DEAR FRIENDS,

The universe recently reminded me that I have been in a deep rut lately. It was a rut I dug myself deep into as daily existence became harder and the world became seemingly tougher, less kind, and more disrupted over the past few years. I dug in and focused on just surviving. It is not that I was unhappy, but instead that my life was lacking in joy and celebration. As I reached out to several friends to explain my revelation, I quickly found out that I was not alone. In fact, I was in good company, and many, many are feeling this same way.

As I am writing this letter, inflation is surging, war is raging, illness is rampant, acts of violence are on the rise, and the world seems dark. But, as a student of history, I know that the world has always been filled with pain and trauma. In our fight against this darkness, we must remember to celebrate the light. Sometimes we win by just surviving. Sometimes we win by just dancing. So, we have decided that this year, the Museum will celebrate the beauty that exists in this world and take time to reclaim joy. I am relaunching the simple art of eating popsicles on my porch and discovering how and when our lives bring light and joy.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth A. Sutton, PhD
Director

AWARDS & NEWS

Illinois Arts Council Grant Awarded

A team of Spurlock Education and Administration staff members Beth Watkins, Karen Fleisher, and Monica M. Scott successfully wrote a grant for Ethic and Folk Arts Programming with the Illinois Arts Council. This year’s award was over $18,000 and will support public and school programming this fiscal year.

Leadership Grant Awarded

Christa Ducy-Quinn and Dr. Gloria See were awarded an Institute of Museum and Library Services leadership grant for $48,000. Their proposed project will develop and test an affordable, easy-to-use UV measurement tool prototype, a UV source to assess meter calibration, and the open-source publication of the associated design files and calibration assessment tools. This new tool for institutions of all sizes and budgets will advance collections stewardship and public access to those collections.

The Institute of Museum and Library Services is the primary source of federal support for the nation’s libraries and museums. They advance, support, and empower America’s museums, libraries, and related organizations through grant-making, research, and policy development. Their vision is a nation where museums and libraries work together to transform the lives of individuals and communities. To learn more, visit www.imls.gov.

New Look for the Spurlock Website!

As part of a larger rebranding effort by the University, we launched a new look for the Spurlock website. The updated design better reflects our position as an integral part of the University and is just the first step in our rebranding efforts. As always, we welcome any feedback at spurlock-museum@illinois.edu!
Charles Hundley
By Wayne Pitard

When Charles Hundley passed away in June, the Spurlock Museum lost one of its dearest and truest friends. A supporter from the days when the Spurlock’s predecessor, the World Heritage Museum, was located on the fourth floor of Lincoln Hall, Charles loved the idea of a museum that explored both the universal similarities in human existence and the diverse ways in which cultures have expressed their understandings of the world. When a new building became a possibility, he was one of those who could envision a modern institution, with excellent preservation and conservation facilities, large and spacious exhibition halls, and a strong education program — and helped to make it happen.

His service to the Spurlock was immense. For much of the time of his involvement, he was on the Museum Board, serving in a range of offices (including trustee, treasurer, vice-president, and president) while also acting as a member on various committees, most significantly as chair of the Development Committee. He and his beloved wife Barbara also committed funds, not just providing a most generous large gift early in the existence of the Spurlock that supports one of those who could envision a modern institution, with excellent preservation and conservation facilities, large and spacious exhibition halls, and a strong education program — and helped to make it happen.

Several of her students have also been important team members at the Museum. They include current undergraduate Anna Rataj, who was part of History Harvest for two semesters and worked extensively on Sewn in Memory, and Dr. Nathan Tye, who was the curator of the exhibit Debates, Decisions, Demands: Objects of Campaigns and Activism (2020–21) and developed public programming for the exhibit Knowledge at Demands: Objects of Campaigns and Activism (2020–21) and Sewn in Memory: AIDS Quilt Panels of Central Illinois (2017–18). Kathy was honored with the Distinguished Award for Campus Excellence at the Museum. Her values of scholarship and community research. History Harvest research areas have included LGBTQIA+ activism, the 5th and Hill Neighborhood Rights Campaign in Champaign, and the Independent Media Center in Urbana.

