the ability to touch us emotionally—emotions like excitement, joy, sadness, surprise, anticipation. These all help create an indelible emotional stamp on our memories.

Think about the elements of a good story—the sense of drama that builds to a climax, characters you care about, a setting that makes the story come alive, a satisfying (or unsettling) resolution. Our challenge is to tell good history in compelling ways, but always be on the lookout for ways to incorporate the format and emotional quality of the narrative.

Why? The Experience Economy is our real competition

The truth is that museums today are competing with a dizzying array of leisure choices. Venues previously considered just for entertainment—like shopping malls, theme parks, sporting events, fairs, even hotels—are increasingly positioning themselves as also being educational. Leisure has become big business at the same moment that people's leisure time is getting increasingly scarce and valuable. What's a poor not-for-profit museum to do?

At The Henry Ford, we position ourselves firmly within the Experience Economy. We keep these strategies, among others, in mind:

- We know that people are looking for experiences that are personally meaningful, so we try to present offerings that are relevant and involve choice, personal reflection, interaction and customized elements.
- We consider the fact that people want experiences to be "productive," to accomplish multiple purposes like quality time with children, a chance to relax, and an opportunity to shop and eat along with the core experience.
- We try to learn from and apply the techniques of the "experience experts"—from such places as themed attractions, retail and food venues—while still ensuring that our own experiences involve thought-provoking content with real artifacts, multiple perspectives and potential controversy.

"We **naturally** look for **patterns** and personal connections."

In summary, here are seven helpful hints:

1. Put your ego in the closet
The bottom line is it's about visitors, not about us.

2. Walk in visitors' shoes
There are many ways to do this—visitor studies being a major one.

3. Think of the last good novel you read
This will help you remember what that "story" thing is all about.

4. Find the emotion behind the content
I was among the many graduate students trained to take the emotion out of good scholarship. But that, unfortunately, runs counter to what makes an engaging experience. I've found the writing style of journalists to be helpful in better understanding how these two seemingly disparate approaches can be melded together.

5. Look outside our field for models and techniques
Observe what makes mass market products so successful.

6. Establish criteria and check it often
Perhaps make a checklist of how you're engaging visitors. Is your project doing this, and this, and this? If not, try to realign.

7. Be willing to experiment!
It's an evolving concept, one we are still striving toward at The Henry Ford. I don't think we're there yet. But that's what makes the journey so interesting!

A case study

by Ellen Rosenthal

Experience design—the conscious manipulation of the visitor's museum visit from start to finish—has been touted as a way to make learning fun, encourage engagement and provide a full and worthwhile museum visit, but its positive impact has been difficult to measure. After five years of learning studies at Conner Prairie, a living history museum located just north of Indianapolis, we find that experience manipulation quantifiably enhances learning.

Previous notions of museum learning viewed visitors as empty receptacles waiting to be filled by the museum's content. Museums followed a traditional educational model with the emphasis on information. We planned topics, not experiences.

However, we now know that informal learning is very different from the traditional educational model. It goes beyond content acquisition, and involves the visitor's larger framework of knowledge. The visitor arrives with their own expectations, interests and concerns. Engagement on the individual level is paramount. Experience design is about thinking through the engagement. (For a summary of museum learning theory, visit the website of the Museum Learning Collaborative www.museumlearning.com)

Family visitors interact with an interpreter. Photo courtesy of Conner Prairie.

Thus, in theory, if the museum can design engaging, individualized experiences, then learning will take place. But does it actually work?

After conducting baseline studies in 2000 and 2002, Conner Prairie made major changes to its interpretive approach via the "Opening Doors Initiative," incorporating theories of experience design. Preliminary results from a follow-up study in 2004 verify the impact and importance of this approach. In each of these three learning studies, group conversations between visitors and interpreters were recorded, transcribed and analyzed. This allowed us to take a close look at actual visitor experiences.

Prior to 2001, Connor Prairie followed the classroom model. Interpreters were required to deliver particular information. Interpreters—whether acting in first person as characters in period dress, or in third person as present-day tour guides—did all the talking and the "doing." Visitors merely watched and listened. Adherence to authenticity was paramount. Unfortunately, that doesn't require the visitor presence. As a result, pre-2001 interpreter-guest interactions took the form of a monologue.

From these studies, we learned that engagement is the most critical element for stimulating learning. Interpreters function best as catalysts for engagement of all family or group members. "Learning" goes beyond museum-delivered content and includes family history, personal revelation, and connection to previous experiences. The museum experience can support intra-group relationships, as parents facilitate the visit with their children. However, monologue impedes this kind of rich conversation and learning.

With this new understanding, we eliminated information delivery requirements. We integrated engagement techniques into regular programming and training. We also created teams to empower staff to do their own problem-solving. And we asked interpreters to customize the experience—to follow visitor leads and respond to their interests, rather than sticking to a script. In short, we moved from arbitrary rules of authentic correctness to thinking through possibilities for visitor involvement.

As a result, our 2004 programs are more of a dialogue than a monologue. And the impact has been tremendous. Length of time at each station has increased dramatically. The recorded conversations show evidence of more interest from the visitor in the subject and deeper questioning. And we have found higher levels of visitor satisfaction.

One letter from a teacher illustrates the change:

"[Previously] students were in a building, the interpreter gave his or her speech, and we were sent on our way. [This time] my students were able to participate in several tasks … butter churning, biscuit pounding, etc. When … students get to 'help' or really get involved in the person's activities, it's more meaningful."

Conner Prairie has come to value experience design, but still has a way to go. We are striving toward staff-wide acceptance that "learning" goes beyond information acquisition. We need to accept that the visitor day may require greater ranges of experience to maintain their engagement. And we must acknowledge that, while the experience is in our control, the visitor outcome is not.

"Engagement is the most critical element for stimulating learning."

Visitors take part in the Prairietown Militia muster during the annual Independence Day celebration.
Photo by Shawn Spence Photography, courtesy of Conner Prairie.

Old Topic, New Designs: Three New Species of Dinosaur Exhibits

by Nancy Lynn,
Jennifer Pace Robinson,
Jeffrey H. Patchen
and Todd J. Tubutis

Nancy Lynn is Director of Traveling Programs at the American Museum of Natural History. She may be reached at nlynn@amnh.org.

Jennifer Pace Robinson is Director of Exhibit Development at The Children's Museum of Indianapolis. She may be reached at Jennifer@childrensmuseum.org.

Jeffrey H. Patchen is President and CEO, The Children's Museum of Indianapolis. He may be reached at Jeffp@childrensmuseum.org.

Todd J. Tubutis is a Senior Project Manager of Exhibits at The Field Museum in Chicago. You may contact him at ttubutis@fmnh.org.

Introduction

by Jeffrey H. Patchen

As fossils are dug out of the ground, there is a human desire to envision what life was like during the age of the dinosaurs. Early paleontologists worked to incorporate their finds into museum displays, and visionaries like Waterhouse Hawkins tried to bring them to life. In many instances, there were impressive skeletons without interpretation or environment.

The dinosaur "renaissance" in the 1970s brought about a rekindled interest in paleontology and new, controversial theories. "Super" specimens such as "Sue" have been discovered, and advanced research conducted. New breeds of dinosaur exhibits then began to emerge. Many traveling exhibits have since been mounted, and there is a desire for museums to present new information and keep dinosaur halls from becoming "dusty."

Dinosaurs continue to interest audiences of all ages. Evaluation shows that visitors' expectations are expanding. They are no longer content with seeing cast skeletons in blank halls, but instead want to see real fossils, experience how dinosaurs lived, and also learn about new, cutting-edge science.

Institutions must continue to reformat and refurbish how they present information, even on tried and true topics. Today, there are new methods for presenting information, and there is the ability to show a virtual world through media and technology and to create a realistic environment through theming, sound and light effects. The movie industry has driven expectations of audiences to some extent, and museums must find ways to marry the experience offered in movies with real specimens and realistic three-dimensional environments.

This article presents three museums with new approaches to sharing information about dinosaurs. One museum has created an immersive theatrical experience with real specimens. Another is refurbishing an existing hall with new information discovered by their own scientists. And a third institution is producing a traveling exhibit focused on the little-known facts of dinosaur biology.

Theatrical lighting produces a nighttime scene on the original dome screen. Photo courtesy of The Indianapolis Childrens Museum.

The Children's Museum of Indianapolis

by Jennifer Pace Robinson

Dinosphere: Now You're In THEIR World opened to the public on June 11, 2004. It is the largest display of real juvenile and family dinosaur fossils in the United States. This multi-level, multi-sensory environment sits within a former large-format theater space. The project, which took four years of planning and two years of construction, is a major accomplishment for The Children's Museum of Indianapolis.

The project began with an extraordinary find—"Bucky," the Teenage *T. rex*, found by Bucky Derflinger a 20-year-old rancher and rodeo cowboy. It would be the first juvenile *T. rex* on permanent display. A team was assembled to place "Bucky" into the context of a larger exhibit. All along, the team desired to create an immersive Cretaceous world that would feature one-of-a-kind real specimens and use dramatic sound, light and theming to transport visitors back in time.

Through fast-track planning, an initial concept was developed. This initial concept garnered funding, and an international advisory board of renowned paleontologists and educators was assembled to move exhibit plans forward.

We assembled our advisors for a meeting and asked them what they would do if they could create the dinosaur exhibit of their dreams. They said they would:

- Assemble a group of amazing specimens that tell a story.
- Create a complete world for "Bucky."
- Add plants, trees, sound and light.
- Use water features, "swampy mist" and smells.
- Conduct on-going research on specimens; publish information.

Dino head viewers allow families to see the scene as a *T. rex* or *Triceratops*. Photo courtesy of The Indianapolis Childrens Museum.

The exhibit team took most of their suggestions to heart and incorporated them into the experience. However, we were not able to include a water feature.

The exhibit team also conducted front-end studies with many visitors, including children, families, teachers and school groups. We wanted to assess what they already knew about dinosaurs and what they wanted to learn. Evaluation included testing on the floor, focus groups and formative testing of potential activities in early special dinosaur events.

Visitors shared that they wanted the following:

- The top specimen they wanted to see was *T. rex*.
- Teachers wanted a connection to their curriculum.
- They wanted to experience a "ride" and slide down a dinosaur's neck.
- They wanted to see a "dinosaur's world"—what was it like?

Through the testing, the exhibit team was able to determine which dinosaurs visitors expected to see and what activities they were interested in. Although there were some things we could not do—such as the "dino slide"—there were many things we could do. Basically, the exhibit team heard that our public wanted to see and experience a dinosaur's world.

The feedback from both the advisors and visitors helped the exhibit team create an action plan for the project. We were able to develop the main exhibit areas and continued to gather specimens to tell our story of a day in the Cretaceous. Specific tasks included:

- Finalizing the "Big Idea:" **Fossils are clues to dinosaur lives.**
- Developing main messages to help visitors understand what life would have been like in the Cretaceous.
- Acquiring juvenile and family dinosaurs to amass a world-class collection.
- Creating thematic dinosaur scenes that tell a story and issue a challenge.
- Producing "learning stations" behind the scenes to provide hands-on activities.

In addition, we decided to acquire the premier collection of paleo art in the world, the John Lanzendorf collection.

We also wanted to add areas for further study and exploration. We developed dynamic surrounding areas including a working Dinosaur Dig; a real Paleo Prep Lab staffed with trained technicians; and a Question Lab where visitors can discover information about extinction theories and learn the answers to key questions that we had amassed from visitor surveys.

A dynamic sound and light show changes a Cretaceous sky from day to night in a fifteen-minute cycle. This light show is accompanied by dinosaurs roaring and insects buzzing. We developed special targeted narration at each dinosaur scene to deliver the main messages and to issue special challenges to visitors.

"Basically, the exhibit team heard that our public wanted to see and experience a dinosaur's world."

Having real specimens that are important to science and also tell the story of juvenile and family dinosaurs was a critical part of the experience development. The exhibit team continued to acquire specimens to help tell the story of the Cretaceous and develop a complete world for "Bucky." Each fossil scene conveys a main message of the exhibit, tells the story of the specimens as they might have lived, and shares the story of those individuals (and in many cases families) who discovered the dinosaurs. Scenes and specimens include:

T. rex Attack!
Adult and sub-adult *T. rexes* face off with a *Triceratops.* Fossils suggest that *T. rexes* may have worked in family units to find food.

Scavenger or Predator?
A *Gorgosaur* feeds on a *Maiasaura.* Numerous, rare pathologies were found on this *Gorgosaur*, including the first evidence of a dinosaur brain tumor.

The Watering Hole
A *Hypacrosaur* family stops at a watering hole with a rare *Prenoceratops*. This scene presents the unique story of a dinosaur family.

Eggs, Nests and Babies
This area features the rare Baby Louie *Oviraptor* embryo, the first articulated embryo ever discovered.

As the exhibit team was planning the experience, the museum was confronted with the opportunity to revise our large-format theater space. Due to declining attendance and inability to find films that match our audience, we decided to investigate putting the exhibit into the previous CineDome™. We conducted an architectural feasibility study, and then moved forward with new plans and construction. New features were added to make the space more family-friendly, including a new ramp walkway entrance and two overlooks to allow visitors to take advantage of the full height of the theater space. The exhibit team was able to use the existing dome screen and sound system.

With a new location in the shape of a sphere, the exhibit team finally had an actual "world." The new exhibit was named *Dinosphere: Now You're In THEIR World*.

Dinosphere has positively affected The Children's Museum of Indianapolis:

- 25 million dollars in funding was raised to support the project.
- 27% increase in attendance.
- Early evaluation shows that visitors are staying an average of 57 minutes in the exhibit.
- 83 million media impressions for the entire three-year *Dinosphere* campaign.
- 14 published scientific papers.

We have also learned from our mistakes. By working through specific challenges, we now have a better understanding of what we need to do to plan for future projects. We believe it is important to:

- Consider where your visitors "are" in reference to your topic.
- Present one-of-a-kind artifacts and specimens.
- Have a unique story to tell.
- Produce an immersive environment with a combination of exhibitry and dramatic technical effects.
- Develop interactive elements that promote inquiry and exploration by families.


A model of *Dilong paradoxus* from *Dinosaurs: Ancient Fossils, New Discoveries* at the American Museum of Natural History. Photo by Craig Chesek/AMNH.

Dinosaurs at the AMNH

by Nancy Lynn

The American Museum of Natural History's approach to teaching paleontology, evolution and the nature and process of science has changed dramatically over the last decade. The reorganization of the museum's 50,000 square feet of permanent dinosaur halls ten years ago and the museum's newest dinosaur effort—a traveling exhibit entitled *Dinosaurs: Ancient Fossils, New Discoveries*—illustrate this change.

Renovation of the Fossil Halls, 1990-1996

Before the renovation, the forth floor fossil halls were set up as a typical "walk through time." Specimens were displayed in old-fashioned cases along a geologic timeline. By 1986, the halls were physically, stylistically and academically outdated. The curators and administration decided on a complete overhaul.

As leaders in the field of *cladistics*—the plotting of evolutionary relationships—AMNH scientists wanted to highlight this approach in the exhibit halls. In 1990, we began a six-year project to re-organize the galleries based on the evolutionary relationships of vertebrates, as opposed to the more typical chronological placement. The entire fourth floor was re-oriented around a cladogram built into the floor.

In the new hall, visitors begin their experience in an orientation area that introduces cladistics in great detail with a 12-minute film, extensive graphics, models and interactive kiosks. As visitors leave the orientation area, a thick black line on the floor, representing the evolutionary pathway, leads to "nodes." Each node identifies a feature signifying a unique branch on the evolutionary tree, such as the development of four limbs, the hole in the hip, socket or three-fingered hands. The reorganization of the halls also gave AMNH an opportunity to remount some incorrectly posed specimens. For example, we remounted *T. rex* in a horizontal instead of vertical stance. In addition, we moved all fossil mammals into a separate *Hall of Mammals and their Extinct Relatives*.

