



Alaska State Museums Bulletin 65

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Interview with Aaron Elmore

Last October the Alaska State Museum hired Aaron Elmore as the new Exhibits Designer to work with Curator of Exhibits, Jackie Manning, to continue the tradition of excellence in exhibitions at the Alaska State Museums. Aaron brings to the museum more than a decade of professional graphic design experience, including the design and manufacture of various historical signs and visual displays around Juneau; his hand-painted signs, logos and murals hang throughout Southeast Alaska. Elmore is also co-artistic director for Theatre in the Rough, an award-winning theater company he and his wife co-founded in 1991. At the museum, he will be designing exhibitions at both the Alaska State Museum in Juneau and the Sheldon Jackson Museum in Sitka, as well as travelling exhibits.

We caught up with Aaron during a short lull between installing the big summer shows and planning for the Fall lineup.



The job is like a dream come true but I'd never dared dream this big. That sounds a bit ooey-goey to say about civil service, maybe, but it's true. Not only do I get to do amazingly cool things like turn brass and butcher wood and help maintain a fine shop, I get to tell a story with design and materials every day, all day. That last is a Theatre in the Rough thing, yes, but it is a thrill to make a living wage at it. Finally, to do all this in service of my town and this state is, well, a gift.

Did you have good experiences with museums as a kid and did you ever think you would work in one someday?

Yes, I did and, no, never in a million years. I remember twice taking an hour-long school bus ride from Sonoma County, CA, to see the De Young and the Aquarium in San Francisco and found it all thrilling. Made me want to learn about everything. But I never thought of a museum as a place where people worked. At least not people who do what I do. Now, of course, I know connecting people with these collections is part of connecting them with who they are. It's a vital part of what makes the collection precious. It's amazing to think that I get to be a part of that.

You have worked in so many facets of exhibiting to the public, from graphic design to stage building, how is all this coming together for you in designing and fabricating museum exhibits?

Extremely well. In designing exhibits, I think I use just about every skill I have acquired, and then some, both as a graphic designer and as a theatre practitioner. I am doing graphic work and copy writing to help promote the exhibits as well as helping design, layout and fabricate the exhibits themselves. I'm even making some big signs. But I am also learning so much about everything from best practices to fasteners. It is enormously involving and enormously enjoyable.

What is the most fun aspect of your job?

The breadth and the variety. I use every part of my brain and both hands all day in this job. And, in one day, I might design and build a storage crate for a one hundred year old chair, create a new concept for displaying several thousand collectible pins, kibbutz about finishes in the new building and pull a half-eaten gingersnap out of the eagle nest. It is the best job in the world.

You worked in the private sector for years. Does that help you with the deadline oriented nature of museum exhibits?

Absolutely. Customers in the sign and print trade need their stuff when you say it will be done. If you advertise a show on such and such a date you have got to have it all together on that day. I must say though, so far, the volume and the work load here seems geared to produce excellence. This schedule is not only doable, it is sustainable. Its healthy. Makes me want to do more.

Tell us something that not many people know about Aaron Elmore?

I guess some few people know about my history of dabbling in chainmail, both manufacture and repair. Maybe not so many know I've been at it since I was 14.

Well now we all know where to get our chainmail repaired!

Ask ASM

Question: Do you have guidelines for keeping the museum clean or examples of signs to post in the staff break room. I am not referring to cleaning the actual objects or storage shelves, but the spaces where staff congregate to eat their lunches.

ASM: We mostly try and make the case for cleanliness in the break area, etc. on the basis of pest control. People seem to get it that if you leave a bunch of trash, food, debris around that it attracts insects. Once an infestation takes hold it can be very expensive and time consuming to get rid of. It is not easy but somehow you have to get people to realize that museums are special places like hospitals where special rules apply. Basically there are only two places in our museum where you can eat, the kitchen/break room and the conference room (receptions are special and require immediate cleanup and trash removal). This keeps the potential for food caused infestations to a minimum or at least to a minimum number of places. It seems to work. How do we know? Because our IPM tells us so. Our Integrated Pest Management Plan (IPM) has most of do's and don'ts regarding food in the museum. You can see more on museum IPM at this link. <http://ellencarrlee.wordpress.com/2009/03/19/integrated-pest-management-made-easy/>

As far as signage goes we just try and keep it simple so that people are reminded to keep the area clean. The sign that has hung above the sink in our break room for years looks like this.