It is her work with History Harvest that led to our recent collaborative exhibit Sewn in Memory: AIDS Quilt Panels of Central Illinois (2021–2022). This project brought together the Greater Community AIDS Projects of East Central Illinois, Spurlock, Illinois Public Media, and faculty and students from the Departments of Journalism and History. The genesis and guiding spirit of this project were Kathy’s. Our staff had had the opportunity to share Sewn in Memory exhibit with the head of the Smithsonian, Lonnie Bunch, when he was awarded an honorary doctorate at commencement in May, and he was profoundly moved and impressed.

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With great sadness, we note the passing of Professor Kathryn Oberdeck. As a member of the History faculty at UIUC, Kathy had a long career of teaching undergraduate and graduate students in United States, Illinois, cultural, labor, and public history. She supervised student interns in public history for course credit and created a network of professionals interested in public history work, connecting faculty and students with staff of local museums and archives. She led the course called History Harvest: Collaborative Public Digital History, in which students engage with members of the public to collect and digitize documents and artifacts of historical interest for scholarly and community research. History Harvest research areas have included LGBTQIA+ activism, the 5th and Hill Neighborhood Rights Campaign in Champaign, and the Independent Media Center in Urbana.

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His interest in the Museum also manifested itself in his tireless personal efforts to encourage others to support it. He often brought friends and colleagues to the Spurlock to show them around, and he would sometimes join a tour led by me to add his own enthusiasm to the proceedings. He was a constant champion for Spurlock in his meetings with members of the University’s upper administration, as well as at Museum events. He also simply enjoyed dropping by to say hello and to talk about new developments, often inviting us to lunch, to get to know us better and to talk about the Spurlock. These conversations are some of the most enjoyable memories of my directorship at the Museum.

Charles will be deeply missed by the Spurlock family, for his generosity in both finances and time, his enthusiasm, his infectious laugh and smile, and his unquenchable love for the Museum. Our deepest sympathies go out to Barbara and the family in their loss.

Charles Hundley

Professor Kathryn Oberdeck

By Beth Watkins

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PROGRAMS PREVIEW

By Beth Watkins

CU Pride Fest
Last week of September
This year’s CU Pride Fest is also coming to Spurlock! We’re thrilled to be the host for educational events on September 27 and 28, organized by Uniting Pride of Champaign County.

Community Art Events
October 22 & October 29
The CU International Film Festival of works created by local high school students will be held on Saturday, October 22. On October 29, we’re holding a community art event with Ascending Aesthetic (www.ascendingaesthetic.org), a local group that connects arts and ecology.

Program series this year include old favorites and new ideas.

Spurlock Sundays
Second Sunday afternoon of each month
Spurlock Sundays invite families of all ages to making activities, performances, and games.

Crafternoons
Saturday, Nov. 26 and Tuesday, Dec. 20
Drop-in craft projects for young artists’ ages to making activities, performances, and games.

Spurlock Museum staff enjoy talking about our collections, but it is even more exciting when students can teach each other. Dr. Mathisen’s class chose their own artifacts from our holdings to research and then present to their peers. During their visit to Spurlock, the students made short presentations on their selections based on research in our database and other sources. They shared information on where their objects came from, what they think they were used for, and what led them to these conclusions. Students then asked each other questions, discussing the overarching themes of the class using their artifacts.

Using artifacts in class enables students to engage with material in new ways and helps them make connections to what they’re learning in the classroom. For example, seeing how small an ancient Mesopotamian cylinder seal really is, or feeling how heavy medieval chain mail armor is, engages multiple senses in learning in the classroom. For example, seeing how small an ancient Mesopotamian cylinder seal really is, or feeling how heavy medieval chain mail armor is, engages multiple senses when learning. Students participating in artifact reviews note that “seeing the surviving artifacts is incredible.” Professors have also shared how “engaged students are with the full-scale museum experience.”