Designed to be bright and modern, with glass and chrome accents, white walls and windows permitting natural light, the new halls opened in 1996. They incorporate many interactive touch screens and feature videos of scientists explaining their work. The goal of the redesign was to give visitors a greater understanding of how evolution works; of how interconnected species are to one another; of where we, as human beings come from; and how the process of science works. Visitor studies show that over half the visitors use at least one interactive station during their stay. When asked, 75% of visitors listed "evolution" as a main theme of the Dino Halls.

Dinosaurs: Ancient Fossils, New Discoveries, 2005

These same goals are apparent in AMNH's new traveling dinosaur exhibit. This exhibit explores Curator Mark Norell's and his colleagues' incredible findings in China's Liaoning Province, and brings to light new discoveries and technologies used today in the field of paleontology.

For the first time, AMNH organized a team of collaborating institutions to participate in the exhibit's development: the Houston Museum of Natural Science, the California Academy of Sciences, The Field Museum and the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences.

While the findings in Liaoning were the catalyst, the exhibit is at its root an opportunity to talk about new discoveries, new technologies and new ideas in the field of paleontology and about the process of science. Each section focuses on a different area of study—how dinosaurs moved, how they behaved, where they lived, what they ate, why they became extinct, and late-breaking discoveries and information.

AMNH believes it's especially important to convey to visitors that science is not a faceless process. Therefore, we feature a scientist's work in each section of the exhibit. Large, projected talking heads allow visitors to see the scientists, hear them speak about their work first hand and feel their enthusiasm as they describe their areas of study.

The first section of *Dinosaurs: Ancient Fossils, New Discoveries* focuses on biomechanics—how dinosaurs moved. As visitors enter, they see a full-sized cast skeleton of a *Tyrannosaurus rex*. Near the huge cast are two interactive stations based on the research of John Hutchinson that allow visitors to manipulate the variables of leg muscle mass, posture and center of gravity, and see how these affect the running speed of a *T. rex*. Visitors can then compare their *T. rex* to familiar animals, such as crocodiles, elephants, ostriches, horses and humans.

Paired with the full-scale *T. rex* cast is a six-foot long mechanical model designed by Hall Train Studios in Toronto. This robotic *T. rex* walks in place and has incredibly lifelike movement, based on actual mobility data. This is the most precise physical representation of how *T. rex* moved that can be produced at this time.

Next is an artistically rendered, 60-foot-long model of an *Apatosaurus* skeleton. This minimalist fiberglass structure shows how an engineer would look at a dinosaur—stripped to the essential physical characteristics. The idea came from Kent Stevens' new DinoMorph computer software and mobility research. Behind the *Apatosaurus*, three large high-definition video screens show an animation loop of the DinoMorph model turning into a realistic *Apatosaurus*. Different muscle groups are layered on, skin is added and finally a fleshed-out sauropod moves its neck realistically, demonstrating the range of motion determined by Dr. Steven's work. An interactive introduces visitors to the actual DinoMorph software.

The next two sections explore dinosaur behavior. The first focuses on what can be learned about dinosaurs' social behavior based on studies of fossilized dinosaur footprints. It features a full-scale recreation of a section of a track site in Texas, which preserves footprints of 23 long-tailed plant-eating dinosaurs. From this track site, visitors learn that on a single day 120 million years ago, about two dozen plant-eating dinosaurs crossed a mudflat together. The larger animals were in the lead and the other, smaller sauropods followed behind. A large meat-eating dinosaur visited later. In this display, the prints of each dinosaur are illuminated sequentially and in different colors according to the pattern of their movement as they walked.

The second section on behavior looks at the latest theories on the purposes of the unusual horns, frills, crests and domes found on many dinosaur skulls. To look at whether such structures were used for display, mate recognition or defense, we present a large "trophy wall" of mounted dinosaur skulls. This approach—placing fossils together based solely on specific common features so as to better compare them—is not done anywhere else in the AMNH Dino Halls.

"...the exhibit is essentially an opportunity to talk about **new discoveries, new technologies and new ideas** in the field of paleontology..."

A walking mechanical *T. rex* from the exhibit, *Dinosaurs: Ancient Fossils, New Discoveries* at the American Museum of Natural History. Photo by Craig Chesek/AMNH.

At this point visitors come to the centerpiece of the exhibit: a diorama depicting the prehistoric ecosystem of Liaoning Province, an area that has yielded a rich diversity of exceptionally well-preserved fossils. This dramatic diorama is filled with scientifically accurate, life-size models of more than 35 species of dinosaurs, as well as reptiles, early birds, insects, mammals and plants. For many of these species, this is the first time they've been re-created. A two-year effort, the diorama's content is incredibly detailed. Each element—from large vertebrates to tiny insects to 12,000 individual leaves—was handmade by AMNH staff and volunteers. The background is painted on a single 700-square-foot canvas. Inside the diorama a cut-away pool shows visitors marine plants and animals. A shallow pan of water over the surface and a hidden fan casts moving shadows, creating the illusion of water movement.

The exhibit's penultimate section explores the hard evidence for extinction theories, including asteroid impact, global climate change, and massive volcanic eruptions. A computer simulation projected onto a large screen presents vivid re-creations of the various scenarios, showing visitors that science sometimes results in multiple "correct" ideas.

The final exhibit area features a "new discovery." The curators and designers wanted to ensure that venues hosting the exhibit would be able to display new fossil evidence or local finds and research. They also wanted to convey that new findings in paleontology are both exciting and commonplace, in the hopes of enticing young people to enter a career in the sciences.

The future for dinosaurs

The choices of subject matter and display techniques of dinosaur displays are driven by the work of AMNH research scientists and the museum's mission to make current, real science accessible, understandable and engaging. At the same time, curators and designers try hard not to "dumb things down." It is our priority to recognize scientists and describe the process of science in an exciting way.

As Jeff noted, we are in the midst of a "paleontology renaissance." We're discovering new dinosaur fossils faster than ever before. Advanced technology allows scientists to look at these fossils in fresh ways and researchers are gaining surprising insights into the past. While "dinosaur Disneyfication" will no doubt continue, future museum displays will focus on the fossil discoveries, presenting surprising, fresh and late-breaking dinosaur news.

Renovating the dinosaur halls at The Field Museum

by Todd J. Tubutis

The Field Museum's permanent evolution exhibit, *Life Over Time*, opened to the public in two phases: "DNA to Dinosaurs" in 1993, followed by "Teeth, Tusks, and Tarpits" in 1994. The exhibit provided an overview of evolution from life's beginnings four billion years ago to the present day, and featured dinosaurs within this evolutionary context. It quickly proved to be one of the Museum's most popular permanent exhibits, attracting nearly 1.5 million visitors in the first three years it was open.

In addition to the dinosaurs, one reason for its popularity was the large number of hands-on activities for visitors. However, this soon became a drawback: many interactive elements frequently broke down, and Exhibits staff ultimately had to remove a number of the most problematic ones without replacing them. It became clear that the maintenance needs of *Life Over Time* exceeded routine upkeep and repairs.

Facing this practical dilemma, the Museum chose to perform a detailed evaluation of *Life Over Time* in early 2001. It revealed that the original exhibit messages were still timely: the history of life on Earth is vast, every living thing is connected through evolution, and evolution is an ongoing process. However, because many elements in the exhibit simply did not function properly, aspects of these messages were not being communicated to our visitors.

Design rendering of entrance to dinosaur hall for *Evolving Planet*. Photo (c) The Field Museum.

In addition, much had happened in the evolutionary sciences since *Life Over Time*. In fact, many Field Museum scientists have been at the forefront of research, advancing our understanding of the complex and lengthy history of life on Earth. *Life Over Time* was due for a substantial science update to incorporate new theories and discoveries.

The Field Museum's acquisition of Sue the *T. rex* in 1997 has also had a significant impact on *Life Over Time*. As the most complete *T. rex* specimen yet discovered, studying Sue has led to a better understanding of the dinosaur world. Putting the fossils found with Sue on display in the new exhibit gives visitors a glimpse of the Cretaceous world in which she—and many other dinosaurs—lived.

As a result of this evaluation and the new research, the Museum committed to a full-scale renovation of *Life Over Time* with four overarching goals:

1. Strengthening the exhibit's interpretive focus on evolution and engaging visitors in a well-paced journey through time.
2. Heightening the impact of our spectacular fossil collections to position The Field Museum as **the** place for dinosaurs in Chicago.
3. Creating a link to and context for Sue in the exhibit. (Sue will remain on display in the Museum's main hall.)
4. Making the exhibit flexible to accommodate new scientific information, showcase contemporary discoveries and embrace scientific debate.

Beginning in 2001, the Exhibits Department assembled a team that fully immersed itself in the revitalization of both the content and design of *Life Over Time*. Highlights of the expanded 27,000-square-foot exhibit include:

- nearly 750 more specimens on display
- a large-scale, 140-degree animated projection of the Cambrian sea
- eight interactive "Scientist Stops" featuring Field Museum scientists talking about their research
- six interactive stations explaining how evolution works and how we know
- an expanded section on hominid evolution, featuring a full-scale, three-dimensional reconstruction of "Lucy," a three-million-plus-year-old human ancestor
- 24 cleaned and restored murals, originally painted for the Museum in the 1920s.


Design rendering of dinosaur hall for *Evolving Planet*. Photo (c) The Field Museum.

The renovated dinosaur hall will be a highlight for Field Museum visitors. All dinosaur groups will be now be represented for the first time, with fully articulated mounted specimens and casts. In addition to dinosaurs still in place from *Life Over Time*, the Museum will install a newly-mounted 18-foot juvenile sauropod, *Rapetosaurus krausei*, from the Museum's collection of Madagascar material. Sue will be featured within the Mesozoic world with a display of other plant and animal specimens found with Sue's skeleton, such as a magnolia leaf, a *Triceratops* tooth, and bones from a second, smaller *T. rex*. John Gurche's original painting of Sue will be displayed alongside a computer interactive where visitors can "touch" a series of fossils to flesh out Sue's world. Children of all ages will find answers to common questions about all dinosaurs—such as "what did dinosaurs eat?"—in a hands-on, interactive "dino zone."

Naturally, a brand new exhibit deserves a brand new name. *Evolving Planet* and its expanded hall of dinosaurs will open to the public as a permanent exhibit at The Field Museum in March 2006.

Guerrilla Exhibits:
Small Feats with the Community

by Tamara Biggs,
Jane Clark Chermayeff,
Jill Connors-Joyner
and Serena Furman

Serena Furman is an independent exhibit designer. She can be reached at sfatASpace@aol.com.

Tamara Biggs is the Director of Exhibitions at the Chicago Historical Society. She can be reached at biggs@chicagohistory.org.

Jill Connors-Joyner is the Assistant to the Vice President for Policy and Programs at AAM. She can be reached at jconnors-joyner@aam-us.org.

Jane Clark Chermayeff is President of Jane Clark Chermayeff Associates. She can be reached at jcc@jcca-nyc.com.

Introduction
by Serena Furman

Guerrilla: ...an irregular war by independent bands.—*Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*

Guerrilla exhibit: An irregular exhibit by independent hands.

When I travel to museum conventions, I look forward to seeing new exhibits in the host cities. I find it a little disturbing that more and more exhibits look like ones that I've seen before. Perhaps we are simply very good (too good) at keeping up with each other's work. Exhibits may be suffering from too much cross-pollination and are becoming a homogenized, hybrid experience. I wonder if visitors walk into exhibits and think "Oh, this looks like every exhibit I've been in before."

Some of the sameness of exhibits is also born out of efficiency. By necessity and by choice, we create systems that use our knowledge of the museum and its bag of tricks to produce galleries full of proven components.

Guerrilla exhibits are all about fighting that monotony.

When you move out of the gallery and bring in untrained collaborators, all of these systems can fall apart. You risk blowing your deadlines and your budgets. But with the risks come rewards: innovative exhibits, invigorated staff, and involved communities. (I hope there are some directors reading this, because without your support in risk-taking, this might never happen.)

The following examples of guerrilla exhibits come from people who have been down this road before. They'll share what they've learned about working with the community and why they want to go back again. When you include the community in exhibit development, you bring your audience behind the velvet rope. You go from a museum where people don't really have a voice and become a museum intently interested in what the visitor has to say—and, indeed, lets them say it.

The Gallery is Sanctuary

Safe for everything,
safe for all,

The way is clear,

Doesn't look bad,
maybe not great.

Enter quietly,
we have something to say,

We are listening,
what do you have to say?

The Chicago Historical Society
by Tamara Biggs

The Chicago Historical Society (CHS) was founded in 1856 by a group of visionary businessmen and politicians. "Society" was an appropriate name for this institution, as it focused on the lives and deeds of the rich and powerful. As the city grew from a fledgling town to a burgeoning metropolis, museum leaders recognized the need for inclusive history. They formally expressed it in the 1990s in the museum's values statement:

We recognize the contributions of all Chicagoans to the history of the city. We value the relationship we have with our diverse publics and respect the importance of forging and maintaining partnerships to help advance our mission.

At about this time, the museum launched a series of ground-breaking neighborhood projects that reached out to four communities, involving the residents in preserving and interpreting their own histories. As radical as these projects were for CHS, the institution remained the arbiter of history. We listened with open minds to our neighborhood partners, but we made the decisions.

Three subsequent projects went a step further. Rather than CHS soliciting community input for our exhibits, the community approached us seeking a venue to tell their own stories. Over the course of two years, CHS partnered with three local ethnic institutions: The Chicago Japanese American Historical Society (CJAHS), the American Indian Center, and the Institute of Puerto Rican Arts and Culture. Each of them asked CHS to host an exhibit, since their organizations had no appropriate gallery space. In fact, two of them have no building at all.

Jean Mishima, president of CJAHS, called to see if CHS was working on anything that her institution could contribute to. To my surprise, our *Chicago Sports* exhibit dovetailed perfectly with the CJAHS's desire to do an exhibit on the Chicago Nisei Athletic Association (CNAA). This serendipitous phone call resulted in new material to include in our 6,000-square-foot exhibit. But Jean kept pushing to get a separate little show about the CNAA.

Women's basketball team of the Chicago Nisei Athletic Association. Photo courtesy of CJAHS.

But where to put it? Every single gallery, big and small, was full of exhibits. We finally decided on what at first appeared to be a second-class location: two cases would go under the main stairs in the lobby, and text panels and photos would spread out on non-adjacent lobby walls and continue into the school lunch room. Although not a coherent space, it was highly visible.

Together we defined the main message of the exhibit (that the CNAA helped young, dislocated Japanese-Americans build an ethnic community in Chicago) and the quantity and topic of text panels. The CJAHS wrote the title (*Japanese-American Team Spirit: The Chicago Nisei Athletic Association*) and the label text, and CHS edited, designed and produced the panels. The CJAHS assembled artifacts and selected, reproduced and framed photos. CHS provided cases and installed the show.

Another call came from Joe Podlasek of the American Indian Center (AIC). 2003 marked the 50th anniversary of the Chicago Powwow, and they wanted to organize an exhibit to travel to several Chicago locations throughout the year. Joe offered the opening venue to CHS and we set dates. The honor brought with it the usual complexities. When the designer, Dan Oliver, and I went to see the 50 images selected for the show, we quickly realized that we had more to do than just arrange photographs. We advised Joe to have all of the photos reframed with identical frame and mat styles, and suggested that they organize the photos into groupings that could be introduced by interpretive labels. After the AIC had written a draft, we provided a "layperson's" perspective that helped to clarify ideas and language.

Once again, there was no gallery space to mount *50 Years of Powwow*. Our solution was to remove some watercolors of the 1893 world's fair from the museum's atrium events space and install *Powwow* there. Like the CNAA show, the exhibit occupied a less-prestigious setting, but one that offered high exposure. And how appropriate to have a powwow exhibit for our events space!

The most recent call came last summer from Alderman Billy Ocasio on behalf of the Institute of Puerto Rican Arts and Culture (IPRAC). Banco Popular had offered to host an art exhibit and fund raiser to support the renovation of the building that the Chicago Park District would be leasing long-term to IPRAC. The trouble was that IPRAC had no place to either mount an exhibit or hold a reception. CHS worked with Banco Popular to organize the exhibit. We got the name of the artist, Luis Gonzalez, and the name of the show, *Atmosfera de la flora*. But we couldn't get images or dimensions of the paintings.

