

Magic at the Museum

*by Jason Goldberg, Volunteer,
Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History*

Paraphrasing from the Wikipedia entry, the Sant Ocean Hall in the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History opened on September 27, 2008 with over 650 specimens and models drawn from the over 80 million specimens in the museum's total collection. It has 23,000 square feet of exhibition space, a replica of a 45-foot long North Atlantic Right Whale, Science on a Sphere, a 1,500-gallon aquarium, two giant squid, an adult coelacanth, a two-tusked narwhal skull, and a sea devil.

What an amazing theater for a magician.

Professionally, I have joint Master's degrees in Public Policy and Marine Science, but I have been interested in magic ever since I was young, perhaps coincidentally when I attended SeaCamp in the Florida Keys and had a camp counselor who taught me my first tricks.

Environmental policy won out as a career, but I always wanted to learn magic. While working for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in 2001, my supervisor learned of my interest and introduced me to a friend of hers who was a member of the International Brotherhood of Magicians. From that seed I began my study of magic more intently.

Magic has had real tangible benefits for me personally and professionally. Scientists are not necessarily known for being the best communicators, but that's a vital skill for anyone in theatre. Performing has forced me to become more empathic, to think about my audience. That skill has directly translated into my capability to lead and work with a team, to understand what other people need, and how I can serve the public more effectively. Magic also involves



Jason Goldberg

Photo by Maria del Carmen Cossu

critical thinking, another skill that has allowed me to enhance my analytical skills in solving complex environmental problems.

Just as with other forms of theatre, the types of magic that one can perform are also equally varied. Someone can perform in stage, parlor, street, or close-up settings. Serious, comic, Renaissance, bizarre, birthday party, "Blue and Gold" (Boy and Girl Scout), and other types exist. The tools of the trade are also equally varied and include cards, rings, ropes, coins, handkerchiefs, and many other props. I've leaned toward close-up magic, a style best suited for a few people at a time, because it can be performed anywhere, and I like the one-on-one audience interaction. I'm also interested in magic's broader relationship with society, its rich history, and what it can teach us about ourselves.

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President's Report

I love the theme of this INSIGHTS issue, The Magic of Museum Theatre, and I find this quote, “Magic is something you make,” a perfect fit for the themes covered in this publication. It sums up the art of theatre in a nutshell. What we make: the stories we share, the worlds and characters we invent or recreate bring museum content to life in a magical way. We ask the audience to suspend their belief, to take a journey with us, to buy into our theatrical conventions and often to participate on stage with us. Museum theatre inspires a unique sense of wonder that cannot be replicated by any other form of engagement. Museum theatre can truly feel magical.

Unfortunately, when we witness other museum theatre companies dismantled, it can also feel like magic when others remain intact. Every time we hear the crushing news about a museum theatre department closing, we can be comforted and supported by our IMTAL membership. For every challenge, we can find solutions, advice, and success stories from our fellow IMTAL members.

However, IMTAL, like magic, is something you make, so I encourage you to become more actively involved in IMTAL. There are numerous ways to volunteer. Simply contact a board member for more information.

My term is ending, so this is my last Presidential column for IMTAL. While I'm sad to leave the office, I'm thrilled to pass the Presidential wand on to Elizabeth Pickard. We couldn't ask for a more



devoted, reliable, and talented individual. Elizabeth will serve us well. I want to thank all of you for electing me, for working tirelessly for museum theatre, and for staying active in IMTAL.

I look forward to my term as past president and to reconnecting with you at future conferences.

Stephanie Long

Science Museum of Minnesota,
Science Live Theatre
IMTAL President

Late-breaking Conference News!

As we were finishing up the proofreading for this issue, new IMTAL president and conference maven Elizabeth Pickard sent GREAT NEWS about the upcoming FALL IMTAL AMERICAS CONFERENCE. Budgeting info (so hot off the presses it's not even on the website yet!); member conference rate is super cheap—\$150 per person and includes an opening reception (with food and drink) and cookie breaks. This is a great deal! (Nonmember rate includes membership, so tell your friends!) The hotel will be the lovely Sheraton Clayton Plaza. Clayton, MO is St. Louis's second downtown and features great bars, restaurants, and parks. The hotel is just a block and a half from a Metrolink station, making your commute from the airport AND the museum super easy. We've secured a great rate of \$149/night which includes breakfast.