This year’s exhibit on AIDS quilt panels, Sewn in Memory, saw many Community Health classes visit. GCAP co-founder Jerry Carden spoke with multiple classes. Jerry shared his experience, giving a short history of AIDS, the stigma within communities surrounding AIDS, and how it has affected the local community, before giving tours of the exhibit. Afterwards, students had the chance to process and discuss what they learned and saw. Many students noted how young HIV patients were when they died, noticing how they were just a few years older than students are now. Other students talked about how the quilt panels brought each person to life, mentioning that AIDS is more than just the numbers — it affected communities, and it is important to remember that real people are affected by diseases. Often, students also discussed the current coronavirus pandemic and how differently AIDS and COVID-19 were treated by health professionals, media, and government officials.

I presented on this year’s experiences in undergraduate instruction and in building relationships with faculty at the Alliance of Academic Museums and Galleries (AAMG) annual conference. The theme of this year’s conference was Sustainability Now! Empowering Community Adaptation and Transformation. I was part of a panel with three other academic museum professionals, and we looked at how university units are turning to interdisciplinary interactions as methods for teaching and learning. The panel explored four different models in fostering college-level interdisciplinary interactions within our museums, sharing lessons learned and providing ideas on how to begin and maintain these interactions. I was pleased to be able to share the experiences from UIUC in creating new, lasting relationships with our faculty from around campus.

For more information, please reach out to me at akpn@illinois.edu.
When I became director of the Spurlock Museum five years ago, the North America Gallery stood out to me as one of the galleries most in need of transformation. Several attempts to change the exhibits had occurred over the last ten years or so, but they inevitably stalled. The gallery was problematic for several reasons. The lack of Native voices represented in the interpretations offered in the Gallery was concerning, as was the general tendency to interpret Native Americans as existing in the past instead of as creators of vibrant, resilient, modern communities in the present. Many of the objects on display at the time were part of a collection that is very difficult to interpret. The Reginald and Gladys Laubin Collection includes both items created by Native American artists, as well as some made by Mr. and Mrs. Laubin. The Laubins, both white, were very interested in Native American cultures and traveled throughout the United States from the 1920s through 1970s learning about Native art, traditions, and dance. They performed educational “Indian shows” with their interpretations of Plains Indian dances and stories. We needed to remove many of the Laubin Collection pieces from display until we could conduct better research and determine who created each piece.

Fortuitously, around the time we were removing these items from display, we connected to the Bizhiki Culture and Dance Company through Nichole Boyd, the former Director of Native American House at the University of Illinois. We collaborated with the Bizhiki Culture and Dance Company to bring performances and educational offerings to both Spurlock Museum and local schools. During several of their visits, we began to discuss potential exhibits that could be of interest to the local community, and we were very drawn to the idea of an exhibition about Pow-wow, as they occur throughout much of North America, have some traditional roots, but are also a modern art form and often highlight intertribal exchange and collaboration.

We were very pleased that Dylan Bizhikiins Jennings (Bad River Tribe, Ojibwe) and Sasanehsaeh Jennings (Menominee) agreed to curate this exhibition, *Welcome to the Pow-wow: An Intertribal Pow-wow Experience*. Over the past three years, the Spurlock staff has had an amazing experience working with these curators to bring the project to fruition. We also were able to commission new works of art by Josh Atcheynum (Sweetgrass First Nations) to be featured in the exhibit. (See Josh’s work on the cover of this magazine.) Opening in March, the new exhibit will transport visitors to a pow-wow where they can view intricate regalia and a drum, hear music, learn about elements of a pow-wow, and touch a variety of objects and materials that you would find at a pow-wow.

The exhibit will be on display in our North American Gallery for seven years, but each year we will install new regalia pieces to keep the exhibit fresh and enable us to feature regalia representative of a number of dances and belonging to several different artists. We will also continue our collaboration with the Bizhiki Culture and Dance Company, with members visiting at least once a year to help us host programs and events highlighting Native American Art and Culture.

Stop in to the Museum this March to experience this dynamic new offering—and return each year as new regalia is rotated into the exhibition. And check our monthly email newsletter for associated events and programs.
Exhibition on the Japanese American Experience

By Jason Finkelman

The community she was raised became a catalytic moment. “This really opened my eyes to how much significant history is not taught in schools or represented in museums. I started listening more, learning how to do my own research, and asking people to share their stories with me.” It was then Sutton recognized the importance of amplifying the story of the Japanese American experience, and since arriving in Illinois she has wanted to present this history at Spurlock.