These were important in order to make final selections. Since the paintings would be displayed at the Banco Popular regional headquarters in Orlando, before coming to CHS, we sent our designer to Florida to take some snapshots and measurements. The next challenge was learning about the artist in order to produce a label to introduce his work. After failing to get contact information from Banco staff, I reached out to the sole staff member at IPRAC, Jorge Felix. Once we started working directly together without the mediation of the sponsor, things came together. Jorge contacted Gonzalez's

Atmosfera installed at the Chicago Historical Society. Photo courtesy of CHS.

gallery in Puerto Rico and gathered specifics to write labels in both English and Spanish. When the paintings arrived at CHS, Jorge also helped prepare and hang the works.

These three guerrilla projects—all unplanned, unfunded and fast-tracked—embody CHS's values of recognizing the contributions of all Chicagoans to the history of the city and of forging relationships with our diverse publics. More importantly, they go beyond representation to self-representation, and bring our constituents "first voice" to the visiting public.

The Historical Society of Washington

by Jill Connors-Joyner

The Historical Society of Washington, D.C. (HSW) opened *Growing Up in Washington,* in April 2000 to a room filled with Washingtonians of all ages and ethnicities from all parts of the city. *Growing Up in Washington* offered a perspective into a city many people know as the monumental seat of government, but few thought of as a thriving community of people. In September 2003, another 500 sq.ft. exhibit opened, *Chinatown: Place or People?* It provided visitors an entree to the Chinese community through the perspective of Washington's Chinatown residents. Both exhibits used a similar approach: excerpts from oral history interviews, family photographs, neighborhood photographs, childhood effects, documents and HSW collections. While *Growing Up in Washington* was completed on a budget of $5,500, the Chinatown oral history project and exhibit had a budget of $20,000, which included a $5,000 grant and a $5,000 DVD component. Both small-scale, small-budget exhibits served HSW's ambitious goals: to celebrate the diversity within a city of neighborhoods while broadening the outreach of HSW and the City Museum of Washington, D.C. Both also brought new constituents to the Historical Society, and helped us build meaningful relationships with many who never thought we would be relevant to them.

The Historical Society of Washington, D.C. was once a club for Washington's white elite and their material heritage. In 1998, HSW was still housed in an historic house museum in an elite neighborhood, but was planning to open the City Museum and move to the old Central Public Library, located across the street from a new convention center. There it would become part of a revitalized downtown arts and entertainment district. In the new museum, there would be two changing exhibit galleries dedicated to telling the stories of neighborhoods and communities. The Community Galleries exemplified the Society's commitment to community outreach and to telling the unique stories of various neighborhoods.

In a city that is roughly 70% non-white, HSW needed to reach beyond its usual slate of exhibits that often centered around German-American life or Victorian-era topics and connect with Washingtonians in new ways. *Growing Up in Washington* would serve as a bridge between the old Historical Society and the new. So, in 1998, with the help of volunteers, HSW undertook an oral history project about growing up in the nation's capital, to engage the larger community and expand its 20th-century collections. HSW conducted over 50 interviews with people from different races, ethnicities, neighborhoods and generations. Washingtonians were thrilled to talk about their childhood experiences in D.C., because they had never been asked before. When asked how they felt connected to the city, many people identified with Washington through their neighborhoods and communities.

The oral history portion of *Growing Up in Washington* also added new scholarship on the history of childhood by emphasizing the connection between youth and a sense of place. Often when people recalled a memory, it was connected with a specific place and linked to a larger societal issue. Interviewees told us about segregated schools, wartime Washington, transportation, popular entertainment, the 1968 riots, seeing the President walking down the street, and other events that had national as well as local impact. Part of growing up in Washington was that ordinary people intersected with extraordinary events.

The exhibit featured eight "poster children" or faces of Washington, a boy and girl of different ethnic backgrounds in each of four 25-year periods. The rest of the interviewees from each time period were represented in scrapbooks of neighborhood photographs, family photos, and excerpts from interviews, all arranged by the themes of belonging, celebrating, learning, playing and working.

HSW created a complementary program called a *Tell-e-bration*, where people could gather and share their experiences. By adding their memories to the *Tell-e-bration*, Washingtonians could learn from a public history project to which they contributed. HSW continued to use the *Growing Up* model when we curated our first set of community galleries for the City Museum.

Because of its proximity to the City Museum, the Chinatown neighborhood was chosen to be the subject for the inaugural exhibit in one of the community galleries. Using the experience gained from the *Growing Up in Washington* project, HSW developed the Chinatown exhibit with a much more methodical approach. The staff created an advisory council of community members, held several charettes about the Chinatown community, and hired bilingual oral historians to conduct interviews. We used the information gained from the charettes and from the advisory council to craft questions and identify specific community members to interview.

Community representatives helped us identify photographs and artifacts, facilitated meetings with other members of the community, helped publicize the exhibit, read drafts of the script, and assisted us throughout the two-year project. Many interviewees invited me to their homes, showed me family photo albums and treasures, and introduced me to traditional cultural practices such as paper cutting and calligraphy. I was treated to several personalized tours of Chinatown that introduced me to features that are often invisible to people outside of the community, such as the shop signs written in English on street level and repeated in Chinese characters on the second level. One couple even brought me to the Lee Family Association, an exclusive mutual-aid society that has been active in Chinatown since the 1920s.

The resiliency and longstanding traditions of the neighborhood were common themes that came out of the oral history interviews. Interviewees also talked about the precarious future of Chinatown and weighed in on the debate of whether Chinatown can survive urban revitalization. Several blocks of the neighborhood have been lost to major construction projects over the years. Even though only about 1,000 people of Asian descent still live in the neighborhood, the community remains very much alive. We used the exhibit to question whether a community is a place or a group of people. At the end of the exhibit, visitors could make a powerful argument for people, place or both. Interview excerpts promoted both sides of the question.

In contrast to *Growing Up in Washington*, where interviewees openly talked about the pains and pleasures of childhood, interviewees for the Chinatown exhibit were more guarded about difficult experiences. We needed to strike a balance between respecting the community's wishes to downplay the discrimination experienced and still tell an historically accurate story.

The power of this exhibit grew from the community collaboration, which blossomed into an on-going relationship. Community members decided they liked working with the Historical Society so much that the Chinese Community Church held its annual festival at the City Museum.

These truly were guerrilla exhibits, from the dedication it took to complete the exhibits in a short time to the engagement of the community. The personal nature of the exhibits enabled people to understand the history of Washington through its neighborhood pride, spirit of place, experiences of segregation, and kinship of community. The Society gained new members, new supporters and vastly increased our visitation by school groups. HSW built its collection of oral history interviews, and because of the trust we fostered with the community, Washingtonians chose

"Part of **growing up in Washington** was that **ordinary people** intersected with **extraordinary events.**"

Community members decided they liked working with the Historical Society so much that the Chinese Community Church held its annual festival at the City Museum. Photo courtesy of Ben Zweig.

to donate important family, business, neighborhood and community-based items to our collections. Even with the closing of the City Museum in November 2004, they are still donating to the Historical Society.

Fire Zone

by Jane Clark Chermayeff

At Jane Clark Chermayeff Associates (JCCA), most of our projects, in fact, could be described as guerrilla exhibits. We work regularly with non-museum clients, from the Park Service to real estate developers to the World Monuments Fund to conservation organizations. We have developed many installations and visitor experiences for untraditional spaces—on science playgrounds, in forests, amid ruins, aboard water taxis.

One of the most illustrative examples of our "guerrilla" experience in the field is my firm's work with the Fire Department of New York City on *Fire Zone*, the fire-safety learning center in Rockefeller Center. With the architectural firm of BKSK, we won a competition sponsored by FDNY to create an exhibit aimed at reducing fires in the five boroughs.

Fire Zone was designed to promote fire safety through an understanding of the causes of fire and the means of prevention. It was also a place to learn more about how FDNY works to save lives. Our audience was New York City schoolchildren and families visiting midtown. The address was Rockefeller Center. (Sounds glamorous, right?) The reality: We were given a coffee shop to transform into a multi-faceted program for the largest school population in the country.

The overall experience combines two elements: a day in the life of a NYC fire fighter, and a multi-media object theater presentation. From the street, you see a red fire engine, you read a "fire-buff beeper" LED announcing FDNY activity in real time, and of course you are greeted by a Dalmatian. The front room portrays elements of a real firehouse. Inside, you can manipulate the fire truck's water system and sit in the cab. Children can try on "bunker gear"—jackets and boots.

There are two timed, participatory programs: one for the general public and a more extensive one for school groups. When the "show time" is announced, the kids climb onto the fire truck, a call comes in from the dispatcher, the sirens wail. Volunteer, off-duty fire fighters slide down a pole in the rear of the room. An overhead screen shows the view

The house watch desk. Memorial cards from Rescue One fire fighters are displayed here much as they also are in their own firehouse. Photo courtesy of FDNY.

from the fire truck as it backs out of the building on its way through the streets of New York to a fire. The screen retracts, and the kids walk through a simulated fire scene—charred and actually quite scary. There is a slight aroma of smoke. The students move into the object theater, where they become fire detectives. On the surrounding walls and stages are five different scenarios depicting the most frequent causes of fires. The class then has a question-and-answer session with a fire fighter, supporting the theme "Speak to your fire fighters, they are your friends."

To date, we have had about 65,000 school kids visit annually and we have won three design awards, including the New York State AIA and a THEA award. The exhibit and experience took more than two years to develop. To get it done, we spent a good deal of time with the community of NYC firefighters as well as educators and politicians.

Our main client was the director of the Fire Safety Education Fund for FDNY, but we also answered quite frequently to the fire commissioner, Thomas von Essen. He was very involved in our effort and frequently asked us to make presentations. We were assigned two lieutenants for our day-to-day needs and an advisory board of fire fighters and educators.

We became immersed in firehouse life and learned the step-by-step response to a fire. We researched all relevant fire safety materials and, working with the department's team of educators, we went into the classrooms and evaluated our materials and some of the ideas for the *Fire Zone*.

What are the general lessons learned from working with this highly specialized community?

Give it time
Plan to immerse yourself in the experience you are presenting through interviews and hours and hours of observation.

Be a neutral listener
In the museum world, personalities differ but expectations of professional comportment are relatively uniform. In the lay world, opinions and behavior may force you to suspend personal and political judgments in favor of a diplomatic relationship. (I am referring to frequent experiences of being a woman in a firehouse.)

Be an educator
Part of the job is guiding the inexperienced clients through the exhibit-making process.

Be playful
Creating an exhibit is more than likely a new experience for most clients. It may also be intimidating. As an old hand you can afford to have fun and to make it fun for everyone in a real collaboration.

Make friends
You will need advocates to maintain excitement and interest in your project and perhaps to overcome internal opposition. You can help your key supporters by working to articulate the project vision in a clear and lively way.

Promote the brand
Often part of the job of the guerrilla curator is helping the client raise funds. Conceive of the project as a marketing opportunity by producing materials that clients can use for fundraising and promotion.

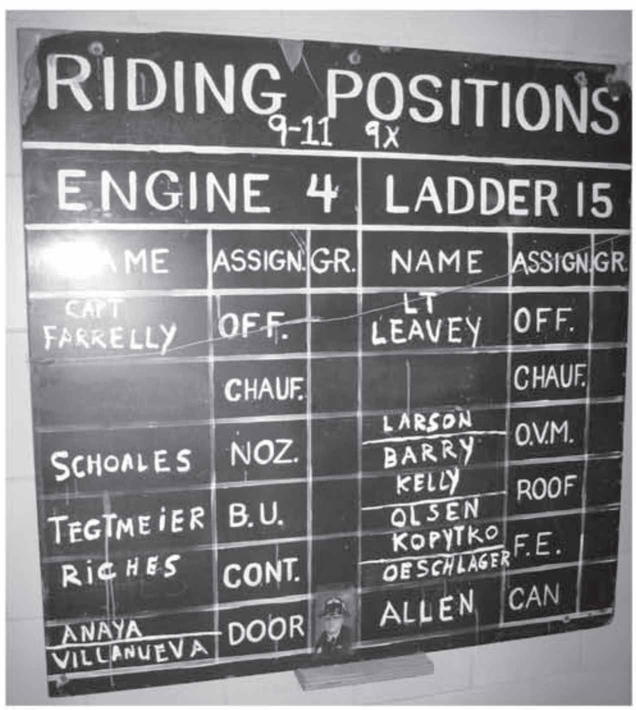
There is a final lesson learned that requires a bit of elaboration. We opened *Fire Zone* in early Summer 2001. Our mentors, the guys who helped with the installation of the fire truck and allowed us to use their truck in the filming through the city, were all members of the elite Rescue One team, which was the closest firehouse to the *Fire Zone*. On September 11th, they all were among the first responders. Many of them died in the Twin Towers. One of our volunteer fire fighters heard the call come in while at *Fire Zone* and hitched a ride on another fire truck. He also perished.

For the exhibit, we had asked companies from around the city to send us their distinctive patches to include in a display of firehouse paraphernalia. After 9/11, hundreds of patches came in from firehouses across the country. They were layered into the exhibit.

The front of *Fire Zone* is a kind of deconstructed firehouse. Every firehouse has a watch desk. Very subtly displayed at the *Fire Zone's* watch desk are portraits of deceased fire fighters, just as they are memorialized in their own firehouses. On some days, the off-duty fire fighters are there, willing to talk and tell stories.

So the number 7 lesson learned is—**Remember, it's personal**. A community-based exhibit gives voice to the individuals whose stories are being told. The community of fire fighters has continued to shape the exhibit and make it their own. You know your project is a success when the people involved claim it for themselves. When an exhibit becomes more than the installation you curated. When the exhibit takes on a life of its own.

"You can **afford to have fun**
and to make it fun for everyone
in a **real collaboration.**"



"Remember, it's personal." Photo courtesy of FDNY.

In and Out:
A Crossroads for Exhibition Design

by Lou Casagrande,
Paul Martin,
Maeryta Medrano
and Phyllis Rabineau

Phyllis Rabineau is Deputy Director for Interpretation and Education at the Chicago Historical Society. She may be reached at rabineau@chicagohistory.org.

Maeryta Medrano is Principal Designer and President at Gyroscope, Inc., an exhibition design and planning firm located in Oakland, CA. She may be reached at maeryta@gyroscopeinc.com .

Paul Martin is Director of Exhibits at The Science Museum of Minnesota. He may be reached at pmartin@smm.org.

Lou Casagrande is President and CEO at the Boston Children's Museum. He may be reached at casagrande@bostonkids.org

Phyllis Rabineau

Over the years, many of us have noticed a lot of changes in the expo hall—who's there, what services they're selling, new faces and new businesses. One of the biggest changes is taking place among exhibit design, which has become a growth industry in the consulting sector. New firms crop up every year, and long-standing firms seek increased visibility as the field expands. Concurrent with this trend, and linked closely to it, museums appear to be shrinking their exhibit design staffs. Although these changes are quite evident, up to now there has not been very much thoughtful dialogue about them.

The goals of this article are to examine these changes through the eyes of experienced museum leaders and consultants, identify the trends and currents that are feeding them, encourage more nuanced understanding of their implications, and evaluate their impact on how we do business and how we serve our visitors. Among the questions the panelists asked ourselves—and would like to pose to our audience—are:

- How do different kinds of projects lend themselves to working with consultants?
- What should a museum expect when it considers outside help?
- How can or should staff be part of the process of working with consultants?
- What should you have figured out before you bring a consultant on board?
- What are the best things a museum can bring to the table?
- Who makes the decisions that guide the project?

To start off, each of the panelists will share their thoughts about these and other related issues, and then we want to quickly throw open the discussion to the audience.

Maeryta Medrano

A lot of people have the impression that consultants have no real museum experience. That may have been true years ago, but today it's very common to find consultants with a great depth of experience. I was at a meeting recently where there were five other consultants around the table, and all were former museum CEOs. You can find experienced people to help you address a very broad range of issues. Some have experience with business planning, or with collections, or can help you develop a new model for your museum, including the exhibit design. The goal and challenge is to find the best source for the best product.