More details and CALL FOR SESSION PROPOSALS on page 13.

Editor's Corner

I couldn't breathe. All those old emotions, the ones I'd stuffed away since college and before, were fighting in my throat, stretching my vocal cords tight like a garrote.

The play wasn't long. It wasn't in the "right place"—not in the gallery where it was designed to be performed, but in an odd-sized conference room in another state's history museum, part of the first IMTAL conference I attended. It was about a war I thought I knew—I'd grown up during that time—but I wasn't a military vet, wasn't married to one, wasn't even related to one unless you go back a couple of generations. I wasn't a protester, an anti-war activist, or an aging hippie. I was just me, a long-time freelance writer and writing coach with a portfolio weighted down with a lot of interp writing. Just me, intrigued by the possibilities of live performance that went beyond stand-and-deliver guiding and knowing intuitively that writing exhibit labels and display panels (even when done brilliantly) was not the same as writing a play, even if the core messages and goals were the same. Just me, sitting on a hard chair in a make-shift theatre, trying to defend myself against something for which I had no defense.

And me, ultimately realizing that I didn't need to defend myself, that somehow, the combination of pre-show set-up, performance, and post-show discussion made some sense of my messy emotions and, even more surprising, made sense of that time of my life and our shared history. It was a superb illustration of the power—the magic—of museum theatre.

There are those who proclaim the importance of theatre is that it can change lives. I'm not much for hype, and I distrust such over-the-top pronouncements. But I can't deny what happened, can't deny the intense discussions and discoveries that happened in that remarkable space.

May the magic continue.

Judy Fort Brenneman
Greenfire Creative, LLC
IMTAL Publications Officer

We're now imtal-us.org.

Just a quick reminder that IMTAL Americas has a new domain name, and with it, a new website url and new email addresses for our board members. The new name—imtal-us.org—isn't meant as a slight to our neighbors. We're still IMTAL Americas, with members throughout North, Middle, and South America, but we have temporarily lost our original domain name. (If you try to access our website with the original url, you'll end up on a squatter's sales page.) We hope to eventually recover imtal.org, but in the meantime, please update your bookmarks and address books:

<http://imtal-us.org/>

links to all three IMTAL branches (Americas, Europe, and Asia-Pacific)

<http://imtal-us.org/home>

IMTAL Americas homepage

Board member email addresses are listed on the last page of the newsletter.

Newsletter Survey, Take 2... and a bit

The newsletter survey launched just as the problem with our domain name surfaced. You might have been able to respond to the survey—or you might have ended up on another company's sales page. Our apologies for any confusion. We haven't sent out the new survey yet, but we're hoping to get to that soon.

And as always, if you have questions, comments, feedback, or are interested in submitting an article or announcement, send me an email: publications@imtal-us.org.



Ocean Hero design is courtesy of the Smithsonian based on concept by Jason Goldberg

“To this day, I’m convinced that they thought I wanted to pull a squid out of a hat.”

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Magic today is more than just tricks. It’s a conversation piece, an opportunity to get the spectator talking and thinking. Magic is being applied in hospitals for physical and recreational therapy, helping psychologists unlock the mysteries of the human mind, and yes, being used as a tool for museum theatre!

I approached the National Museum of Natural History’s staff about performing in the Sant Ocean Hall when they were first soliciting volunteers for the Ocean Hall. The staff were, perhaps understandably, a little skeptical. To this day, I’m convinced that they thought that I wanted to pull a squid out of a hat. However, they let me “audition” and liked what they saw. Since then, I’ve been performing monthly in the Ocean Hall. That early show contained many of the same effects that I still use today in the Ocean Hall, though I am always seeking to refine my act and research new ideas.

My goals remain the same. Each trick must have some direct link to a message in the Ocean Hall. As such, I almost never perform pieces that are inspired by our natural world, but are rather directly about it. The audience must distinctly see the link, rather than, for example, a dance piece that evokes images of coral reefs through colored lights or movement. For me, magic is a tool to open conversations in a nonthreatening way, and one that encourages

people to think more deeply about the objects in the museum. When they are astonished by a trick, they’re thinking, “Oh, wow,” and not, “Yes, but....” That opens the doors for all kinds of learning in people of all ages.