Shaking the Money Tree

NEH

New application guidelines are now posted on the NEH Web site (<http://www.neh.gov/grants/public/americas-historical-and-cultural-organizations-planning-grants>) for their **America's Historical and Cultural Organizations: Planning and Implementation grants**. The next deadline is August 14, 2013, and they expect this grant program to be offered again in January 2014.

Grants support interpretive exhibitions, reading or film discussion series, historic site interpretation, lecture series and symposia, and digital projects. NEH especially encourages projects that offer multiple formats and make creative use of new technology to deliver humanities content.

MAP

The Museum Assessment Program (MAP) is an IMLS-funded program available to small and mid-sized museums of all types. During MAP your museum conducts a self-study, consults with a museum professional who will provide a customized site visit and report and gains the tools to become a stronger institution.

- The MAP process is customized to your museum.
- The application is easy to complete and 98% of museums that apply get accepted.

- Choose one of three assessment types: Organizational, Collections Stewardship or Community Engagement.

IMLS funded MAP grants provide \$4,000 of consultative resources and services to participating museums. Become the next museum to take advantage of MAP. The upcoming application deadline is July 1.

Apply today for the July 1 application deadline.

Visit www.aam-us.org/map for more information about MAP or contact at map@aam-us.org or 202.289.9118.

MAP is administered by the American Alliance of Museums and supported through a cooperative agreement with the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

Spotlight on Grant in Aid

The Carrie McLain Memorial Museum used GIA funds purchase of a Dell Studio XPS 9100 Desktop Computer. This computer replaced their 5 year old workhorse computer used for scanning, restoring and preserving their extensive photo collection. They also use this computer to help fund their institution by reproducing and/or digitizing photos for sale to the public, researchers and production companies.



Museum Aide Liz Edwards preparing a digital file for printing a photograph of Leonhard Seppala and team using the new Dell Studio XPS 9100 computer. The finished product was sold to a Museum visitor for \$52!

Alaska Museums in the News

3 part series on the SLAM project

<http://juneauempire.com/local/2013-06-01/highlighting-states-collections-designing-slam-exhibit-floor>

<http://juneauempire.com/local/2013-06-03/slam-part-two-digging-deeper-states-collections>

<http://juneauempire.com/local/2013-06-04/reaching-out-digital-access-states-collections>

Professional Development/Training Opportunities

Image Permanence Institute

Free webinars on the optimal preservation environment

The Image Permanence Institute is presenting a series of free webinars for collections care and facilities staff in cultural institutions is designed to enable collections care and facilities staff in cultural institutions to work together to achieve an optimal preservation environment—one that combines the best possible preservation of collections with the least possible consumption of energy, and is sustainable over time. This series is funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities Education & Training grant program.

Webinar presentations will focus on broad environmental challenges and provide useful and effective suggestions for dealing with them. Webinars will be presented by IPI staff unless noted otherwise. Each webinar will be presented on a Wednesday from 10 – 11:30 Alaska Standard Time. You can get additional details and register for webinars at <http://ipisustainability.org/>

July 10, 2013

Investigate your HVAC System & Identify Potential Energy Savings – Guest Speaker Peter Herzog, Herzog/Wheeler & Associates, Energy Management Consultant

August 7, 2013

Practical Approaches to Environmental Control for Small Institutions – Guest speaker, Richard Kerschner, Director of Preservation and Conservation, Shelburne Museum, Shelburne, Vermont

September 4, 2013

Sustainable Preservation Practices—Key Team Activities

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Professional Time Wasting on the Web

Interesting blog from the National Watch and Clock Museum

<http://national-watch-and-clock-museum.blogspot.com/>

Here's a link to an interesting article about cannon conservation http://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/conservation-big-guns-opened-civil-war-19415436#.Ub4aXwiL9_k.email

Disaster planning and response resources from across the web in one place: <http://sheronline.info/resources/>

Interesting idea about “Crowd Sourcing” for museums

<http://www.notesfromnature.org/>

A Haida pemmican grinding tool.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/roadshow/archive/201206A23.html>

A food critic reviews the museum café at the National Museum of The American Indian

<http://engagingplaces.net/2013/05/31/video-food-critic-reviews-museum-cafe/>