

Volunteer Advisory Council (VAC) Meeting

Tuesday, 15 January 2019

Board Room

2:00 pm – 3:30 pm

Officers Present

Heather Duchow	Chairman
Jean Drzyzgula	Vice Chairman
Dave Price	Secretary

Council Members Present

Jean Bennett	Collections
Jim Boehlke	Living History
Thad Grudzien	Naturalist
Steve Murray	Birds of Prey
Siobhan Sullivan	Newsletter
Marge Trayser	Admissions
Sigrid Von Hurst	BHTM

Staff Present

Dana Whitelaw	Executive Director
Shannon Campbell	Volunteer Coordinator

Other Attendees

Nancy Horton	Volunteer
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1. The VAC meeting was called to order by the chairman at 2:00 pm in the board room.
2. Staff Reports:
 - a. Executive Director—Dana said the museum’s old five-year strategic plan ended in December 2018. It will be replaced by the museum’s master plan and a new strategic plan with a shorter time horizon. The museum is working with a wide range of community partners to develop goals and focus areas for the museum. She announced that the museum is offering free admission to furloughed federal employees and their families. Dana also announced that the *Blue Star* program that gives free admission and membership to active duty military personnel will now be offered year around. It was previously limited to summer months. Finally, she reported that the museum’s collections manager, Cindy Bradley, will be leaving to return to North Carolina.
 - b. Volunteer Coordinator—Shannon announced that Laura McWhorter left the staff to attend college full-time, but she will be back next summer. Ellen Johnson has been hired to replace Laura. Also, a new wildlife position is being created. Upcoming training events include two *Diversity, Equity, Accessibility and Inclusion* classes scheduled for 29 January and 4 February; a *Certified Interpretive Guide* class 11-13 February; and two *Certified Interpretive Guide Refresher* classes on 9 and 20 February. A staff led coaching program for museum interpreters will begin sometime this spring. The goal of the program is to help improve engagement skills of staff and volunteers using an informal mentoring approach. *Free Day* is schedule for 26 January. Some

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teams are still looking for volunteers to cover *Free Day* stations. Finally, Shannon encouraged volunteers to read the on-line *Volunteer Manual*.

3. Old Business: Shannon said that she is working on plans for quarterly volunteer meetings. The meeting will be an opportunity to do group training and provide staff updates similar to the reports the VAC receives. She will provide more information on her plans at the February VAC meeting.
4. New Business and New Ideas:
 - a. Heather asked VAC members what they thought about the merged November/December VAC meeting. Feedback was positive. After the discussion, the VAC voted to make a merged November/December meeting a permanent part of the VAC meeting schedule, leaving it to the VAC chairman and volunteer coordinator to determine the specific meeting date in either November or December. Sigrid suggested that the VAC consider a merged meeting sometime during the summer months as well. The VAC will discuss that option at the next meeting.
 - b. Heather asked if there was any general feedback from volunteer teams on museum policies or operations. The only comment was from Thad. His feedback is in the Naturalist team report below.
5. Team Lead Reports:
 - a. Naturalist— Thad said several members of the naturalist team thought the time allotted for daily *Nature Walk* was too short. However, the daily program schedule is very tight so adding time to the *Nature Walk* is not practical. Also, since the *Nature Walk* is an excellent general introduction to the ecology of the high desert, the walk works well at the beginning of the day. In addition, best practices in interpretation indicate that the attention span of visitors is normally limited 15 to 20 minutes for interpretive programs like the *Nature Walk*.
 - b. Collections—Jean Bennett said that Cindy Bradley will be missed. She has done a wonderful job organizing the collection and improving internal controls. However, the work she started will continue.
 - c. BHTM—Sigrid said the BHTM team has a new volunteer, Justin Groza. His training is going well. She reported that BHTM has all the volunteers it needs for *Free Day*. She said the sturgeon in the BHTM fish tank is very hard to find sometimes and that results in lots of question from visitors. She also reported that fish tank's side door which is used to feed the fish is not secure. She also reported that lights in one area of the BHTM exhibit have been out for several months.
 - d. Living History—Jim reminded everyone that Saturday/19 January is *Mining Day*. Also, the living history team is getting ready for *Free Day*. Currently, the *Spirit of the West* exhibit is scheduled to be cleaned 4-8 February, but that could change.
 - e. Newsletter—Siobhan said the newsletter team has two new volunteer writers, Zoe Klein and Imelda Cerillo. Imelda has written for the newsletter previously.
 - f. Desertarium—Jean Drzyzgula said the *Desertarium* staff is continuing to do target training with selected animals. The *Desertarium* fish pond is being resealed. It should be ready to refill soon.

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- g. Photography—Heather said two new photographers recently joined the team. On 9 January, the entire team met with the museum’s communications director and staff. The meeting was very productive. The team would like to continue meeting on a quarterly basis. The photography workshop held on 15 December went very well. Eleven photographers attended. It provided an opportunity for photographers to shoot some close-up shots of both artifacts and wildlife. The next photography workshop will be in April. It will focus on birds and mammals. Also, light panels were offered to photography team members to help improve lighting for their photographs. Finally, the communications staff and photography team would like to be notified when the cleaning dates for the *Spirit of the West* exhibit are firm, so they can photographically document the process.
 - h. Birds of Prey—Steve noted the staffing changes previously highlighted by Shannon. He said the new wildlife position was great news. He reported that the BoP team is preparing for the *Sky Hunters* program scheduled for spring break. He also reported that the new gyrfalcon is very comfortable around people and may be used by the education staff for school groups. Work with the two golden eagles has started in preparation for the summer flight programs. The new mew is still under construction. Finally, Steve let everyone know that the wildlife staff has put together a collection of show-and-tell items that gallery attendants can use to give visitors hand-on experience with wildlife-related items from the museum’s collection.
 - i. Admissions—Marge reported that the museum sold over 500 memberships in the past month including approximately 200 gift memberships. Second quarter attendance was way ahead of budget. Attendance during the first week of January averaged over 700 visitors per day; however, attendance has now dropped back to normal winter levels of about 150 per day. The admission team is all set for *Free Day*. Marge passed around a copy of the museum’s policy regarding service animals along with a map showing the areas where service animals are not allowed. She noted that the admission team has also implemented the new *Blue Star* program.
7. Something Nice to Say about Someone or Something:
- a. Shannon thanked all the volunteers who signed up to help on *Free Day*.
 - b. Siobhan wanted to call everyone’s attention to the new female voiceover being used in the museum’s television advertisements. She noted that most previous commercials have used a male voice.
 - c. Heather noted that the newly painted ranger station looks great.
 - d. Jean Drzyzgula wanted to recognize Dave Gilbert for his excellent newsletter articles profiling staff and volunteers.
8. Reminder: The next VAC meeting will be on Tuesday/19 February at 2:00 pm in the board room.
9. The meeting was adjourned at 3:30 pm.

Dave Price
VAC Secretary