When performing, I can usually be found near one of the giant squid with a cart that holds my props. This allows me to perform close-up for visitors who want to see the show without disturbing others. Over the course of my four-hour shift, I will perform “shows” ranging from one minute to over twenty, depending on what the audience wants. On busy days, I’ll perform for well over 100 people. My costume is usually simple—an aloha shirt with different critters I can talk about. Since I’m not a trained actor, I have shied away from adopting a persona much different than who I am “normally.” I also usually have objects from the museum’s collection, such as a horseshoe crab and shark jaw, so I can move from magic to object discussion as relevant.

My repertoire includes pieces that highlight actions we can take at home to protect the ocean, show ways in which we are similar to other animals, and describe the diversity of habitats on this planet. I may even teach a little 15th Century pirate history to the adults when the Smithsonian staff aren’t looking!

As an example, let's take a look at one of my favorite routines. The museum maintains a wonderful portal where learning can continue, <http://ocean.si.edu/>. Volunteers can hand it out on a business card. However, how many business cards have you been given and kept? How do we make it something that people will truly want to keep (and use)? Fortunately, magicians solved this problem decades ago. We wanted a way to perform a quick trick highlighting our skill while making sure spectators kept our business card for future bookings.

The answer is to make the object a gift, something that has special meaning with extraordinary value for the audience. In my case, I offer each spectator a blank card. It is actually shown to be blank on each side. Covering the card with their hands, I ask the spectator to think how they are connected to the ocean and name one thing that they can do to protect the ocean. They then open their hands to show that the card now reads, "Congratulations! You're an Ocean Hero!" The portal website is in smaller print. The response is always one of astonishment, no matter the age of the individual. This is something that they WILL keep. I want these cards pinned to refrigerators, and more hits on the Ocean Portal website as a result!

The sleight of hand is very easy to learn. My presentation sells it, and I use it to link practical conservation messages with why the ocean is important. Working with the museum's brilliant graphic designers, I designed five different cards so I can perform it for multiple people at once; it's a subconscious but important message that they made the magic happen themselves. The cards feature pictures of sea turtles, sharks, and other animals. The sleight of hand, in case you're interested, is based on a move called the "Carlyle Paddle Turnover," which dates back to about 1943, though there are other methods of performing this effect.

IMTAL 2013 in Washington, D.C. gave me a lot I'm grateful for. I had stumbled upon "museum theatre" because I wanted a way to combine my interests in environmental science and magic, and the Sant Ocean Hall gave me a perfect venue. Finding IMTAL and its passionate members has been inspiring. The people I met have inspired me to continue developing new routines. For example, I had never performed a classic of magic, the Linking Rings, in the Ocean Hall because I was concerned that it was too strong a trick and would overpower my message. IMTAL members encouraged me to rethink that view, and I'm now working on scripts that use the Rings. I'm also branching out to develop a 25-minute stage show for children, with perhaps

one for adults in the works to come down the road. I realized that I can be more "theatrical" without giving up anything about ocean conservation. In fact, I may gain much more.

Incorporating magic into museum programs/theatre does not need to be expensive; it can be done with a deck of cards or other simple items. There are several great resources you can use to get started. You already know theatre, which means you're already halfway there. Entertaining magic really is all about the presentation. Check out 793.8 in your library. Find a trick in a book and explore how it can be adapted to meet your needs! For example, Joshua Jay published a great book in 2008 for non-magicians, *Magic: The Complete Course*. You can also reach out to local members of the International Brotherhood of Magicians (www.magician.org) or the Society of American Magicians (www.magicsam.com). Both are international organizations and great places to start. Of course, you can also contact me, and I'll be happy to help however I can!

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"Magic today is more than just tricks. It's a conversation piece, an opportunity to get the spectator talking and thinking."

Behind the Scenes & In Front of the Camera

Technical Wizardry in Interp Programming

Interview with Brad Krey and Heather Holm, California State Parks PORTS Program

by Judy Fort Brenneman

My friend Roger rattled the door open. “You gotta see this,” he grinned. “It’s so cool.”