As Elizabeth and I got to know each other through Spurlock Illinois she has wanted to present this history at Spurlock. As conversations became more expansive regarding the infant son born ten days after the attack on Pearl Harbor, my ongoing work towards deeper understanding of my own Japanese American heritage and the incarceration experience led to wider exposure to the multifaceted stories of Japanese American histories occurred and remained hidden within the community she was raised.

Exposed to this knowledge after starting a career as a high school educator, Elizabeth’s understanding that extraordinary Japanese American histories occurred and remained hidden within the community she was raised became a catalytic moment. “This really opened my eyes to how much significant history is not taught in schools or represented in museums. I started listening more, learning how to do my own research, and asking people to share their stories with me.” It was then Sutton recognized the importance of amplifying the story of the Japanese American experience, and since arriving in Illinois she has wanted to present this history at Spurlock.

As Elizabeth and I got to know each other through Spurlock and campus projects, Elizabeth was fascinated to learn of my ongoing work towards deeper understanding of my own Japanese American heritage and the incarceration experience of my grandparents who first reported to the Santa Anita Assembly Center on Easter weekend, April 4, 1942 with an infant son born ten days after the attack on Pearl Harbor. As conversations became more expansive regarding the greater history, she acted on the Museum’s growing mission of inclusive and collaborative exhibition programming and invited me as a guest curator.

As a Yonsei, fourth-generation Japanese American on my maternal side, I have long chased historical narratives, documents, and images to better comprehend the enduring journey of my grandparents and extended family. This research led to wider exposure to the multifaceted stories of Japanese Immigrants — the Issei — and their descendants the Nisei (second generation) and Sansei (third generation). As curator of Nikkeijin Illinois, I am to offer this dynamic history through the lens of former and current students, faculty, and staff of the University of Illinois.

With the opportunity to present the Japanese American experience at Illinois, I set out to focus on people connected to Illinois to tell the story. Preliminary research identified several Japanese Americans who have been part of Illinois from the years before, during, and just after World War II. By highlighting Japanese Americans at Illinois, I center histories of struggle and perseverance for Nikkeijin — those of Japanese American heritage — on campus and in our community, creating new resonance within spaces we may frequent today.

Nikkeijin Illinois will provide a concise overview of the greater Japanese American experience: the pre-war years, anti-Japanese propaganda, Pearl Harbor and U.S. Entry into World War II; the forced removal and incarceration of Japanese Americans during war; those who volunteered for U.S. service and others segregated as loyal; relocation and migration across the country during and after the war; and the groundbreaking work towards redress and reparations.

Nikkeijin Illinois will also provide meaning towards why understanding the past is important to the present. While one thread of the exhibition connects histories of exclusion and anti-Asian hate to current reports of violence and hate crimes inflicted upon Asian and Asian-Americans that upset our contemporary news headlines, another platform will serve to amplify Japanese American voices of today.

The exhibit at Spurlock will further be anchored by a digital platform inviting Illinois-affiliated students, faculty, staff, and alumni who identify as Japanese American to share their stories. Along with providing an account of one’s Japanese American family experience during WWII, we inquire how attending the University of Illinois has informed one’s sense of cultural identity, and offer an opportunity to expand your story by sharing images and descriptions of a family artifact or photo.

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In the midst of the 2020 pandemic year, three of us — Professor Angharad N. Valdivia with students Stephanie Perez and Ariana Cano — got together for a semester-long independent study on Latina Feminist Media Studies. We relished the opportunity to read and learn together about issues of media, gender, and Latinidad. We were very thankful that the University of Illinois via the Institute of Communications Research at the College of Media and via the Latina Latino Studies Department at the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences demonstrated a commitment to the study and production of knowledge on issues about Latinas/os/x/e that were previously not included in the academy.