Many clients come to Gyroscope because they have no "inside" yet—the museum is just a blank piece of paper, or an empty site. Sometimes it isn't even a site—it's just an idea or a dream. Sometimes a client comes to us because they want a fresh perspective or a new way of looking at things.

Often when you work at a museum for some time, you tend to do things the same way over and over. That's good, because it helps you establish your brand and your culture. But there are times when you want to explore new ideas and take some risks. One advantage of working with a consultant is that they have been exposed to a lot of different museums.

For example, my firm works with science centers, natural history museums, children's museums, outdoor environments and habitats, as well as art and history museums. In doing that, there's a lot of opportunity for cross-fertilization. You can see trends such as children's museums influencing galleries in natural history museums, or a science center approach being taken at a zoo or an aquarium. You can see these hybrid institutions starting to form, and I think it's really exciting that the best kinds of visitor experiences are starting to find their way into all types of museums.

Since you can find such a wide range of services, the key is to ask yourself what you're really looking for. It's not unusual for someone to think they're looking for exhibit design when what they're really after is fundraising materials, in which case the picture you paint is much broader and the materials you produce are a lot different. Especially in the early stages of a project, you might not anticipate something you need—perhaps vision, feasibility, site selection or attendance studies, as well as the more concrete needs for architecture, design and fabrication. It's helpful for the consultant and for the museum to really go through an analysis of what is needed before they start the job.

Here are a few true stories of why museums have gone to the outside, to us.

- A CEO says "We have no staff at all, we need you to do everything."
- The Board says "Our museum is tired and we want a new vision, top to bottom, ASAP." Often, the Board withholds this comment from the staff, so the staff naturally feels threatened, uncomfortable, or insecure—why are these consultants coming in here? One thing we need to do as a team is find constructive ways to share this information, so the staff has an understanding of the Board's expectations and can grow through the process.
- A museum gets a large grant—perhaps they didn't think they would get it, but it comes through, and the project has to be done quickly. If the staff is already over-committed, you may want to go outside for assistance.
- Or, for a big project, a museum might want more visibility. Leadership at the museum should share with the staff why this decision was made.

What makes a successful project? From the consultant's point of view, strong leadership is always the key. You have to have a vision, someone who is clearly in charge and empowered to make decisions. The consultants are running on a schedule; they need timely decisions because that affects everything they do. It's important for both consultants and staff to look at each other as colleagues, and also to recognize that the process can be messy. Often a dialogue goes back and forth among people with completely different opinions. Meetings can get heated and people do disagree. But at the end of the day everyone wants an outstanding product that visitors will love and come back to. So, in the heated discussions, keep in mind what the ultimate goal is.

Finally, an important goal, which I think we all share, is to move the whole museum field forward. Senior staff in the museums we work with often tell us that this process is a learning experience, a kind of professional development that exposes them to many new skills and ideas. It's good to think about how you might construct your team to take advantage of those opportunities.

Paul Martin

At the exhibit development roundtable yesterday, the folks who were no longer at museums outnumbered the ones who were affiliated with institutions. But most people had grown up at museums, and they referred to it as "graduating"—from something that was kinda painful. As the profession ages, there's been a lot of buzz about shifting demographics in how we get our work done, particularly in exhibitions and design. I'm going to take this from the perspective of an inside guy although I've been a consultant, and at the Science Museum of Minnesota we do a lot of work with consultants, as well as act as consultants ourselves.

I don't know if AAM knew what they were doing when they chose the theme for this year: "Defining a Moment: Museums at the Crossroads." And then this session as well, "In or Out: A Crossroads for Exhibition Design." I grew up thinking about the idea of crossroads coming from Robert Johnson and the blues. It's where you go to make a deal with the devil. I didn't realize until this morning how fitting that theme is. We're making the deal with the devil—or at least there is tension in what we're doing.

"Folks who grew up at museums, but left to become independents, referred to it as 'graduating.'"

Why would we use outside talent?

- They can do something we can't. They have capability or skills we lack. Or we're too busy and they have capacity we don't.
- They can push us to do new things, unencumbered by being part of the organization.
- They don't have to worry about the bigger things and can just focus on a particular project.
- Or sometimes it's the other way around, they can take an overview of the whole museum while we're working on something specific.
- They can do things we don't want to, such as tell us—our staffs, our Boards, or even those who hired them—to fly right. This is the "hired gun" approach, one of the deals with the devil that happen in back rooms that needs to be out on the table.
- They can help us do better than we can on our own. There's a mentoring aspect to this: consultants have a responsibility to mentor the organizations they work with. In the past there were a lot of abuses when projects were developed as turnkey operations and people were not vested in things once they left. But I think that as more people who have been consulted upon become consultants themselves, that is changing.
- We can learn from them, and they can and must learn from us. That's how this business works, and we need to figure out how to do it to survive.

Maeryta was right—it's a messy business, but it **is** a business, and a process of balancing expectations, abilities, time and money. The questions we need to ask are: what do we want to get out of this, can we do it, who do we need to get to do it, how much time and how much money do we have to do it. It's making all of those things fit together, but the piece that's most important is the relationship to the folks that actually use all this work—the visitors. In my job description the ultimate client is the visitor and we need to stay focused there. Without that, we got nothing.

Lou Casagrande

My perspective is that of the CEO, and so my concern is really the questions the CEO needs to figure out before you bring a consultant on board: "For whom do you want to tell what stories, in what ways, at what cost?" You as the CEO are accountable for answering that question—not your Exhibits Director, not your Deputy Director, not the Board committee. You as CEO are responsible, because this is the core of what museums do. It's the message of who your institution is and what it stands for. I hold CEOs accountable for answering that question not only for a specific exhibit but for the whole master plan. You should know for the next three to five years what stories you will tell, for whom, in what ways, and at what cost. You have to know the role of any one project within the overall context of space and resources.

"Can you really outsource a new exhibit paradigm?"

I've come across many people, especially those who come in from the outside, who are happy delegating those big questions to the museum professionals who have been on staff for 30 years. But you as the CEO are accountable. You're accountable for more than just how that question is asked; you're accountable for creating internal consensus in response to it. I know many CEOs who never want to have their Board and staff talk about exhibits, for all kinds of reasons. There are Board members who have pet ideas, there are staff members who have pet ideas, and it makes building consensus extremely hard. If you have a museum staff of three people, you'll have four opinions on what an exhibit should be. But the CEO has to build that internal consensus before you bring in outside consultants. And for the consultants in the room, you have to make sure that the CEO knows what he or she is doing. Have they built that consensus, or do you need to help them build that consensus?

My second issue is more about the field. What I would say to CEOs who are beginning their careers is, "Are we creating cookie-cutter institutions?" You could say there's a hybridization—a coming together of zoos, children's museums, science museums and history museums—but I worry about distinctiveness, about institutions having unique identities. I worry that we are getting more conservative and are taking fewer risks in the areas of exhibits. Can you really outsource a new exhibit paradigm? Can you really find the right combination of talent, story, method, ambience, environment—can you really outsource that, or does it have to come from your own sense of soul, of what you represent as a museum? I worry that the field in general is creating a managerial culture: we are managing creativity, we don't take responsibility for creativity, and I think that's not a good trend. I think we will find the pendulum swing back to where we need to take more responsibility for creativity in our own building. That doesn't mean we won't work with consultants—maybe, to the contrary, we will have to work with more consultants to create a richer dialogue to find what would make each of us unique. I know this sounds abstract, but many of you who are CEOs know that we are under tremendous pressure to differentiate ourselves from that museum next door or down the street. That is the world we live in. You have to think about this—it has to keep you up at night: "For whom are we telling what stories at what cost?"

Discussion

Jane Werner [*Children's Museum of Pittsburgh*]: We just opened an 80,000-square-foot facility and made the decision to do all of our exhibits in-house. We hired a team that had some experienced people, but most of them—all artists—had no exhibit experience. It was an interesting and wonderful experience. They pushed us, we pushed them, they became part of us and now we have an amazing team that I think has done very interesting and innovative work. As we get older in the industry, we need to remember that people were kind to us when we began, and we need to give similar opportunities to new people. That's why we made these decisions—we saw it as our responsibility to cultivate new approaches and bring a unique perspective to the museum. I would never do it any other way. It has made me more creative, the staff more creative, and we really feel as though we have a soul. The Board was incredibly supportive because they recognized that we wanted to do something new and unique, and not be cookie-cutter. They believed in the process. We talked more about process than we did about what would actually be there.

Redmond Barnett [*Washington State Historical Society*]: Does it in fact make a lot of difference in the outcome if the museum has a sense of soul?

Paul Orselli [*POW! Paul Orselli Workshop*]: How do you balance a museum's need to develop a distinct identity, with the reality (or perception) that success often comes when consumers are presented with a known brand?

Lou Casagrande: I don't think we give our visitors or our communities enough credit for backing us as we take risks. Visitors believe in us and trust us. I don't mean to suggest that consultants don't understand our communities or our visitors. But they really don't live with the nuances of your town, or the nuances of your own Board or staff. "Soul" comes from a blending of those nuances.

Beverly Serrell [*Serrell Associates*]: I think it's great that museums want to have unique identities, and that artists are being brought in from the outside. My concern is that we have an awful lot of knowledge about what goes into developing exhibits, what kinds of things we need to be thinking about. It's important not to lose sight of our own knowledge base. When we bring in new people who aren't familiar with that body of knowledge, it's important to get them up to speed. It's discouraging to see the same old mistakes in brand new exhibits. We have to build on what we know and not just always try to do something completely new.

Carol Tang [*California Academy of Sciences*]: How can an educator effectively reach the consultants that are brought in? What is the important information that I can impart in a one-hour meeting, that is most useful, so the consultants might learn and we can move forward together?

Lou Casagrande: We need to get better at internal conversations with our educators and our marketing staff about the "for whom." Who is that audience that we are talking to—not yesterday's audience, not today's, but tomorrow's and five years from now. We need to be very clear about the time horizon and educators need to be part of that conversation.

Sharon Koomler [*Shaker Museum and Library*]: We hired our designer March 1 for an exhibit that opens May 27. I have to say the experience has been very positive, and has helped us understand that consultants are not our enemies, but our support system. The consultant has helped us understand what our limitations were, but also what we could achieve.

Nashid Madyun [*STAX Museum of American Soul Music*]: In looking to either bring in traveling exhibits, or making new ones, how do you take in the concerns of the community? How do we respond to their interests? I believe when you come to the table, if it's only your staff and the consultant, you're pretty isolated.

Lou Casagrande: Every CEO should have a perceptual map of their institution's place on the cultural landscape—a research tool where you interview people and find out the attributes that are associated with you and differentiate you from other institutions. And every museum should be doing front-end story-testing. Test the big story, find out what your community wants to hear about. Those are two tools that are absolutely essential in managing a modern museum.

Jim Roe [*Bell Museum of Natural History*]: We're in the process of doing front-end evaluation on ideas for a new museum and working with an audience research consultant. What's fascinating is that our consultant is helping us hear what our audience is saying, but we are also helping him hear what they're saying. It's become a three-way conversation. What we're hearing from the community is coming both through the consultant's filter and through the museum's filter.

Rich Faron [*Museum Explorer, Inc.*]: Part of this conversation is very fraternal—it's all one big group moving around from inside to outside. However, there are community groups that have no inside, there are rural groups that are looking to create something, and of course there are places outside the US that want to build museums. It seems the real brokers in many of those situations are museums themselves. Museums are the place people look to as a source of information and approval. They are power brokers.

Mary Ann Reynolds [*Denver Museum of Nature and Science*]: Ten years ago we built an exhibit called *Prehistoric Journey* with an in-house staff of about 70 people. Today our staff is about 14 people, and the *Space Odyssey* exhibit we built a few years ago was done with a blend of in-house and outside people. We are outsourcing our most fun and sexiest projects, and that leaves staff in a funny place. I understand that it's expensive to maintain in-house staff, but I'm wondering how we can get a better blend so that the staff you do have is motivated and excited.

Paul Martin: Phyllis and I lived through one of the great museum renaissances at The Field Museum, where Mike Spock made the decision to take project money and invest it in an in-house staff. There were a lot of great consultants brought in to help, but it was enough work that the expertise could be grown and mentored on-staff. That project was an incredible training ground for a lot of us, and it added a great deal to the field. I learned about evaluation, and text, and even though I don't do that work myself, all the projects I'm associated with now take them into consideration.

Judy Rand [*Rand Associates*]: I'm the beneficiary of having been part of an in-house team at the Monterey Aquarium. I also benefited a lot, as did Monterey, from being a consultant to The Field Museum, and the Boston Museum of Science. I brought back ideas from those places to Monterey and shared with everyone. There was an incredible back-and-forth. As a consultant, I took on another role, which is coach and trainer, and that's a result that lingers after you are gone.

Matthew Dawson [*LORD Cultural Resources Planning & Management*]: I liked Lou's comment that we are developing a managerial culture rather than taking responsibility for creativity. It's not clear where this originates.

John Fraser [*Wildlife Conservation Society*]: We're really dealing with a trade economy and we need to be clear about what we are trading. You can hire designers as vendors and their job is to do another one of your brand, your style, look and feel, just the same, real fast. Another time you may be looking for someone to add intellectual property, and then you need to cede control for what is in their area of expertise. We ought to know what is the core center of scholarship within our organization, and partner with people who have expertise in the places we're not focused. One of the advantages we have at AAM is to think about what kind of scholarship someone else can bring to our trading nation. If we start to think of ourselves as part of a larger economy, we can begin to grow our scholarship as a community.

"It's important not to lose sight of our own knowledge base."

Designer-Client Relationships: Strategies for Success

by Donna R. Braden, Joseph Hines and Sharon Klotz

Donna R. Braden is a Lead Experience Developer at The Henry Ford, Dearborn, Michigan. She can reached at donnab@thehenryford.org.

Joseph Hines is the Owner and Principal/Designer of Project Arts & Ideas in Dearborn, Michigan. He can be reached at Info@ProjectArtsandIdeas.com.

Sharon Klotz is the Director of Exhibitions at the Brooklyn Children's Museum. She can be reached at Sklotz@broolynkids.org.

Increasingly, museums rely on outside design firms to create engaging visitor experiences. Each side comes to the table with perceptions, expectations and often a culture of its own. While the initial interview process might seem to go smoothly enough, getting down to the real exhibit work can reveal—sometimes shockingly!—a range of conflicting styles and expectations.

The following examples focus on practical strategies for developing a positive and productive working relationship between museum clients and outside design firms contracted to develop exhibits. We each have a different perspective—those of an exhibit team member, a director and an independent designer. While we agree that there are no guarantees for success, we found common ground around the following points:

- A good process will more likely lead to a good product.
- A good working relationship sure helps.
- A lot of important things should happen early in the process.
- The visitor is the ultimate client.

Strategies for working with designers
by Donna Braden

As a member of an in-house exhibit team, I find that although the overall design process is similar from project to project, working with different firms can create radically different experiences. When I begin a new project, I assume that every firm has its own style, process and terminology. I expect that every firm brings different expertise, roles and responsibilities to the table. I've found that it's important to know who you'll be working with. You might interview with the principal, but never actually see them again. You might hire a firm because you love the designer, but you get assigned a graphic artist whose work doesn't align with your vision. However, I know that in the end they all want me to be satisfied! The bottom line is no one wants to blindside you. They all want to refer to your project in their next proposal and they want you to give glowing references to their next potential client.

To help smooth the process along, I have developed four strategies for working with outside designers.

Strategy #1: *Find a firm that you work with well*
We've included a working session with designers as part of our interview process, with great success. At the interview, we gave the firm a topic (usually one artifact with a rich story; there's not enough time for anything else). We asked them to work with us over the course of an hour to develop three potential exhibit storylines or approaches to this topic. It was fascinating to see what happened. The designers went pretty easily into their default working mode and we could tell very quickly what their style was. It also showed us how flexible they were, how collaborative they were, how well they facilitated, how creative they were, etc.