The room was tiny—bigger than a closet, but smaller than what I thought of when someone said “studio.” Especially “TV studio.” LuAnn Thompson, PORTS Interpreter at Anza-Borrego Desert State Park in Borrego Springs, California, greeted us enthusiastically, explaining that she had a few minutes while some technical glitches were sorted out. She was about to go live—standing in front of a green screen, various props at the ready—to present an interpretive program to students who were miles away. It was magic of the highest order.

Often, we focus our attention on the “performance” part of “performing arts,” sliding past the challenges

*and opportunities of technology in museum theatre and interpretive programming. California State Parks’ PORTS program (Parks Online Resources for Teachers and Students) has been exploring and exploiting technology for more than ten years to bring live interpretive programming to classrooms throughout the state. This free distance learning program introduces state parks to students and helps schools teach common core state standards. PORTS provides lesson plans, digital video, digital images, and other media materials, followed by real-time, two-way, audio and video communication between the classroom and park staff. I interviewed **Brad Key**, PORTS Program Manager, and **Heather Holm**, PORTS Program Coordinator, to learn more.*

JFB: *All this videoconferencing and standing in front of the green screen so that it looks like you’re actually out in the desert, to me, all of that is magic. So I*



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Casey Dexter-Lee, PORTS Interpreter, inside the Angel Island Immigration Station

wanted to talk about the effective use of technology to broaden reach or to enhance scope, and how this program came about, how it works for you guys, the things that you find challenging, the things that have brought you great joy or been a surprise or easier than you thought they would.

BK & HH: That sounds great, and we appreciate the opportunity.

JFB: *Let's start with a little bit of background—how the program arose, a little bit of history and context.*

BK: The program was born over ten years ago, as kind of an attempt to use technology to bring park programming into classrooms, knowing that using technology was a part of the future of K-12. Some very forward-thinking parks professional said, what can we do to engage the K-12 community on their own terms? We'd done lots of different pilot programs with big heavy equipment and lots of staff, a program with microwave towers and all sorts of repeaters out in the desert, for example. But really what we were doing more than ten years ago was proving the concept that you could use videoconference technology to effectively do a park program.

The driving goal of this program is to engage the audiences that don't even know parks exist. We're working with inner-city school districts, underserved populations and rural areas throughout California. Basically, we're working with the largest urban school districts, like Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), and then the smallest school districts, out in the middle of Imperial Valley, Modoc County, and in Central Valley. So, ten years ago or so, we proved the concept, that this would be something that teachers would want to use, and it's just kind of expanded from there.

JFB: *How have things have changed over the course of the program? How technology has changed, perhaps become more streamlined or more efficient or more problematic, over the years, but changes also going from a "traditional" interp model, with field interpreters doing formal and informal programs on site, to getting interpreters who are comfortable in front of a camera, for example.*

BK: You know, when we first started, you had to buy a ChromaKey setup and build studios. And it was very expensive, and you needed professional lighting and you needed video mixers. But everything certainly did get streamlined, and then



LuAnn Thompson, PORTS Interpreter, inside the Anza-Borrego PORTS Studio

California State Parks PORTS Program

into one machine or videoconference unit. Lighting became easier to use. We're never shooting for a Hollywood-quality program. This is a park program, and while you saw LuAnn's studio, I think it's important to know that we also do, and we have been doing, more and more mobile programs.

Our ability to get outside of that green screen or ChromaKey studio has improved drastically over the years, and that's really been important to us because we've evolved with what we can do. One of the things that we want to do is decrease these barriers between the student and the resource. For example, at Angel Island, we're actually using a telemedicine cart.

HH: Angel Island has a really rich history. Part of the island is a U.S. Immigration station—it's sort of the Ellis Island of the West. The detainees there carved poems into the walls, and a lot of the rooms are set up to represent what life would have been like for these detainees. We wanted to really immerse the students in that environment, so we set up this telemedicine cart. It's battery-powered with a wireless mesh network, and we basically take the students on a virtual tour through the U.S. Immigration station. We'll walk them down between the rows of bunk beds, take them right up to the walls, and zoom the camera in on the poems on the walls, and just get the students thinking what life would have been like for those immigrants,

what they were experiencing and what they were feeling at the time, and really try to connect it back to students' lives. That program is in its pilot year this year, but so far it's been really successful. We're receiving great feedback. And it's been a learning experience for us, because we've never used a telemedicine cart before.