We read many books about how Latina girls and women navigate mainstream media production and consumption. One of the books, Quinceañera Style by Rachel Valentina González, inspired us to ask many follow-up questions about this ethnic cultural practice. As Latinas two of us (Ariana and Stephanie) had celebrated our fifteenth birthday through a quinceañera party. Ariana shared, much to our delight and admiration, that she was actually a part-time quinceañera choreographer, having choreographed over 30 quinceañeras in her career. Stephanie’s quinceañera united family from Guatemala in a Los Angeles celebration. Angharad, being from Chile, the one country in South America that does not celebrate this rite of passage, had nonetheless noticed how quinceañeras had recently become a nearly required component of most mainstream media’s content about Latina girls. In a recently published article about the Disney television show Stuck in the Middle, Angharad and her co-author Diana Leon-Boys identified quinceañeras as one of the three tropes that mainstream media uses to codify the Latinidad of characters (the other two are Day of the Dead/Día de los Muertos and Navidad/Christmas).

As media scholars, our group brought our personal experiences to the study of quinceañeras and how they appear in film and television, and we know that interpretation is influenced by personal experience. As Ethnic Studies scholars, we know that mainstream media incorporates ethnic subjects, which include Latinas and quinceañeras, in repetitive and dismissive ways.

Yet in our exploration, we could not forget that quinces are a celebration of girlhood, family, and culture. The quinceañera is a rite of passage where a girl enters the world of womanhood, at least symbolically. Particular elements of this coming-of-age ritual serve to underscore this transition from childhood to adulthood. Stephanie kept asking: “Where is the joy?” While quinces are an embodiment of gendered rituals, consumption, and ethnicity, they are also an occasion to come joyfully together. This exhibit highlights the joy of quinceañera celebrations in the U.S. and contextualizes popular culture representations of this important coming-of-age event for Latinx/es and Latin Americans.

As we began to plan this exhibit, Dr. Dora Valkanova joined Team Quince. Dora is a film scholar with production skills — she was the ideal fourth person for our team. She is the curator and editor of our photography and video components.

We hope that this exhibit provides visitors with an understanding of the quinceañera as a joyful practice. We have sought to bring together artifacts such as dresses, shoes, tiaras, the last muñeca, and banners. We have collected photographs donated or lent by former quinceañera celebrants and their families.

We have put together two videos. One combines mainstream media representations of quinceañeras with interviews with people who had quinceañeras. The other video has footage of actual quinceañeras.

We anticipate you will experience this exhibit as a celebration of pride and joy.
South American Indigenous and African-descended peoples live in vastly different environments. Since 1492, they have confronted multiple forms of repression by foreign and local colonizing, racializing, and settling peoples. Central to repressed peoples’ imagery of the larger society in which they are embedded is the image and force of el diablo (the Devil). Accordingly, the Spurlock’s Gallery of South American peoples offers two illustrations of celebratory events and processes that confront, confound, and reverse the forces of oppression that stem from the late fifteenth century on. We begin with the Afro-Latin American population of the Pacific Lowlands of Ecuador and Colombia and then move to the Andean Indigenous population of Bolivia.

In the former, the Devil is ubiquitous on land, on sea, in the forest, and in spiritual domains such as purgatory and hell. Black people of the region use African-derived musical events (the Devil) to chase him away and keep him at bay. In the latter case, the Indigenous people bring (to which the Devil is attracted) to chase him away and keep Black people of the region use African-derived musical events forest, and in spiritual domains such as purgatory and hell. In the former, the Devil is ubiquitous on land, on sea, in the Andean Indigenous population of Bolivia.

Self-liberation, known in English as maroonage (and the people as maroons) and in Spanish as cimarronaje (and the people as cimarrones), is the fundamental dynamic celebrated by the Afro-Ecuadorian-Colombian peoples of the Pacific littoral-rain-forest region of these two countries. One feature of such celebration is the marimba dance. The marimba (xylophone) and knowledge of its complex melodies and rhythms were brought directly from Northwest Africa by peoples long thought by outsiders to be beyond the realm of African-related cultural features.1

The marimba dance began in northwest Ecuador sometime after 1553, when Africans staged a mutiny on a slave ship from Panama bound for Peru and escaped into what became the province of Esmeraldas, Ecuador. They created the only sector of the New World where Blackness and Africanity began with freedom and self-liberation. The Devil may be disguised as a white overseer, a white lumber dealer, a white development officer, or even a gringo tourist. Diego Quitoza (2003) points out that the Devil gives himself away by a smell of sulfur, glimpses of horns underneath his hat, or the hint of a tail coming from the back of his pants. He is attracted to the “dance of respect” of the marimba ensemble, but as he tries to enter the performance area to steal children, he is driven away by the bombo and cununo drums of Afro-Hispanic culture.