Over the last few years, we've refined a matrix of criteria for assessing proposals and have had pretty good success using it. Our current matrix includes an assessment of the designer's previous work, and our best take on how they approach this project and what they might be like to work with.

Criteria for Selecting Proposals
2005 The Henry Ford

Their Previous Work
(Circle one: 4=strongly agree, 3=agree, 2=disagree, 1=strongly disagree)

Does their design approach seem non-traditional?	4	3	2	1
Do their designs seem appealing?	4	3	2	1
Do their designs seem to be customized for individual projects—that is, not formulaic or "cookie cutter"?	4	3	2	1
Do their designs seem visitor-friendly?	4	3	2	1
Have they worked on historic subjects?	4	3	2	1
Do they seem to be client-focused?	4	3	2	1
Do they show a demonstrated ability to work within a budget and timetable?	4	3	2	1

Relating to Our Project
(rank on a scale of 1-4; 4 being the strongest, 1 being the weakest)

Do they grasp our project vision?	4	3	2	1
Do they demonstrate an ability to make an abstract concept concrete?	4	3	2	1
Do their preliminary experience ideas for our project seem creative, appropriate, intriguing?	4	3	2	1
Do they seem to be creative problem solvers?	4	3	2	1
Do they seem able to work together collaboratively?	4	3	2	1
Do you think they can work within our institutional culture?	4	3	2	1
Does their proposed staff seem appropriate and capable?	4	3	2	1
Does their process seem workable?	4	3	2	1
Does the budget seem appropriate?	4	3	2	1
Does the timetable seem appropriate?	4	3	2	1

Overall Strengths of the Proposal:

Issues, Concerns, and Questions:

"In the end they all want me to be satisfied!"

We assess these two categories on a quantitative scale, so we can actually come up with a statistical measure. We also add our comments and concerns, which we discuss together. This matrix helps us compare "apples to apples" when it comes time to justify our recommendations with senior staff.

Strategy #2: *Give your designers as much up-front direction as possible!*
We've learned that the more direction we can give our designers at the beginning, the better things go as we move forward. For us, this includes:

- Goals, including institutional vision, exhibit, visitor and education goals, target audiences, look and feel, etc.
- Big Idea and three to four interpretive themes.
- Any approaches we'd like to take (we've learned it's good to discuss this early).
- Historical thesis. A curator at our museum writes a Topic Report and has it reviewed by outside scholars. This report and the scholars' feedback become the framework and reference point for concept development.
- Visitor feedback—front-end evaluation, syntheses of existing relevant visitor and marketing studies.
- Collections scope, including up-front conservation issues.
- Suggested reading.

Strategy #3: *Always know what you want to accomplish*
We establish goals and Big Ideas for areas within the exhibit, not just the exhibit as a whole. It helps a lot to think about messages for each area of the exhibit, sometimes even for each exhibit component.

We use criteria to help make many different kinds of decisions, including selecting designers, choosing objects for an exhibit, determining interactives, writing labels, and value engineering. (See example of artifact criteria.)

Even with the best working relationship, there are bound to be disagreements. We've found that **written design direction** helps to reinforce your ideas or course correct.

A lot of exhibit designers these days create their designs by computer. We see fewer "napkin sketches." But don't lose that idea—sketches are an important way for everyone to visualize and agree upon a design concept while you're still talking about ideas, before you split up to do separate work. So, even if it's just circles and stickmen, **ask your designer to sketch out ideas.**

Sample Artifact Criteria
"Quilting Genius" exhibit:

- Visually arresting
- A balance of artistry and technical skills
- Highlight known makers and/or users, if possible
- Quilts that we know are popular with visitors
- Good condition (need limited conservation)
- American-made and show a regional range
- Range over time

We develop short, written "Message" and "Intent" statements for interactives and media in an exhibit. The "Message" is what we want to get across—the historical concept or point. The "Intent" is what visitors will do there—it should relate back to the Message. Writing these up helps everyone (both internally and externally) get on the same page about what we're trying to accomplish and why it's worth the time, effort and money to create this component—or not.

Sample Message and Intent Statements
"Heroes of the Sky" exhibit:

Flight Test Alley hands-on activity

Message—Inventors like the Wright brothers, Louis Bleriot, and Igor Sikorsky went about solving the problems of flight in different ways.

Intent—Try your hand at inventing an airplane that flies. Test your plane, then change the design if you want to achieve different results.

Strategy #4: *Be flexible!*
Finally, exhibit development is more art than science. It's always evolving and has unpredictable elements, not the least of which is human nature. That's why working on the relationship is so important.

One of the most remarkable things about the process is that the best ideas can come at the most unexpected moments. When you're feeling stuck, remember that there is probably some other great idea out there that no one's thought of yet. You and your designer just have to find it.

A director's questions
by Sharon Klotz

As a senior-level museum administrator, I offer the perspective of someone who manages both projects and people, in-house staff and consultants. I believe that a good design process can be felt and experienced in a tangible way in the final product. All successful process models have clarity in common—clarity of purpose, communication and content. And, as any group process, the exhibit process can be affected by chemistry or other factors that seem to make things go wrong.

In my experience with designers, a well-planned interview can form the basis for a positive working relationship. The following questions were part of a Request for Qualifications sent to potential designers. These questions emerged through open-ended, shared internal dialogue about design and the design process, and they helped us assess each team's approach to design, sensitivity to research and evaluation, and capacity for honest and transparent teamwork.

- What do you think are three essential qualities of good exhibit design—and what, in your experience, are successful ways of achieving those qualities in the finished product?
- In your view, what is the ideal configuration of a design team?
- Describe the relationship you envision building with your client.
- What are your starting points for design? From what sources do you think design should begin to find its voice?
- What benchmarks and milestones do you use to gauge when and whether design is complete?
- Describe the ideal prototyping process and how it would inform design.
- How do you ensure that your designs are buildable?
- When and how do you make choices about materials?
- What kinds of tools do you use to communicate design ideas?
- What do you want to learn about exhibit design?

Tools and techniques for working with clients

by Joseph Hines

As designers create exhibits, we spend a lot of time considering options in lighting, architecture, media, collection displays and word counts. We should also be aware of how we can anchor and focus the interactions of our partners in these creative efforts, to maintain the best process and create the best possible exhibit.

As an independent interpretive designer, I have worked with museums of many types and sizes. I've developed a number of tools and techniques to anchor and ease the process of creating museum exhibits. This article will touch on a range of topics, including: my understandings and assumptions about creating exhibits; simple interpersonal strategies that can be used to strengthen teams; structures or documents that can anchor the exhibit development process; and creative tension.

Understandings and Assumptions

Exhibits require a team. Interpretive exhibits generally require the work of more than one person. Designers and museum clients form the core relationship in exhibit project teams.

A good team has a good process that is grounded in understanding each other. As people working together, we sometimes mystify each other. The less mystified we are, the better our process of working together.

A good process leads to a good exhibit product. Good relationships between team members lead to good and timely decisions, which result in well-thought-out exhibit experiences for visitors. I've found that sometimes exhibits—even big, expensive ones—offer confusing experiences that shout out, "We didn't get along!"

Group ideas can be better than "camels." Contrary to the notion that "camels are horses designed by committee," groups of people really can come up with exceptional ideas. Often, the most exciting and creative ideas emerge from groups without anyone knowing which person "lit the fire."

The Good Conversation

Never assume communications have been made. Always back up your communications—via phone, e-mail, on paper, in person—without being pesky. Consider repeating your messages to be sure you are understood, and repeat other people's messages to be sure you understand each other.

Strive for "The 3 Cs" of good communication. All communications should be complete, clear and considerate. Never be too busy to clearly and respectfully communicate.

Know the political landscape of the project. Find out who is ultimately making decisions regarding this project. Clarify the relationships among the people on the team. Assess and discuss the client's experience with exhibit and interpretive projects. This information will help you navigate the political landscape with more ease and success.

Use the same vocabulary. Reach agreements on terms of reference overtly, rather than by accident. There are many words like "section," "vitrine," "development" and "storyline" that can mean different things to different people. Be sure that everyone uses terms the same way. Particular terms evolve or become important within a project, and agreeing on definitions can smooth out misunderstandings and make the conversation more efficient.

Know when to move from verbal to visual and spatial. As the design leader of the project team, look for interpersonal cues to when the conversation needs to move from verbal explorations to visual and spatial explorations (if this has not been explicitly planned out in the project timetable). Some signs of this are a slow down in the generation of new ideas, the conversation circling back to earlier topics, and questions about the form of the exhibit.

Say "we" when you're talking about the exhibit. Be aware of the value of the group, and minimize the use of the words "I" or "my" this-or-that. Refer to all efforts or ideas as "our" efforts or ideas, even if you can claim credit for yourself. Simple semantics make a big difference in group efforts, and when you say "my idea" or "my work" or, worse, "my people," you can be divisive.

Tools of the Trade

The RFP—Request for Proposal. When museums are looking for design services, they should expect a designer to submit qualifications in the form of images, descriptions and reviews of past projects, and an outline of the resources they offer the project at hand. The designer should provide impressions of their working process, including how comfortable they are with the subject matter, how they work with people and how they respond to challenges. Museums should not expect designers to create and submit new design in proposals. Designers can't design for content and goals they do not yet know.

The *Clockwork* exhibit at The Henry Ford in Dearborn, Michigan. The exhibit project's statement of purpose was paraphrased in the summary statement at the gateway to the exhibit. Photo courtesy of Joseph Hines.

The Content Hierarchy—the anchor in the explorations. Start with a title or a working title that serves as the ultimate, purposeful focus of content. Having a title gives the project an identity and an organizational presence, and it provides the team and museum with a quick, shared term of reference. Write a short, intriguing statement of purpose or main message. Consider using some version of this statement at the gateway to the exhibit. In addition to providing guidance to the project's development, I've found that this hierarchy also provides an objective anchor to the creative conversation, when ideas or advocacies threaten to pull the project off-focus.

Determine exhibit goals, perhaps five each in the categories of cognitive, affective and, sometimes, behavioral goals. **Cognitive** goals should state what the visitors should learn from the exhibit—the information that will be provided, the desired relationship with local school curricula, narrative sequences, etc. **Affective** goals describe how the visitor should feel in the exhibit—the desired emotional impacts, inspiring or guiding experiences, memorable discoveries, and so on. As for **behavioral** goals, I have encountered different definitions. I consider them to be desired visitor behaviors within the exhibit experience—walk through a cave, touch realistic models, etc. But others refer to behavioral goals as desired visitor behaviors after the exhibit experience (exploring the subject further, altering their behavior, becoming advocates, etc.). Again, teams need to clearly define what they mean by "behavioral goals."

The pre-planning survey—the powerful introduction. A pre-planning survey is a fruitful way to start a project. It can be given to members of the project team, or members of an entire community. It can ask for suggestions for the content hierarchy—title, statement of purpose, goals. It can ask for ratings between pairs of words describing the desired experience—like guided vs. unguided, images vs. objects, and stately vs. playful—without asking for judgments of "good" or "bad." It's a great way to start conversation, and for team members to try out ideas and get a sense for each other. Getting this sort of information quickly saves time and avoids wasted design effort.

Attention to Tension

The most important thing is to keep talking. It's the best way to appreciate people. Not talking usually leads to misunderstandings and tension, hindering progress on the project. Tension between members of the team can be overcome by real shared excitement about the project. In fact, creative tension should be welcomed, not feared. It can create new ideas within the team when people leave behind their agendas and come together to explore and push forward important creative ideas. Tension is also sometimes necessary, as pressure to meet deadlines and correct mistakes. So don't be afraid of tension in the course of working intensely with people on projects as challenging and rewarding as museum exhibits—just keep talking through it.

Pre-Planning Survey

With so many options to consider, the following questions are intended to get a sense for your preferences and vision for the exhibit, before development and planning begins.

- Note your suggestion for exhibit TITLE
- Note your suggestion for STATEMENT OF PURPOSE
- Note GOALS for the exhibit:
  - Cognitive (what the visitor should learn from the exhibit)
  - Affective (how the visitor should feel in the exhibit)
  - Behavioral (what the visitor should do in the exhibit)

Indicate your vision with an "x" between the following CHARACTERISTIC PAIRS, without giving them a sense of "good" or "bad":

Guided	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Unguided
Bold	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Subtle
Entertaining	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Informative
Specialized	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	General
Presenting	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Interactive
Non-verbal	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Verbal
Images	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Objects
Deep info	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Quick information
Stately	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Playful
Objects	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Concepts, contexts
Impressions	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Facts
Metal	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Wood

Exhibitors at the Crossroads:
Building Better Museum Teams

by Dave Becker,
Rich Faron,
Diane Gutenkauf
and Marcia MacRae

Dave Becker is the manager of the Hamill Family Play Zoo. He may be reached at dabecker@BrookfieldZoo.org.

Rich Faron is President of Museum Explorer, Inc. He may be reached at rich@museumexplorer.com

Diane Gutenkauf is Chief Business Developer at Exhibit Works, Inc. She may be reached at dgutenkauf@exhibitworks.com

Marcia MacRae is Interdisciplinary Art Specialist at the DuPage Children's Museum. She may be reached at mmacrae@dupagechildrensmuseum.org.

Introduction
by Rich Faron

Most museum workers learn quickly that personal relationships constitute the core of modern not-for-profit business management. Trust, cooperation and understanding are the active components, and best practice for forging useful connections beyond the boundaries of the organization. Successful outreach requires that museum staffs build solid, long-term and even personally bonded relationships with members of the community.

But what about building relationships on the inside? Do museum workers recognize that internal connections are just as critical for success, and require just as much effort and attention? Forging internal relationships—working well with others—is fast becoming the critical path for achieving success. This appears to be especially true for museum staff working in public programming.

The typical American museum is organized around standardized offices, subdivided into departments. Recently, in response to economic pressures, exhibits and the educational programs that complement them have begun to function as more than platforms for mission-based programming. Exhibits are now expected to drive attendance, push revenue and attract new markets through advertising and outreach. To better confront these heightened expectations, exhibit departments are seeking to nurture new partnerships inside the museum. By crossing departmental lines, exhibitors can transcend the organizational frameworks of traditional museum infrastructure.

Despite all of the emerging technologies, and all kinds of new scholarships, and all the things you can think up in the shower—in the end, it still boils town to putting together good, old-fashioned teams. I've worked on a great variety of projects, from 25,000 sq. ft. exhibits with multi-million dollar budgets and staffs of over 100, to a single room in a small children's museum. And in every project that was successful, there was communication, there was trust, there was a collaborative spirit, and it worked.

The contemporary museum exhibit or education professional is in real need of strategies for developing, adapting and building cross-departmental partnerships within their institutions. The top-down hierarchy is quickly growing ineffective in the face of direct competition from an ever-expanding entertainment marketplace. Reorganization has been tested, but museums remain conservative and continue to lag behind. However, interest is growing from the ground up, from workers eager to rethink and retool organizations in an effort to build a more integrated network of human and material resources. The stories below are real-life examples that explore in detail how cross-departmental relationships can facilitate the development of fresh, alternative, relevant and customized educational content to excite audiences.

DuPage Children's Museum
by Marcia MacRae

Why does DCM have interdepartmental exhibit development teams? First, it usually makes for better exhibits. Employees from throughout the museum have very different interactions with our visitors, and this gives them varying perspectives on how to best deliver an exhibit's message. These differing perspectives combine to create a richer environment, and experiences that reach a broader range of visitors. Second, the team development process helps more staff understand why and how exhibit decisions are made. And, third, like most Exhibit Departments in small- to mid-sized institutions, we can use the help! Many hands make light work.

Exhibits have benefited particularly from bringing technicians into the development process at the earliest possible stage. DCM has moved away from simply asking technical staff to put devices together per a designer's instructions. We realized they could provide more complete and higher-quality work if they understood the content goal of an interactive and could offer suggestions for improvement.