JFB: *I need to ask: what's a telemedicine cart?*

HH (laughing): It's a cart very similar to what hospitals use and that easily rolls around and can connect a laptop, monitor, and other peripheral equipment. In our case, we've got a TV monitor and videoconference machine hooked up on it. The interpreter uses an iPad and a document camera as well to be able to connect the students to the park resources there. So she can put an artifact under the document camera—one of the immigration documents that people were required to have or something like that—and show the students. It gives us the ability and flexibility to show a range of artifacts and experiences.

JFB: *And in the classroom, what does the end-user side of it look like?*

BK: In the schools and school districts, this is always something that was meant to be projected into a classroom. Teachers or districts used to have to buy a videoconferencing machine that they would hook up to a TV or a projector. But then five years ago or so, that got way cheaper and smaller and less complex for teachers. And then about three years ago, you could just buy a little video-phone. This was the thing we did with the Los Angeles Unified School District. The little video-phone gets projected up to the smartboard projector or something like that. And now it's getting even easier; teachers just have to have a laptop or an iPad to project. We send them a link and they just click on it.

JFB: *So they just open the link and they're good to go?*

BK: That's gonna be next year. We're piloting that right now with some iPad stuff. But yeah, that's the direction it's all going.

JFB: *How do interpreters handle this kind of programming? What do you look for?*

BK: Not everybody is a good fit for this kind of program. But people like LuAnn, who have an in-depth knowledge of the content already and can

grasp the content and have the attitude that, "Well, I'm gonna try some new tools for interpretation to tell my message, whether that's a document camera or a microscope," or they're just willing to learn how to use an iPad and take selfie movies while they're walking down the trail—that's great.

The interpretation always comes back to, "Is it the most appropriate use of technology or tool to tell the interpretive story?" That's an important thing. These programs—the PORTS programs—are all good interpretive programs, and that's what's made them successful. Not this cool, hip, fun use of technology, but using the technology to tell the story effectively for the audience. And having people i.e., the interpreters, to facilitate that is key to that process. Having somebody who is creative and who is energetic and enthusiastic and has a camera presence, and all of those good interpretive skills, that's the people we have doing this. And that is the magic, really.

JFB: *Going back to what Heather was talking about with the Angel Island program, this is a way to connect the historical context strongly to the kids by using the combination of really effective interp with the technology into classrooms that are statewide?*

HH: Yes. Probably 90% of the 50,000 students that we talk to this year from our nine different sites will be in California. But we also do programs across the country.

BK: PORTS was born to engage students who don't know that California State Parks exist, so we want to talk, obviously, to the kids who potentially could go home and say, Hey, I wanna go to a park this weekend, or are gonna grow up and say, I had a positive experience with parks throughout my K-12 education, and then support us in a variety of ways. But we also know that there are parks like Angel Island, which are telling stories of nationwide significance, and that there's an audience for that out there as well.

JFB: *Do you connect with other institutions—Smithsonian, for example—to find ways to enhance or reach a broader national market without negatively impacting your primary mission?*

BK: Yeah, absolutely. We do an annual training for our core staff—those are the interpreters—where we get together for three days in September and talk about best practices and what's changed and where we're going with technology. As a part of

that, we connect with some of the leaders in this kind of interpretation. Just this past September we connected with the Smithsonian Art Museum to get a demonstration of their program and talk with their docents about what's working for them and what's not, see how they're employing their technology, and what their challenges and successes are.

There's an organization called CILC, the Center for Interactive Learning and Collaboration (<http://cilc.org/>). They're a clearinghouse for distance learning content providers. Teachers can go in and search on Civil War, for example, and then all the things that provide distance learning for Civil War will come up. We work a little bit with them.