In the high Andes mountains, as elsewhere in the Americas, Indigenous people were forced by white overseers and white investors to work deep down in the dark silver mines. As they created wealth for white people, they endured increasing poverty and deprivation for themselves and for the Black people in this region who were imported as death took its Indigenous toll. During carnival, a Spanish celebration, the Indigenous dancers in Bolivia dress as diabladas (devils) and morenadas (Black people) and symbolically emerge from the underworld to terrify white people and exercise whiteness from their expanding universe.

In the mask featured on the diablada dancer in the Spurlock South American Gallery, the snakes have a special significance. They represent the power of the giant anaconda, who as a spirit, it is said, comes from deep Amazonia to the high Andes to create disruption in the white-dominated world and to restore Indigeneity to its proper centrality. This process is known in Quechua as tupaj amaran and in Aymara as tupaj katari (return of the anaconda).

These are but two poignant illustrations of how celebration subsumes the Devil in African American and Indigenous enactment and celebration of freedom and liberation.

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2. Whitten. 2001.05.0062.
5. 2007.05.0043.
Each year we are contacted by people interested in donating items to the Spurlock Museum. However, the last two years we’ve been contacted by over 100 potential donors! With limited storage space and people power to properly care for so many potential donations, we follow our collecting plan and continually research the objects to assess which ones best support our mission. Meanwhile, we also connect potential donors to other institutions that may be a better fit for their items.

Read more about some of the new items that have recently become part of our permanent collections.

**NEW ACQUISITIONS**

*By Dery Martínez-Bonilla*

**Blackware Pot by Donicia Martinez Tafoya** (1912–1979), Santa Fe, New Mexico, United States, 20th Century. Gift of Susie Titus. 2022.01.0001.

**Blackware Pot by Maria Montoya Martinez** (1887–1980), Santa Fe, New Mexico, United States, 20th Century. Gift of Susie Titus. 2022.01.0002.

In 2019 the Museum opened the exhibit *In Her Closet — How to Make a Drag Queen*. The exhibit stayed up while the Museum was closed to visitors during the early months of the pandemic, but many people interacted with online resources related to the exhibit, including information on how it was originally developed. Some readers even reached out to donate drag-related items. Such is the case with this set of Marilyn Monroe stamps.

At first sight, they seem like any other set of stamps. However, there’s a remarkable story behind them. In 2014, the Central African Republic issued commemorative stamps honoring Marilyn Monroe. But there was a mistake on one of the stamps: the image in the bottom right corner isn’t Marilyn at all but rather Jimmy James, a drag performer famous for his Marilyn impersonation. That image was from an LA Eyeworks ad campaign from 1991. The original photo was taken by Greg Gorman. Once the mistake was realized, the stamps were pulled from circulation and many of them destroyed. The Central African Republic, which has an atrocious record on LGBTQ+ rights, also tried to hide the images online. This donation included all the stamps in the set.

**Mah Meri Wood Carving**

In 1987, Donald Sherbert commissioned this item from distinguished spirit wood carver Pion Anak Bumbong of the Mah Meri culture who lives on Carey Island, Malaysia. The Mah Meri are a subgroup of the Malaysian Indigenous Orang Asli people, who are known for their masterful woodcarvings.

This carving was carved from one piece of wood. The artist signed the carving on the bottom and also included the location it is from and the name of the carving. The term for spirit. This is the only Mah Meri wood carving in our collections.

Donald Sherbert passed away in October 2021. Sherbert’s wife Janice, who is also a Museum volunteer, and their children donated the carving.

**Souvenir Stamp Sheet of Jimmy James as Marilyn Monroe**

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SPURLOCK REGISTRAR

Jennifer White Retires

By Gavin Robinson and Beth Watkins

Jennifer has had a profound impact on Spurlock Museum over the past two decades, and she has led a number of initiatives that have helped to transform the museum into a modern, world-class facility.

Jennifer leads Registration staff in creating an inventory of the Artifact Collection, August 5, 2014.