For example, we developed an interactive called Light Garden based on a painting by Monet. We want to help children make connections between light and color by manipulating colored lights in a special box, to create "paintings of light." The preparator in charge of this interactive repeatedly asked for direction in how I wanted the lights placed. Not knowing the technicalities I could not give a clear answer. I repeatedly replied, "I want them to look like the painting. Please come up and see the painting." Finally, a little frustrated with me, the preparator came up to the gallery. Upon seeing Monet's water lilies, he immediately understood and suggested new ways of installing the lights.

The positive results of this kind of interdepartmental teamwork go well beyond a successful interactive. They can change the way the institution operates. DCM's preparators are now core team members, continually bringing new ideas to the table based on their knowledge of materials and experience with existing exhibits.

We are now developing a component for our exhibit on light called *Build a Shadow*, based on artwork by Charles Biederman. This interactive will engage children in creating designs out of three-dimensional objects and their shadows. By placing objects on a surface and manipulating lights focused from above, children can play with shifting shadows, exploring how changes affect their designs. I thought it would be simple to use a pegboard-like system to set the objects in. As members of the team discussed this idea, the preparators immediately asked questions. "Why don't we do it on this type of a matrix?" "Why don't we use that type of light?" Within 10 minutes they had brainstormed my idea into a richer experience in which children will build and work with light and shadow. They took the concept and ran with it.

DuPage Children's Museum *Light Garden*. Photo courtesy of Randall Studio, 2005.

Creative use of staff has had a radical impact on the working environment at DCM as well. By joining exhibit teams as core members or as stakeholders asked for input, staff in other departments receive training in the museum's process while providing valuable insights in the development of an exhibit's message. This gives them first-hand professional development not usually available in entry-level positions.

Working on teams helps staff understand why things happen the way they do. Frequently staff members approach me with suggestions: "Why don't you just add this?" or "Why don't we just move that?" Their ideas often seem like simple things to do. They often don't realize that these "simple" ideas may actually be quite involved, impacting budget, traffic flow, ADA requirements, and so on. Working on an exhibit team helps staff from other departments learn the process, and discover that even little changes are not as isolated as they seem. It's not that they should just "leave it to the professionals;" it's that we have to bring them up as professionals in the business. We invest in our staff, helping them to become better not only at facilitating or building, but also at content development. Based on their team experience, several staff have become interested in pursuing careers as museum professionals.

In small- to mid-sized institutions, like the DuPage Children's Museum, exhibits departments are small. Exhibit developers and department administrators are usually over-busy. We rely on help from museum staff familiar with our mission to realize our large goals in short amounts of time.

When you bring non-Exhibits staff into teams, it makes their jobs more diverse. You can end up with people invested both in your organization and in the museum profession. Additionally, creative teams can reveal people's hidden talents. One facilitator volunteered to sew props for a theater interactive in our gallery. What a find! She took the initiative and created wonderful, high-quality props. I discovered how valuable her interest and input could be, and she discovered a real interest in arts programming. She is now one of the leading teachers in our Start in Art program.

The more we put staff on creative interdepartmental teams, the more we get back in terms of positive responses. Everybody feels more valued. In addition to uncovering a lot of hidden talent within our organization, we have discovered that many staff have resources outside the institution as well. They know teachers. They know musicians. They know potential donors. When you put your staff and volunteers on different types of teams, then expertise, resources, new buy-in, and new people coming up in this field are your reward.

The Morton Arboretum

by Diane Gutenkauf

In 2003 The Morton Arboretum, a large outdoor museum in suburban Chicago, was in the throes of a major renovation that caused a drop in visitation, especially among members. (At the time, I was Manager of Interpretation and Exhibits.) The renovation included new exhibits and attractions, but most wouldn't be complete until mid-summer 2004. To combat this visitation drop, new programs and events were added. Perhaps the largest project tackled was the Arboretum's first ever large-scale outdoor exhibit, *InTREEguing Treehouses*.

Our goals for *InTREEguing Treehouses* included deflecting visitor attention from the construction, attracting new audiences, encouraging repeat member visits, and most importantly, helping people to connect with trees. We organized the exhibit as an installation of tree-inspired structures created by artists, architects, designers and landscape professionals. Twelve original designs were featured and placed in prominent locations throughout the 1,700-acre facility. The project officially kicked off in September 2003 and the treehouses were installed during the last week of May 2004.

Stationary Flight, designed by Dean Langworthy, part of *InTREEguing Treehouses* at The Morton Arboretum. Photo courtesy of The Morton Arboretum; photo by Melissa Wraalstad.

Planning and logistics for a project of this size threatened to overwhelm the small exhibit department (four people) and required the assistance of staff from all areas of operations—collections, landscape architecture, grounds maintenance, security, visitor services and education. We developed a network of staff teams to address a variety of issues and to ensure the project ran smoothly. Fortunately, we had a strong pool of talented people to help.

With a staff of over 100 full-time employees and nearly 200 seasonal and part-timers, our other challenge was to create buy-in and help staff understand what we hoped to accomplish. The Arboretum's mission—*"to collect and study trees, shrubs, and other plants from around the world, to display them across naturally beautiful landscapes for people to study and enjoy, and to learn how to grow them in ways that enhance our environment"*—doesn't really encompass using trees in artistic installations. We hoped the team process would win over any staff that might doubt our intentions.

The first step, as with any project, was to define our tasks. We created five staff teams. Some teams met early in the project as planners and advance organizers, while others functioned through the length of the exhibit.

Administrative Team

This team's responsibilities included overall project coordination. It included a member of the Exhibit staff (Exhibit Developer), and one representative each from Visitor Services, Security, and Facilities (building maintenance). The Manager of the Interpretation and Exhibits program sat on each team. This group established maintenance guidelines, coordinated marketing and programming efforts, developed a reporting schedule, and managed the process of supervising the designers. This team also coordinated events for staff to inform them of the project's progress and to help create buy-in throughout the institution.

Design Team

Treehouse designs were solicited through a design competition and from invited artists. The Design Team created and disseminated a request for design submissions, established design criteria, ran a pre-design meeting, and selected final entries. Chaired by a staff Landscape Architect, this team also included representatives from Visitor Services, Horticulture Education, and the Exhibit Program. Once the exhibit opened, this team disbanded.

Trees Team

Insuring the safety and integrity of the collection was of paramount importance to the Arboretum. The Trees Team spent several days selecting suitable trees, establishing structural criteria for the treehouse designs, and preparing trees for the exhibit by removing dead branches. This team also oversaw installation of the treehouses and conducted weekly maintenance walks during the run of the exhibit. The staff Community Trees Advocate chaired this team and was assisted by a Landscape Architect, the Tree Crew Leader, Curator of Living Collections, Visitor Services, and the Exhibit Program.

Events Team

No exhibit is complete without associated special events and educational activities. This team was charged with creating links between *InTREEguing Treehouses* and other public programs. They created opening weekend events and developed ongoing educational programs for adults, children and families. Chaired by the Children's Garden Manager, this team also included the Special Events Coordinator, Visitor Programs staff and the Exhibit Developer.

Development/Membership/Marketing Team

This team's primary responsibilities included clarifying our audience; developing creative material such as a logo, promotional pieces, and advertising; securing exhibit sponsorship; and organizing member and donor events. Team members included the Marketing Manager, Public Relations Coordinator, Membership Manager, Assistant Director of Development, and the Manager of Interpretation and Exhibits.

Results

The team process worked very well for this project. The process allowed the small Exhibit Program staff to delegate responsibility for a wide variety of tasks, while serving on a team helped create a sense of ownership for those involved. These team members shared their enthusiasm with coworkers informally during the workday but also formally through regular information sessions and update meetings open to all staff. Special sessions were held for volunteers as well. Staff attended exhibit tours held during installation. They felt better informed and more comfortable answering visitor questions after the tours but, most important, they understood why an arboretum, dedicated to promoting tree education and conservation, might install an exhibit around, but not specifically about, trees.

PlaneTreeHouse, designed by Hitchcock Design Group, part of *InTREEguing Treehouses* at The Morton Arboretum. Photo courtesy of The Morton Arboretum; photo by Melissa Wraalstad.

We were successful at achieving our other goals, too. Visitation climbed 68% over the previous year. Visitor survey data told us many members had been avoiding the construction, but the exhibit gave them a reason to return and explore our site. We also attracted new visitors whom we hope to turn to repeat visitors. New memberships climbed by 34% during the exhibit.

While the exhibit is responsible for attracting these visitors, the team process allowed us to create a great exhibit.

Brookfield Zoo

by David Becker

In 2001, Brookfield Zoo opened Hamill Family Play Zoo, a unique exhibit area integrating characteristics of children's zoos, children's museums, discovery gardens, and adventure playgrounds into a new synthesis. We aim to foster connections to nature through play, exploration and a wide range of direct experiences.

Three main teams facilitate the daily programming at Hamill Family Play Zoo: animal programs, horticultural care, and play programs. Each team has independent functions that support our overall purpose: helping families develop caring attitudes toward the natural world. Our persistent efforts to work across teams, across departments, and across disciplines have created a process-based approach that is similar in many ways to community building.

In the traditional project-centered approach to exhibits or programs, the institution first chooses an end goal, and then assembles the best team to achieve it. In contrast, community building starts by asking: what assets exist within our community and how can we connect with them? We look at the strengths of the community and try to build on those through creative partnerships and intentional relationships. I believe that program teams can function in the same way, and that Brookfield Zoo has good examples of this in action.

To better understand and appreciate the community-building process that occurred, it's important to recognize that Hamill Family Play Zoo takes up roughly two acres of the over-200-acre Brookfield Zoo. In many ways, working at Brookfield Zoo is much like working in a small town, complete with "next door neighbors" and "neighbors down the block." Our efforts at developing experiences can be compared to the staff of a small museum creating a hometown event. It's an inside-out process that often involves building relationships, one at a time.

For example, in spring 2003, our guests helped feed Brookfield Zoo's gorillas. Hamill Family Play Zoo has a greenhouse where children help our horticulturalists. Children watered a banana plant throughout the year until it bore fruit. At harvest time, they helped us cut down the plant and led a colorful "Go Bananas" parade—with props they had made—to deliver the plant to the zoo's gorillas. In addition to being a fun, engaging experience for everyone involved, it was also beneficial and enriching for the gorillas.

Having children parade a banana plant to gorillas was not the starting point. (If we had **started** with the idea of children feeding exotic, endangered animals, the idea would never have gotten off the ground!) The beginning was much more internal. The first step was the horticulturists, zookeepeers and play staff comparing notes and saying, "What can we do together to give these children the real experience of taking care of an animal at the zoo? Is there a way that we can have them use some of the plants?"

Brookfield Zoo's lion prepares to open a pinata made for him by children and families in the Play Zoo workshop. This is one of many programs involving a high level of collaboration across disciplines and departments. Photo credit: J. Schulz © Chicago Zoological Society.

One answer we came up with was to have children grow trays of sod for the Play Zoo armadillo. Zookeepers would add mealworms to the sod and the armadillo would have to dig through the sod in order to find the food—an enriching experience for the animal. It also proved to be a valuable learning experience for the families involved.

The key to successfully implementing this program was the input and enthusiasm of the zoo nutritionist, who would continue to be a primary decision-maker as harvest programs evolved. We all liked the results of this program and asked, "What can we do next?" We began having children harvest carrots and other vegetables from the garden and take them to the Play Zoo's rabbits and the goats. These programs emerged from internal cooperation and talents, and gradually moved toward wider engagement in other areas of Brookfield Zoo. Each step in the process led to incremental growth, adding new partnerships until we were feeding bananas to gorillas.

Since then, these harvest programs have blossomed in variety and frequency. They involve a wide circle of creative partnerships from the wider community of Brookfield Zoo, as well as departments represented within Hamill Family Play Zoo. Marketing, design, special events, public programs and zoo nutrition services, among many others, have been influential in making these successful and memorable experiences. This process continues to evolve and grow. Even as I write these words, children are in the Play Zoo workshop helping to build large-scale papier-mâché piñatas that will be filled with food and taken to the leopards, the lion, the bears and more.

I would like to encourage others to think about the role of community building within their own institutions. Community building isn't only for outreach. It can be a valuable tool for creating bridges to other departments, divisions, or disciplines. Build these internal communities one person at a time. Don't necessarily think about having the whole team defined or the final project predetermined. Identify your assets and begin to work from the inside out. You may find that if you start with the achievable and keep expanding, it doesn't take long before you are doing the impossible.

Learning in Your Own Backyard: Place-Based Education for Museums

by Janet Petitpas, Maggie Russell-Ciardi, Lori Salles and Mary Jo Sutton

Janet Petitpas is the Assistant Director of the Bay Area Discovery Museum, Sausalito, California. She may be reached at jpetitpas@badm.org.

Maggie Russell-Ciardi is the Education Coordinator for the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, NY. She may be reached at mrussellciardi@tenement.org.

Lori Salles is the Exhibits Manager at the Turtle Bay Exploration Park, Redding, California. She may be reached at lsalles@turtlebay.org.

Mary Jo Sutton is Director of Exhibitions at the Bay Area Discovery Museum. She may be reached at msutton@badm.org.

Introduction

by Janet Petitpas

Place-based education focuses on the built, natural and cultural environments of any location as a unifying concept for a content area. Schools have been using place-based education to provide relevance and real-world connection to all the disciplines, and many museums have been successfully using this approach. This article highlights some of the diverse ways that different types of institutions have been using place-based education to further their missions and benefit their audiences.

According to the publication *Place-Based Education* (The Orion Society, 2004), "[p]lace-based education is the process of using the local community and environment as a starting point to teach concepts in language arts, mathematics, social studies, science and other subjects across the curriculum. Emphasizing hands-on, real-world learning experiences, this approach to education increases academic achievement, helps students develop stronger ties to their communities, enhances students' appreciation for the natural world, and creates a heightened commitment to serving as active, contributing citizens. Community vitality and environmental quality are improved through the active engagement of local citizens, community organizations and environmental resources in the life of the school."

The book cites results in schools that have adopted a place-based curriculum, including:

- Reading scores improved, sometimes spectacularly.
- Math scores also improved.
- Students performed better in science and social studies.
- Students developed the ability to make connections and transfer their knowledge from familiar to unfamiliar contexts.
- Students learned to "do science" rather than just learn about science.
- Classroom discipline problems declined.
- Every student had the opportunity to learn at a higher level.

Museums have used multiple successful methods to embrace place-based education:

- Turtle Bay Exploration Park (Redding, Cal.) focuses on the relationship between humans and nature, and tells the story of its region and its people.
- Lower East Side Tenement Museum (New York, NY) has a unique commitment to presenting and interpreting the history of a specific place, as well as engaging visitors in the richness of the neighborhood today.
- The Bay Area Discovery Museum (Sausalito, Cal.) exhibits and programs are based on an educational framework called *My Place by the Bay.*

Photo courtesy of Turtle Bay Exploration Park.

Turtle Bay Exploration Park

by Lori Salles

Shasta County, California, is one of the state's most rural and scenic environments. At the northernmost end of California's great central valley and bordered on three sides by forested mountains, Redding has always been a place rich in natural resources.

Spanning the Sacramento River in Redding, California, Turtle Bay Exploration Park is a 300-acre campus containing educational and entertaining activities that interpret the relationship between humans and nature. The Park tells the stories of the region and its people through a museum and art gallery, wildlife exhibits, forest camp, a seasonal butterfly house, amphitheater, trails and gardens. Within the Museum's 34,000 square feet are five permanent and two changing exhibit galleries. The Sundial Bridge links the two sides of the river and provides pedestrian access to the river.

Exhibits at Turtle Bay are intended to promote exploration and inquiry. There are several strategies for inspiring visitors to take a new look at a familiar landscape. The clear floor through which the visitor can see the true reach of an oak's roots introduces one of the region's keystone species. The expectation is that the visitor will recall this new view when next they see a real oak outside. Tree roots extend beyond the riverbank soil as children climb into a viewing hidey-hole to see the fish of the Sacramento River in the *Visible River* gallery. I remember climbing on real roots like these when I was a child and when the idea in science class came up that roots help hold soil and control erosion, I remembered a prior experience of being under dirt looking up and using the roots to climb. Perhaps these kids will remember their own experience from this gallery and have a scaffold upon which to hang their understanding. Humans better comprehend new ideas when connecting them with an earlier experience.