JFB: *There have been some studies that talk about how, when kids are given the opportunity to connect with nature in a meaningful way, that additional academics also improve, and that some social challenges are somewhat ameliorated over time. Are you seeing any indicators of that?*

HH: We work with the Field Trip Foundation, which is a non-profit organization in the Bay Area that funds low-income fourth-grade classes to actually take a field trip to see the elephant seals at Año Nuevo State Park. And as part of the requirement for them receiving this grant money for the bus and field trip expenses, they have to either have a docent come in and do a pre-field trip presentation or they participate in the PORTS program in our elephant seal program. The coordinator has shared a lot of feedback with me that the students who participate in the PORTS videoconference program are actually a lot better prepared when they go on this field trip, because we do share with the students what they're going to experience on the field trip. These are students from places like Redwood City, where they may not get to venture outside past the neighborhood, and they may not be prepared to walk through a grove of trees, for example. But by showing them what the park is like and what they're going to experience, those students have a much better experience and connect with the environment a lot easier than students who didn't participate in the videoconference.

JFB: *Are the PORTS programs live, where somebody is presenting in real-time, or are some of them pre-recorded and canned?*

BK: None of them are pre-recorded or canned. Every single program that every single person does

is to that particular class period, so they are having a personal experience with that park interpreter. You know, that 45 minutes is basically just like it used to be, where the ranger would come into your classroom and be in the front of your classroom and say, "I'm here to tell you about the redwood forest" or whatever. Now we're just using technology, because it makes more sense since the kids in Imperial Valley are not gonna get to go to the redwoods. And the interpretive ranger, content expert from the redwoods isn't gonna be able to come down there and give them a program.

JFB: *Is there any interactive aspect to this?*

BK: Now you're talking about the magic. Our programs are not talking heads. They are 100% interactive. So, in the example of the redwoods, they'll do the same interaction they would if the kids were at the park: "All right, I need five students to stand up and go fingertip to fingertip. And now I see you guys in the back there. Now, how long do you think it is from one end to the other? How big is it? 25, 30 feet. Okay, that is the size of a redwood tree." They can do the same exact thing using the technology.

(Sacramento Educational Cable Consortium has a video of the program in action:
<http://youtu.be/9d5wy2SKNBV>)

JFB: *What do you see in the future?*

BK: The cool part is we don't know! If you would have told me when we started this program ten years ago what it would look like now—[laughs]. There was no iPad. And now, you're walking down the street and people are Face-Timing with their friends or their parents or whatever. They're doing video calls. It's *The Jetsons*, man. It's happening. And what the next iteration of that is, I have no idea. But I think it's important for the greater interpretation community to be aware of these opportunities.

For more information about the PORTS program:

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IMTAL Goes to Washington!

By Harriet Lynn

Temperatures were below freezing in Washington, D.C. on February 23 and 24, 2015, but over 300 AAM members representing every state in the country showed up for the annual Museums Advocacy Day in Washington, D.C. Despite the bone chilling weather conditions, it was warm and intense inside the meeting rooms of the Liaison Capitol Hill Hotel situated close to Capital Hill on Monday, February 23, 2015.

This day was “preparatory day” for the advocates. Newcomers and old timers alike came to tell their stories to their state officials in the House of Representatives and Senate and explain why they need to support the museum community in substantial ways for FY 2016.

The AAM armed us amply with packets of detailed information on the main issues impacting museums, zoos, aquariums, gardens, and historic sites throughout the country. Throughout the first day we heard from the IMLS, NEA, National Science Foundation, and the State Department. Dan Yeager, Executive Director of the New England Museum Association and a friend to IMTAL, coached us on the “Art of the Ask.”

IMTAL board member Harriet Lynn
at AAM Museum Advocacy Day, Russell Building, Washington DC



Break-out sessions included the newest trends on the horizon and training for those entering the world of lobbying for the first time or wanting to brush up on their skills. After a sumptuous lunch we met with our fellow state AAM members and planned our strategies for the following day. Being from Maryland, I was fortunate to have a large, strong, and diverse contingency speaking on behalf of our museum community and to support AAM’s recommendations. It was also an excellent day for meeting new people, networking, and honing our skills for the next day’s “battle.”

The following day we were treated to an elegant breakfast in the Kennedy Caucus Room in the Russell Senate Office Building. I was fortunate to be able to stand with other Marylanders at the podium with AAM Board Member and Trustee of the National Aquarium Mark Edward, honoring Senator Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) for her long and substantial service to the museum community. At time of this writing we now know of Senator Mikulski’s decision to step down from her office at the end of this term, so the timing could not have been better!

After the ceremonies we were sent off to do what we were here for: storm the Hill in the name of culture and history!