Jennifer sports her "Quail Man" costume, Superhero Appreciation Day, April 28, 2015.

Meaningful and Memorable Projects

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Evolving Jobs
to Meet Community & Program Needs

By Jack Thomas

What prompted this change in your position title and role?
The Spurlock Museum’s strategic planning process has encouraged staff to think differently about our roles and the Museum’s community engagement. With all we’ve learned working with community members for our most recent temporary exhibits (In Her Closet featuring local drag artists, for example), we recognize how critical it is to devote attention to building relationships with the C-U community, both on and off campus.

In 2017, I was hired as the Public Education and Volunteers Coordinator. My primary position responsibilities included overseeing a volunteer program through recruitment, onboarding, and special volunteer activities. The Museum, however, didn’t always have capacity to take on new volunteers. The pandemic also changed our use of — and need for — volunteers. Many of our volunteers can no longer interact with peers through a series of social events and special tours.

Now, my title matches the work I do. One major shift, though, is a complete overhaul of the Museum’s guide training program. We were having conversations in the Education section about streamlining the program and paying student guides. The pandemic presented a great opportunity to officially transition our volunteer guide training program into a paid gallery guide program for UIUC students. I onboarded the first students this past spring. (You can read more about it in this magazine issue.)

Aside from the changes in the volunteer program, are there other aspects of your job that are changing?

For the most part, my day-to-day work hasn’t changed. Now, my title matches the work I do.

Does that mean that Spurlock won’t have volunteers anymore?

I’ll continue to onboard new volunteers; however, there isn’t an emphasis on recruiting volunteers or managing a program for them. Each section can recruit their own volunteers, and the volunteers would complete an application and submit onboarding materials through me.

What is your hope for this position over the next few years?

My focus is on adult audiences and, with the new gallery guides, our community engagement efforts. I hope our work at Spurlock can provide a path forward to more inclusive hiring practices and workplace conditions in museums.

A VERY GOOD BOY

By Mikael Fox

Monica speaking at the Great Art Doors: Artists in Dialogue Contemporary Conversations event, September 9, 2021.

In late 2021, two new additions joined the Spurlock Museum staff. Only one was human. The other had four legs and a tail.

I am a graduate assistant at the Spurlock Museum, and Obi is my service dog. Obi is trained to help me balance and lets me know when I need to sit down or take my medication.

Service dogs like Obi who are trained to assist their handlers with specific tasks are covered under the Americans with Disabilities Act, meaning that employers cannot deny them reasonable access. However, there are still practical aspects to consider. Obi is a labrador retriever, meaning he sheds. How can we minimize his potential as a conductor of pests?

With these concerns, the Spurlock Museum could have made an argument to deny Obi access. Instead, they chose to work with us to make sure I could get the most out of my time here while keeping both Obi and the collections safe.
With few exceptions, the Spurlock’s student staff is rethinking the pay model. It’s not the first museum to face this challenge. When is it appropriate to hire paid professionals versus using volunteers? Though the Art Institute was heavily criticized for the move, across the country feared their own programs would dissolve. One of the primary reasons the Art Institute discontinued its docent core was due to the homogenous demographic within the program. Most people cannot commit to a robust commitment to accessibility to professional opportunities. It also underscores the Museum’s shows value for the work by acknowledging its significance within the program so far.

For one, listen to others! Listening shows value for the work by acknowledging its significance. It can also be a necessary thing in life. It can also help answer even the people who work at museums! Not everyone’s correct 100% of the time, not even the people who work at museums! Once, while running an Elixir program based on the Sewn in Memory exhibit, a guest had a personal story and shared some facts that were new to us about the quilts on display. It helped answer some questions we were having, and that was so nice for cool, calm.

When you give to the Spurlock, you make a lasting impact. We are grateful to so many of you who continue to generously invest in us and ensure our excellence in showcasing cutting-edge exhibits, providing opportunities for student workers, and preserving cultural materials.

Gifts can be made outright or through options such as a gift from your will/estate, appreciated stock, and home/farmland donations.

If you are interested in giving opportunities, please contact: Joseph Baldwin, Associate Director of Development.

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Zoomorphic Hat. China.
The Warfield Collection. 2021.06.0007.