Photo courtesy of Turtle Bay Exploration Park.

A simulated limestone cavern provides an underground experience for visitors of all ages as they enter the *Visible River* gallery, another exhibition that interprets our place. Dramatic lighting and realistic water sounds immerse the visitor in the environment. The fish of the *Visible River* gallery are all found in the Sacramento River today. The 22,000-gallon aquarium is open to the sky outside, and the visitor stands on the bottom of the "riverbed" with a fish's view of the world. Besides details about each species, an information binder includes a newspaper article chronicling a 16-foot-long sturgeon caught at this bend of the river. A colorful historical story can inspire the curious to imagine what whoppers are out there today.

The Sundial Bridge has become a new icon that identifies the place. Incidentally, it has been an excellent tool for our interdisciplinary approach, providing inspiration for both the aesthetic and quantitative entry point. Those who pause to enjoy the ever-varied view from the bridge appreciate the inspiration of the designer to frame the landscape. Standing above the river helps one feel immersed in the landscape in a way that standing on land does not.

Incorporating the artifacts of our collection into changing exhibitions is another place-based strategy, as our locally unique cultural objects illustrate regional stories. Extending beyond our museum collection, specific features of the broader regional landscape have been chronicled in a glove box pamphlet.

Another important component of place-based value is service learning. Turtle Bay Exploration Park includes an intensive 200-acre wildlife habitat restoration project. The willingness of students to pitch in and collect acorns or weed around plants gives testimony to their desire to be a part of a place, serving the community and taking pride in being good stewards of the land.

The charter of the museum-based Chrysalis school states "[m]ost people in the modern world know only a little about how natural systems operate in general and almost nothing about the natural history of the specific ecosystems and watersheds in which they live and work.... Lack of specific knowledge results in the use of generic curricula to convey general ideas rather than curricula based on the abundant but specific regional examples from which students can directly construct general principles for themselves." As a regional interpretive center we fulfill a role teaching the specific biodiversity, history and culture of the region to children, and perhaps just as importantly also to the teachers and parents of the region.

It has been said that "landscape" is something that you observe outside of yourself, while "place" is where you are.

Our hope is that when visitors leave Turtle Bay they have a better feeling of where they are and how they fit into the world as human beings.

Lower East Side Tenement Museum
by Maggie Russell-Ciardi

Many people think about place-based learning occurring in a rural environment—not an urban environment. As David Gruenwald writes in his article, "The Best of Both Words: A Critical Pedagogy of Place," "In recent literature, educators claiming place as a guiding construct associate a place-based approach with outdoor, environmental and rural education...Place-based education is frequently discussed at a distance from the urban...arena."

But what about urban students who look around their community and don't see trees and plants and rivers, but instead see housing projects, or homeless people, or garment industry sweatshops? Can place-based learning provide a way for urban students to make sense of the world around them and to become engaged with the issues that affect the lives of the people in their community?

In 2001, a group of funders in the Bay Area convened to discuss the benefits of a pedagogy of place, to identify ways that cultivating in students a sense of rootedness and a better understanding of their immediate community could improve both the education system and the communities themselves. These funders issued a report that defines place-based learning more broadly as any learning that is grounded in something that is real, meaningful and accessible to students. That may be students' local ecological setting, but for some students—particularly urban students—it may also be their local socio-cultural and economic setting. Place-based education can be focused on nature studies, but it can also be focused on cultural studies, real-world problem solving, or community regeneration.

A respect for the importance of place is at the heart of the mission of the Tenement Museum, the way we approach our work, and all of the educational programs we offer. In 1988, our founders had the idea to create a museum telling the story of the immigrants who had arrived in New York City in the 19th and early 20th centuries. And they wanted to present this story in such a way that the visitors would make connections between the past and the present, confronting their assumptions about contemporary immigrants and considering questions

Photo courtesy of Lower East Side Tenement Museum.

such as: Why do people immigrate? Who should be able to immigrate to the United States? Who should decide? How should immigrants be treated once they are here?

In choosing a theme for the institution, the founders of the Museum agreed that no matter what their background and experience, most of these immigrants did have one thing in common: the place where they lived. Almost every immigrant who entered New York City between 1830 and 1930 lived at one time or another in a Manhattan neighborhood known as the Lower East Side. The Museum decided to take as its starting point one tenement building, located at 97 Orchard Street in the heart of the neighborhood. To date, the Museum has recreated five of the twenty apartments in the building to tell the stories of five different immigrant families who lived there.

Place connects people across time. Living in a tenement building on the Lower East Side is an experience that unites generations of immigrants, whether they came from Russia in 1905 or from Hong Kong in 2005. As an institution committed to using the history of its site and community to shed light on the contemporary issues, the fact that our "place," provides a link between the past and the present is critical, and has become central to our interpretation of the immigrant experience.

Photo courtesy of Lower East Side Tenement Museum.

This sense of place was so important to interpreting immigrant history and engaging visitors that it was written into the mission of the institution: "To promote tolerance and historical perspective through the presentation and interpretation of the variety of immigrant and migrant experiences in Manhattan's Lower East Side, a gateway to America." All programs are created with an awareness of the community and a commitment to exploring the enduring issues that people in our community have grappled with.

It's worth mentioning that not all our visitors support our commitment and ties to the neighborhood. Our president, Ruth Abram, tells a story about a time when she was standing on the sidewalk in front of the Museum's visitors' center, when a cab pulled up next to her and a group of well-dressed ladies got out and looked around them and said, "It's a wonderful idea for a Museum," one of them said, "but why did they have to put it in the Lower East Side?"

The neighborhood today, as in the 19th and 20th centuries, is a working class immigrant area. About 40% of the people living there were born in another country. In more than 60% of the homes people speak a language other than English. Today, most Lower East Side residents are from Spanish-speaking regions. There are also at least four mutually-unintelligible Chinese languages spoken in the neighborhood. People from around the world are living side by side; in one building there may be families from China's Fuzhou Province, Hong Kong, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico and Mexico. They may not feel that they have anything in common with each other, but they are part of the same community.

All of the educational programs at the Tenement Museum begin on Orchard Street. We ask visitors to share their initial reactions to the place where the Museum is located: the impressions they have made, the visceral responses they have had to the things they have seen, heard, tasted or felt. These initial impressions provide the foundation for a discussion about the place and why it evokes different reactions in different people. We hope to engage people on a personal level with the neighborhood, and use their reactions to help them learn more about the socio-cultural and economic factors that have made the neighborhood and continue to shape it every day.

On every tour, the educators employ place-based learning techniques, particularly the idea of learning outward (which Gruenwald describes in his critical pedagogy of place)—focusing first on the home, then the neighborhood, the community, the region and beyond. Our tours link the stories of the families who lived at 97 Orchard Street to the broader community, to the neighborhood today, and then to the social issues these stories shed light on.

For instance, when visitors enter the apartment of Natalie Gumpertz in 1873, they learn that she was a single mother trying to raise three children on her own, with almost no assistance from the government. They learn about the people in the community who would have helped her and the options that were available to her. They then learn that there are many single mothers in the Lower East Side today, struggling in the same way. They then discuss the forms of assistance available to immigrants in the Lower East Side, New York City and throughout the country.

The Tenement Museum is particularly committed to engaging the immigrant residents of the Lower East Side in place-based learning projects that explore the central issues that are shaping the neighborhood and the lives of the people who live there. In addition to our public tours, which serve predominantly people who are not local residents, we also have a special group of place-based education programs specifically designed for new immigrants who live in our neighborhood.

In planning place-based programs, we've found the following to be essential:

- Allow people to tell their own stories—affirmed and challenged to see larger patterns.
- Traditional cultural knowledge is an important form of moral authority.
- Deep reflection and dialogue form the foundation of the learning process.
- Communities should evaluate their own situations.
- Use a language of possibility and call for localized social action.

In conclusion, using place-based learning in an urban environment can provide an entry point for exploring the socio-cultural and economic issues that shape a community, and empower students to better understand and even play a role in shaping how those issues are played out at the local, regional, national and global levels. And, most importantly, it can build alliances between people from diverse backgrounds who are committed to working together to build and improve their broader communities.

Bay Area Discovery Museum

by Mary Jo Sutton

At the Bay Area Discovery Museum, we've been exploring what it means to create place-based experiences in exhibits and also thinking about what aspects of place can or should be translated and interpreted for museum visitors. This idea of educators using a place as a lens to focus content and awareness on what is right around us is not new. Many excellent learning institutions have created deep curriculums around this powerful notion.

In our current life, where Americans typically move every five years, many of us have little sense about what exists nearby now or did in the past. This idea of connecting to the local environment—whether it's human or natural history—runs against the dominant wave of easy freeway mobility and dissociation by default.

The mission of the Bay Area Discovery Museum is to engage, delight and educate children through exploration of and connection to the local environment and the diverse communities that live here. The local environment is central to the institution and is reflected in our programs and our new exhibits.

The Museum is located in a National Park beneath the Golden Gate Bridge, a relatively undeveloped area adjacent to an urban hub. The Museum buildings are renovated historic army buildings in Fort Baker, next to a tiny inlet of San Francisco Bay called Horseshoe Cove. Co-funded by the National Science Foundation, the *My Place by the Bay* exhibit projects (Lookout Cove, Wave Workshop and the outdoor Tot Spot) directly reference the areas surrounding the museum.

We are also surrounded every day by deer, bobcats, great blue herons, quail and skunks. The site strongly influenced content and design decisions in our projects. We very much wanted to bring the stories and charisma of the local environment into the museum to lead visitors to learn more and feel an affinity with this place.

The Museum's signature exhibit for our new site is the two-acre Lookout Cove. In thinking about place and creating something unique and compelling for our audience of families with young children, many questions emerged:

- What is it about place that is so primal and relevant to the human experience, with our sensing bodies and minds?
- How do you translate "wildness" into form?
- And do it in a safe way?

Our challenge was to create a place special in its own right, that becomes memorable for 20 or 40 years to someone who is now only 3 to 5 years old. The goals for the exhibition were ambitious:

- Integrate the landscape as much as feasible into the exhibit using native plants and themes.
- Connect to and respect our unique location and its history.
- Increase visibility and attendance at the Museum while creating an experience that has real impact.
- Raise the average age of our overall museum child visitor from 3.9 to 4.9 years.
- Meet early childhood science learning goals while also targeting 5-8 year olds

We've had a challenge presenting authentic, frequently delicate materials in a way that is appropriate for young children. We've made the decision to mix models with real objects, but always in the style of the authentic object. Many two-year-olds are not able to fully tell real from cast critters and interact with them as the real object. Most five-year-olds take pride in knowing the difference, but they thrive and grow using these evocative props and settings, which spur their imaginary play. Grown-ups know we have created this stage set for them to interact with their children and pleasurably explore the world together. By offering

Photo courtesy of Bay Area Discovery Museum.

Photo courtesy of Bay Area Discovery Museum.

"The site strongly influenced content and design decisions in our projects."

real opportunities with real props, real protective gear as costumes and real plant material to build with, we create authentic experiences.

Coordination and balance challenges are prepared throughout the environment. To encourage this type of activity, the Museum has built a stump trail, spider nests, and hidden areas where kids can build forts and structures. These activities allow visitors to create their own paths and meanings in an open-ended way as well as find and create their own special places.

The Museum exhibits are family-friendly areas within an environment that can be intimidating to families with young children. Within the exhibit, families can encounter sweeping views of the Golden Gate Bridge, the San Francisco Bay, and several habitats and animal species. We frequently see families finding pleasure and peace through the aesthetics of the place around them.

The exhibit also offers surprise and amazement when water comes shooting out of the sea cave. Artist pieces provide inspiration. And kids feel their own power and heroism as captains of the "Bonnie" ship. The opportunity to hunt for treasures in the shipwreck allows kids to be explorers, and to learn something important about the people and objects that have come through the perils of the Golden Gate in order to find a home here.

Both of our outdoor exhibits were undertaken with an understanding than kids like and need to be outdoors. The museum intuitively believes that experiencing the world returns something essential and restores us.

Conclusion

As these examples show, the unique environments in which our institutions exist offer distinct entry points to every type of content. By focusing on what is relevant and present all around us, we are able to connect with our audiences and contribute to our communities.

The idea of place-based learning is not a new idea. Comenius, the seventeenth-century education philosopher said, "Knowledge of the nearest things should be acquired first, then that of those farther and farther off."

Or, in the immortal words of the Beatles, "Get back to where you once belonged."

Visitors as Partners in Exhibition

by The Exhibit Profession as a Whole

A summary of ***What's Going On VII: Hot Topics in Exhibit Development***

Chaired by Paul Martin, VP of Exhibits, Science Museum of Minnesota (pmartin@smm.org).

Facilitated by Janet Kamien, President, Janet Kamien Museum Consulting (j.kamien@worldnet.att.net) and Tamara Biggs, Director of Exhibits, Chicago Historical Society (biggs@chicagohistory.org).

Transcribed by Eugene Dillenburg, Exhibit Developer, Science Museum of Minnesota (gdillenburg@smm.org).

Haiku

Every year, to provide an access point to session attendees who perhaps are a bit more right-brain dominant, Eugene Dillenburg composes haiku to encapsulate the issues. These are written at 2:00 a.m. the night before; Paul, Janet and Tamara take no responsibility for the quality of this poetry.

Mission
Ox cart leaves the road
And rolls into the river.
This is not a boat.

Vision
Crane flies by the stars
But cannot reach the mountain.
No one else has wings.

Visitors
Flashing orange koi.
Each knows but one lily pad.
The school knows the pond.

Passion
Carp frolic in the stream.
Frog sits in mud on the bank
Watching for the crane.

Introduction

For the past 20 years at AAM, Janet Kamien has hosted a pre-conference Exhibit Developers' Roundtable, where exhibit professionals can gather and discuss, on an informal basis, whatever is on their minds. For the past seven years, Janet and her partner-in-crime, Paul Martin, have hosted a follow-up session, *What's Going On?*, an in-depth discussion of one of the themes raised at the roundtable. Participants have told us they value these types of professional conversations.

The purpose of this session is to hear what's on people's minds, to help frame some issues and possibly develop some solutions. It's a conversation among peers. For that reason, we consider the entire audience of the session to be the authors of this article. These aren't Paul's or Janet's words and ideas—they came from everybody. (Wherever possible we've made attribution. We apologize for any misspellings.)

Because this is a free-ranging conversation, this article is not a direct transcript. Comments have been grouped according to theme, and have been edited for length, clarity and language.

The Issues

From the pre-conference roundtable, Paul and Janet distilled four common themes that seemed to be on a lot of minds this year:

1. Are we doing our institutional business in a way that's true to our mission? Is this cyclical? Are we in decline? Are we becoming irrelevant? Too corporate? What about advocacy and activism?

2. Are we growing and supporting the staff that we need to do great mission-driven exhibits and programs? Who is creating and holding the vision? Have the vision holders been laid off or "graduated" to the independent / commercial market? Who's training the next generation? Where are the young turks?

3. Are we really making visitors a partner in exhibitions? Whom are our exhibits useful to? How are we dealing with our highly-polarized population? We say we want to design for spontaneous community, civic engagement and to provide open-ended visitor driven experiences, but are we really doing it?

4. This felt like the least passionate roundtable in the 20 years of doing this. We think this is a problem because there's plenty to be passionate about. Is it just us (Paul and Janet) or do people feel resigned to the current situation?

Through their applause, the audience voted on the four issues. We selected #3, visitors as partners in exhibition (though the ensuing discussion touched on all these areas).

Janet elaborated on what this meant in the roundtable. How do our exhibits relate to the world around us? Are we on top of stuff that is useful and relevant to our audience, or are we still mostly doing exhibits based on our needs (we have a collection—let's exhibit it)? A related issue is: what are we doing to make visitors a part of our exhibits? This can mean a couple of things. One is using technology to create customized experiences for visitors. Another is changing our approach and our philosophy to allow visitors to actually contribute to the exhibit itself.