AAM supports
school-museum
partnerships, including
magnet schools.



Harriet Lynn

MD contingent at Senator Barbara Mikulski's recognition ceremony

Some of the main issues we were extolling included:

Institute of Museum Library Services (IMLS) Office of Museum Services (OMS)

We asked each of our representatives to support and urge other members of Congress to sign the Gillibrand and Tonko/Lance/Slaughter/McKinley letter to support “robust funding for OMS.” AAM supports the full authorized funding of \$38.6 million in FY 2016 for the IMLS Office of Museum Services. An individual letter would also be appropriate and appreciated as well.

Charitable Giving

Our representatives need to understand the serious and damaging impact of charitable giving limitations on museum operations. AAM supports efforts to expand and extend incentives for charitable giving. We also support allowing artists to deduct fair market value of their donated works as well as a permanent extension and expansion of the IRA Charitable Rollover.

Education

Museums are key educational providers—not only for students, but for professional development for teachers and teaching local curriculum. At present, the “No Child Left Behind Act” inhibits museum visits. AAM supports school-museum partnerships, including magnet schools.

Other issues just as important to our nation included support of the NEA and the NEH,

STEM Education and STEAM (“A” for the arts included), Historic Preservation, Public Diplomacy (supporting cultural exchanges), Native American Graves Protection (NAGPRA), and funding for the Multinational Species Conservation Funds.

And last, but not least—and of great importance:

Economy and Jobs

The museum community adds many jobs and generates huge amounts of revenue directly and indirectly all over the country, from small towns to major cities. Several individuals provided “economic impact statements” to demonstrate this activity and influence. AAM asks that Congress amend the Anti-Deficiency Act to allow for the continuity for public access to our nation’s public lands and federally operated museums in the event of a funding gap. And the AAM opposes any effort to restrict the ability of zoos, aquariums, or other types of museums to compete with federal funding.

Most of us met with staffers throughout the day, but at our first stop while waiting outside Senator Benjamin Cardin’s (D-MD) office, we unexpectedly met the Senator himself as he was heading to speak on the Senate floor. Senator Cardin was kind, most friendly, and supportive. On a personal note, his daughter, Deborah Cardin, is Deputy Director of the Jewish Museum of Maryland; I have enjoyed working with her for over ten years in providing museum theatre projects through my company, Heritage Theatre Artists’ Consortium.

It was an exhilarating day and exhausting and,

with a few hours open before I went to the special evening wrap-up event, I treated myself to a visit to the National Gallery of Art to remind myself what I was there fighting for today. After viewing the “Piero di Cosimo: The Poetry of Painting in Renaissance Florence” and the “American Masterworks from the Corcoran 1815-1940” exhibits, I was “artfully resuscitated” and walked back in the shattering cold for the Congressional Reception of AAM Advocacy Day 2015, held at the Rayburn House Office Building.

Two of the excellent guest speakers were Iraqi war veteran, Fernando Valles, who helped establish a healing garden program at the Chicago Botanical Garden; and Robert Gray, retired fire captain who was a first responder during the Pentagon 9/11 catastrophe (Gray’s fire helmet is on view now at the National September 11 Memorial and Museum in New York). Their compelling stories were riveting, and everyone in the room “got it.” The power of their stories and how museums can play such a significant and meaningful part in people’s lives is what we walked away with.

Before I left for the train back to Baltimore, I had the opportunity to thank President Bell (soon to retire) for his valuable leadership and service and the AAM’s work in preparing us and making the Museum Advocacy Day such a success. We also talked of Valle’s and Gray’s heartfelt stories of bravery and healing and how these stories have impact. I could not help myself and reminded Dr. Bell that unfortunately, for this upcoming AAM conference in Atlanta, there was no place for an IMTAL showcase, no place for we who are masters of telling stories. His surprised look seemed to indicate that he was not aware of this development. Hopefully, next year IMTAL can advocate strongly for itself and be successful in landing its moment in the spotlight at the AAM Conference 2016.

