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Press Release

SHELDON JACKSON MUSEUM

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Carlton retires from Sheldon Jackson Museum after ‘a great ride’

After 25 years of employment with Sitka’s Sheldon Jackson Museum, Rosemary Carlton has retired from her position as Curator of Collections.

Carlton began her stay with the museum in 1985, when she left her post at the Russian Bishop’s House as a site interpreter for the National Park Service to take the museum’s education coordinator position. She quickly took on additional exhibits and outreach duties as her title changed to interpretive specialist.

“When I got hired, I was in the right place at the right time and I’ve gotten to work with some of the best professionals around,” Carlton said.

Early in her time at the museum, Carlton was involved in the genesis of the Native Artists Demonstrators Program, which she now looks back on as one of her favorite professional accomplishments. It began in 1988 with one volunteer, Janice Criswell, who volunteered her time to demonstrate her Tlingit weaving skills to museum patrons. At that time the program was unfunded, but it had such a positive impact on those involved that some state resources were dedicated toward its development. Since then, thanks to grants and the support of the Friends of Sheldon Jackson Museum, the program has grown to be able to fund almost a dozen artists each summer.

“It’s such a rich experience, not only for the visitors but also for the people demonstrating,” Carlton said. The program continues to feature artists of all different cultural groups from around the state, from Athabaskan beaders to baleen basket weavers. “We’ve had people who are just starting out in their field and people that have had their work at the Museum Of Modern Art in New York — really top notch people,” Carlton said.

During Carlton’s tenure at the museum, she was able to continue her education, an opportunity she credited to the support of her present and former colleagues. In 1992, she obtained her Master’s of Museum Studies through distance courses from the University of Oklahoma. The program, designed for working professionals, allowed her to further her education without leaving her position for an extended period of time. Her thesis, “Sheldon Jackson the Collector,” was later published by the Alaska State Museums.

When former curator of collections Peter Corey retired in 2002, Carlton became acting Curator of Collections for a few months before filling Corey’s former position. As Curator of Collections, Rosemary’s duties grew to include acquisitions, caring for the collection, registering artifacts and research in addition to her continuing work with exhibits and education programs.

Now retired from the position, Carlton looks back on her years at the museum with fond memories, most of them involving the people she has worked with. “We’re a team here,” Carlton said. “It’s been a whole slew of people who have contributed to all the things that have gone on here. I have felt so lucky.”

Carlton plans to use her newly acquired free time to travel — first to visit museums in Anchorage and Fairbanks in September, and second to spend time with her 19 month-old granddaughter and her nearly 97 year-old father.

“It will be hard to let go, but I know there will be some people who will bring in some new energy and fresh ideas,” Carlton said. “It has been a great ride. There have been some ups and downs, but it’s been a great ride at the museum.”

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