Paul added that many people want to create useful, relevant, valuable and timely exhibits—raising the questions, what good are we, and for whom?

Relevance

Jim Walther (National Atomic Museum) helped get the ball rolling by arguing it is important to find what is relevant to audience. He pushes his staff to read the paper and stay up on current events. "What's in the media is often what's on people's minds," and if there's a link to the museum's subject, they should be on top of it.

Rob (Traveler's Rest Plantation) described an exhibit they had done which was relevant without necessarily being timely. As they renovated their building they did an exhibit, not on architecture, but on home renovation. They hosted a restoration fair in conjunction with the exhibit which was very popular with people working on their own homes.

Rich Faron (MuseumExplorer, Inc.) stated that "useful" is often a matter of scale. The new, multi-million dollar Lincoln Museum in Springfield, Illinois is useful for the nation. Down the road, the renovated courthouse in Metamora, where Lincoln and Douglas debated, is useful for that small town.

Frank Madsen (Teller, Madsen) noted that the Metamora courthouse opened their exhibit, then closed the museum due to lack of funding. They were able to reopen for a few months, and hope to build support.

Dan Spock (Minnesota History Center) bemoaned recent state budget cuts that led to staff layoffs. "We felt as if our institution had been laid off by our constituency." Quoting his mother, he said "if you want to keep a job, make yourself essential." Their challenge is to reposition the institution so they are more "in the middle of things," more essential and useful.

(Paul Martin did a quick survey of the audience. While a few people indicated that support for their institutions—both in audience and funding—was shrinking, a larger number said it was growing.)

Wayne LaBar (Liberty Science Center) described how his institution has both made themselves useful and helped their funding profile. They have a contract with the state to provide educational services to at-risk schools. This includes free membership for kids and their families. When the museum closed for expansion, they coordinated with other organizations to hold health fairs and workshops in the community.

Wayne also argued that museums should be "less a bank of facts and more a forum for discussing issues." If we do this, people will be less afraid to have an issue at a museum—though we need to do this in ways relevant to our local audiences.

Serena Furman (aSpace) complained that museums are getting stale. We just want to talk; we don't want to listen. Audio tours are an extreme example of this. Wouldn't it be nice to develop an audio tour with a microphone!

Being challenging and provocative

Matthew Martin (Matthew Martin Design) argued that we need to get the guests excited about our content, and let them draw their own conclusions. Museums are dying because they are blatantly factual and non-inspiring. "Where's the passion in the truth you're trying to present," he asked, "the compelling, engaging experience?" We offer too many facts, and not enough emotion.

Alan Teller (Teller, Madsen) proposed that part of our job is to challenge visitors. "We should design exhibits that are provocative, raise contemporary issues, don't shy from controversy, and address things of serious consequence." Many museums avoid that, taking a middle-of-the-road approach so as not to offend or upset anybody.

Robert Kiihne (USS Constitution Museum) noted that different people will draw opposite conclusions from the same information. "We need to understand that they bring their own meaning to the exhibit." We give them information so they will make more meaning. Even if that meaning is something we wouldn't agree with, that's their choice and we must respect it.

Redmond Barnett (Washington State Historical Society) begged to differ. He told two stories. One was of the Smithsonian 9/11 exhibit his museum had recently hosted. In the comment book, the politically-based comments were almost evenly divided between those supporting the President and those criticizing. Yet these visitors had seen the exact same exhibit. "Obviously, they had come in with these ideas, and the exhibit had done nothing to change them."

His second story dealt with taking his mother-in-law, a Presbyterian deacon, to see *Sacred Encounters*, a respectful exploration of how Indians and Jesuit missionaries influenced each other's spirituality. Her reaction to the exhibit? "Thank God Martin Luther lived so we don't have to be Catholics." ("This was NOT what the curator intended!" Redmond explained.)

Do we simply accept all responses as equally valid and let it go at that? Redmond argued that, if we are serious, we need to engage visitors in a dialogue about their preconceptions. "We may not want to TELL them what to think," he said, "but there should be some way to ask them to examine assumptions."

Joy Brook, a filmmaker, claimed museums work best as sites for people to come together, experience multiple perspectives, and resolve deep-seated conflicts in personal way. This makes museums nervous, but "it happens without us wanting or willing it to happen. We have to be open to this, rather than trying to steer people to a message." As an example she cited the Atomic Testing Museum. The docents are former test site workers, and have a positive view of the program. But many visitors are "down-winders" who are angry about the impact testing has had on the environment. The human experience of this contact is more exciting than any message.

Susan Markus (Spertus Museum) cited the important role interpreters can play. She described their experience with *Life in the Shadows: Hidden Children and the Holocaust*, an exhibit borrowed from the US Holocaust Museum. Though it was inherently a compelling exhibit, docents in the gallery brought it alive by having conversations with visitors in the gallery—a key approach to a sensitive topic.

Mary Higgins (Willem Reich Museum) noted that, for her institution, the building itself helps mediate controversy. Willem Reich is a controversial figure in the history of science and medicine, and many visitors come with pre-conceived notions. But "the atmosphere of the place plays role in the relationship between the visitor and the subject." The beautiful building, landscape and observatory affects the message visitors take away.

This prompted Judy Gradwohl (National Museum of American History) to relate a study she had done on how visitors used their building. She found that 30%-40% of visitors were in public space, rather than in exhibits. This no doubt has an impact on how people experience our museums.

Working with community

Paul Gabriel, an educational consultant in SF, questioned what it means to "partner" with the visitor. Most of the comments had been on marketing intellectual products to a consumer, rather than inviting people in to be partners. "We're very, very good at presenting information, but very bad at letting go" of control.

Judy Koke (University of Colorado) noted that "making a visitor a partner means they get to shape the outcome of experience." The museum does not prescribe what a successful interaction is. She asked if any museums had had success with this kind of power-sharing.

Tamara Biggs (Chicago Historical Society) described how they developed an exhibit program to do just that. At first, the Society had done a series of neighborhood history exhibits. But though CHS had worked with the communities, listening at forums, etc., the museum still held all the power. After these projects were done, three local ethnic organizations—Japanese, American Indian, and Puerto Rican—approached CHS, asking for an exhibit on their groups. In this round, the community groups were the curators. The museum staff helped them understand how to communicate through exhibition, but the groups were the clients, the "owners" of the exhibit. The audience response was overwhelmingly positive, for both the museum and the groups. (For more information, see the article, "Guerrilla Exhibits," elsewhere in this issue.)

This led Paul Martin to comment, "Visitors create experience; we simply create opportunities for experience." The museum, however, holds power in what opportunities we choose to create.

Several other attendees shared stories of working with visitors on exhibits. Lola Beetlebrox (Park City Museum) noted that her wealthy, white community also included a lot of Latino workers whose stories were not being told. They collected oral histories and made a film. But while some people supported the project, others dismissed it as "propaganda." So, they added a section on Chinese workers who had been in the community 100 years ago, and drew parallels to the current situation. This went over much better. "Applying historical perspective to a sensitive issue of today encourages reflection," she said.

Frank Madsen described *Hoop History*, an exhibit on street basketball at the DuSable Museum of African-American History. In this innovative show, visitors were both partners—in helping shape the content—and the subject, appearing in exhibit videos, etc.

Eloise Scroggins (Indiana Historical Society) urged us to see *Soul & Funk*—an exhibit on black music in Indianapolis in the 1960s and '70s. They had interviewed participants (club-goers, musicians, DJs, etc.) and worked with the University on an oral history project. This audio is in the show—"people tell stories in their voices; not translated into museum-speak." However, after the exhibit opened, some people were upset to be left out. The museum compiled that additional information for the archives, conducted follow-up interviews, and put these people in touch with scholars and filmmakers so their voices could be heard as well.

This post-exhibit work had not been budgeted for. Janet noted that changing an exhibit after-the-fact can be difficult, especially if there is no money for it. Some institutions hold back money—10%-20% of the exhibit budget—specifically for revisions based on visitor input.

Risk

Matthew Groesheck (Indiana University / Purdue University at Indianapolis) noted that engaging the community is risky. "Many institutions are not willing to take the risk of failure by developing exhibits with people not in the field." With funding tight, no one wants to risk seeing an exhibit fail. Furthermore, working with outsiders is a messy process. There are new relationships to the content, the community, the ideas. And mess scares some institutions. He described a project on the east side of Indianapolis, involving several University departments, to help the community create an exhibit that represents them and meet their needs. "It's messy, but innovation comes from mess."

Which prompted Paul to note, "the worst work I've ever done has been the cleanest."

Paul Orselli (Paul Orselli Workshops) proposed that children's museums create some of the most interesting science, history, even art exhibits. They take risks and meaningfully partner with audiences.

At the end of the session, John Russick (Chicago Historical Society) asked us to consider: How do we define failure? And another participant posed two further questions for thought: How do you get your Board to buy into risky proposals? And how do they find support for what we want to do?

Polarization and diversity

The discussion of community-based exhibits turned to the topic of diversity. Paul Gabriel asked a basic question: Who are visitors? He described working on a history project involving 18 communities. In some, his white, middle-class background marked him as the "outsider." But for others, his gay identity made him an "insider." "We seem to make a lot of assumptions. To be useful to visitors, we must know: who are they?"

A woman from the LA County Natural History Museum said they have a diverse audience simply because of their location in the inner city. They are also doing a number of educational initiatives, web projects, and working with the school district.

Freda Plessner (Intrepid Museum) complained there was not enough representation of minorities in her institution's WW II exhibit. The problem is, at that time period, segregation prevented blacks, Latinos, women, etc. from taking prominent roles in the war effort. While there were exceptions (Rosie the riveter, Tuskeegee Airmen, etc.), they played a minor role. To push them throughout the exhibit would not be accurate.

Jim Walther suggested focusing on the home front—an important part of the war effort—where there was more diversity than in the segregated fighting forces. Tamara responded by suggesting you can talk about why a group is underrepresented. Lori Sciavo (Jewish Society of Greater Washington) agreed—segregation is the point. She also pointed out that diversity is not a new idea—there have always been minority groups in America. "It's better to talk about the way we all exist together, rather than creating a separate exhibit for each group."

Paul Martin posed an interesting question. "I don't want to get into politics, but how many people here voted for the current Administration?" In a room of 200 to 300 attendees, perhaps 3 or 4 raised their hands. This raises a challenge for us. "We who make decisions on stories, and opportunities for users, are almost all on one end of spectrum. How good can we be" (at being relevant to all visitors)?

One participant—a newcomer to the field, attending their first conference—expressed surprise at how much discussion was focused on diversity. Isn't that dated? This prompted another attendee to remark that it would be nice if we did have diversity in staff, exhibits, but we're not there yet. We need to reach out to diverse groups—both visitors and staff.

Conclusion

There is no conclusion. There never is with this session. We merely air the issues and have a conversation. It is our aim and our hope to inspire us all to think about these ideas a little more deeply, and to share our thoughts with our colleagues. Let's continue the conversation.

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18th Annual Excellence in Exhibition Competition

About the competition

The Eighteenth Annual Excellence in Exhibition Competition recognizes outstanding achievement in the exhibition format from all types of museums, zoos, aquariums, botanical gardens and any other types of non-commercial institutions offering exhibitions to the public. The competition is the joint project of the following AAM Standing Professional Committees (SPCs): Curators Committee (CURCOM), the National Association for Museum Exhibition (NAME), the Committee on Audience Research and Evaluation (CARE) and the Committee for Education (EdCom).

Eligibility

Many rules remain consistent with prior competition requirements. Any non-commercial institution offering exhibitions to the public may participate. Exhibitions may have been designed by a commercial firm for a non-commercial institution. Entrants need not be members of AAM.

However, the following rules regarding eligibility have changed this year: The exhibition must have opened to the public no earlier than November 29, 3003 and no later than November 29, 2005. To be eligible, exhibits may not have previously won this exhibition. Exhibitions submitted this year will not be eligible for future competitions.

Entry fees

A $60 fee is required for each exhibit entered. Make checks payable to the AAM Curators Committee. For multiple entries, submit one check for the full amount.

Notification and awards

Each winning exhibition will be featured in a program at the 2006 AAM Annual Meeting in Boston and a representative from each winning institution will be asked to do a short presentation. Winners will also receive national recognition in the AAM publication Museum News.

Competition policies

The SPC sponsors are not responsible for lost or damaged entries. All entry materials become the property of the SPCs and cannot be returned. Entrants agree to allow AAM and SPC sponsors to use photographs of winning exhibitions, at no charge, in AAM publications. Entrants warrant that they have the right to allow such use. Institutions will be credited in any published reference to winning entries. All materials (with the exception of exhibit budgets) will be displayed at SPC booths located in the Exhibition Hall at the 2006 Annual Meeting in Boston.

To Enter:

- Include five copies of your entry in five separate binders.
- Entries must be submitted in 2" or 3" binders. All materials must fit in this binder.
- Entry materials must be submitted in the order listed below with binder tabs identifying each section. Please submit all text sections of the entry electronically as well.

The following documents (referred to below) are available at: www.N-A-M-E.org, www.edcom.org, www.curcom.org or from the competition coordinator.

- Entry Form
- Standards for Museum Exhibitions
- Exhibition Budget Worksheet

Entry Form: Complete and place at the front of the binder.

Narrative: Addressing the Standards for Museum Exhibitions and Indicators of Excellence. Not to exceed 10 double spaced pages.

Exhibition Staff: List both in house and contracted staff and their role in the exhibition planning process.

Exhibition Walkthrough: Must submit both a CD with a Power Point presentation and a printed version of the presentation. The walkthrough must not contain more than 20 images.

Each CD should be clearly labeled with the institution's name. Each image should be clearly keyed to the exhibition floor plan (see below). Include a 2-3 sentence explanation for each image in the Power Point notes. The purpose of the slides is to give a sense of the exhibition as a whole. We strongly encourage you to submit images of the public interacting with your exhibition.

Floor Plan: A single sheet keyed to walkthrough. Include square footage and scale.

Exhibition Budget Worksheet: Only final exhibit budgets submitted in this format will be accepted.

Evaluation: Provide a one page summary for each evaluation (formal or informal study, focus group, remedial evaluation, etc.) with the intended or actual audience. Summary should include: Purpose of study, who conducted it, methodology (how it was conducted), number of participants, results, and actions taken because of the evaluation. Include forms, questionnaires, etc.

If post opening/ summative evaluation is not finished in time for entry, send a brief summary of your evaluation plan as well as a schedule for conducting the study.

Educational Materials: Respond to the following three questions (responses not to exceed a total of 9 pages). You may attach up to three samples of educational material used with the exhibition. Samples must fit into your entry binder.

- How were the education programs developed with the intended audience in mind?
- How was the community (teachers, youth groups, elected officials, colleges/universities, etc.) involved in developing the educational programs for this exhibit?
- How were the goals for these programs accomplished? Explain how the education program worked in tandem with the exhibit goals.

Labels: Include the introductory label (as you define it) and 5 labels that best communicate the look, feel and content of the exhibition. Labels should be sized to fit into the binder in graphic form as they appear in the exhibition, not just as text.

Exhibition Development Process: A two page explanation of your process, however you choose to define and present it.

Entry Form

____
Name of Your Institution/Organization

____
Address

____
City/State/Zip

____
Phone/Email

____
Contact Person

____
Exhibition Title

____

Date Exhibition opened to the public: ______________________

Date Exhibition closed or will close: ______________________

Institution's operating budget for the most recently completed fiscal year:

____

Type of Exhibit:

❑ Traveling ❑ Temporary ❑ Permanent

Is your institution a 501c-3? ______________________

Are you a member of AAM? ______________________

Please send entry materials in **five collated sets** to:

Lindy Hankins
Exhibition Competition Coordinator
10 Michigan Drive
Hudson, MA 01749
617-823-9292
lindy@farneth.com

ALL ENTRIES MUST BE POSTMARKED BY JANUARY 6, 2006

EXHIBITIONIST

NAME
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR MUSEUM EXHIBITION

1220 L Street, NW, Suite 100–270
Washington, DC 20005

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First-Class Mail
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