Addendum:

I was personally invited to and attended an informal dinner gathering for the History Relevance Campaign. The “call to action” is “the first step in a campaign to assert and demonstrate the relevance of history in contemporary life.” We met Monday night at the Dubliner, an Irish Pub, near Union Station in D.C. Both Kim Fortney of National History Day and Tim Grove of the National Air and Space Museum were hosts. It was quite a friendly and enthusiastic group from history-related museums from various parts of the country. Read the HRC’s Call to Action (http://imtal-us.org/Resources/Documents/150304%20HRC_updated_final.pdf)

Carpenter Science Theatre Funding Renewed

(and An Announcement for Playwrights)

In December of 2014, the Carpenter Science Theatre Company at the Science Museum of Virginia received a renewal of full funding for 2015, 2016, and 2017 from the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation. The company was founded in 1996 and will celebrate 19 years of creating, producing, and performing “science theatre” in Richmond, Virginia, on October 18.

Each year, CSTC produces 10–12 separate titles, and 4–6 of these are brand new scripts. Artistic director Larry Gard and resident writer/actor Kimberly Jones-Clark work with each other and approximately a dozen other contract artists from the Richmond theatre community on an annual basis to write, produce, and perform live theatre and storytelling in the museum galleries as well as in the museum’s traditional theatre space, the Barbara Thalhimer Theatre. There are 4–6 titles being performed on a daily rotating basis every Wednesday through Sunday.

This year, the company has started to present quarterly staged readings of “science theatre” scripts at the museum’s popular Lunch Box Science event on Wednesdays. Each reading is followed by a discussion of the script. Larry Gard invites any playwrights in the IMTAL community to submit a script to be considered for one of these staged readings. Of course, the script must focus on a science related topic or person. In addition, scripts should be 20–45 minutes in length, and require no more than two actors. The script may have been produced before. Submissions are accepted on an ongoing basis (i.e., no deadline). Playwrights whose scripts are chosen for inclusion will receive a royalty payment of \$50.00 for the single staged reading performance.

E-copies of scripts may be sent to lgard@smv.org, and hard copies may be mailed to: Larry Gard, 4716 Scouters Pl, Chesterfield, VA 23832, or to Larry Gard, Science Museum of Virginia, 2500 West Broad Street, Richmond, VA 23220.

Once More with Feeling: IMTAL Americas Conference

September 25–27, 2015, Missouri
History Museum, St. Louis MO



Judy Fort Breneman

IMTAL members climb to great heights at the annual conference

Wondering when you can get your fill of IMTAL this year? Ready to renew your practice, push your boundaries, aim to get better, and challenge your definitions of museum theatre?

Sadly the IMTAL International Conference in Europe can't be held this year—it's being pushed back to another date. But we couldn't go a year without seeing your faces. So we're holding a workshop in St. Louis! It will be short, sweet, and wonderful: mid-day Friday, September 25 through mid-day Sunday, September 27.

And YOU could be a presenter.

Call for Workshop Proposals is OPEN NOW. IMTAL supports the use of theatre and theatrical techniques in the museum setting. Do you do this? Can you help others do it? Do you have a model program? Do you have a show you want us to see and give feedback on? Propose a 2-hour workshop, a 30 minute performance plus discussion, or a 1-hour panel.

Send us the following information about your session no later than June 1, 2015. We'll notify you by July 1, 2015 if your proposal has been accepted.

1. Type: e.g., Performance with Discussion (45 minutes); Panel Presentation (1 hour); Workshop (2 Hours)

2. Title:

3. Presenters: (Please list the presenters and give 50-word or less bios of each.)

4. Synopsis for program: (150 words maximum)

5. Abstract: (500 word maximum. Please include the ways in which the presentation will benefit the attendees and the themes of renewing practice, pushing boundaries, using best practices, or applying theatrical techniques in interpretation.)

6. Please list any A/V needs beyond a power point projector and screen. Laptops can be made available with notice. For performances, any set pieces, costume items, props and equipment should be able to fit in a suitcase or the trunk of a car. We do not have heavy equipment or staff for moving bulky items and our storage space is extremely limited—generally speaking, you should plan to bring these items with you or ship them very close to the conference dates.

7. Please indicate what kind of room set up you would prefer. (e.g., theater, seminar, etc.). Please note that some sessions will be held in the Missouri History Museum's E. Desmond Lee Auditorium, which does not have flexible seating.

8. Please give us the contact information for the presenters and indicate who is leading the session.

9. Submit proposals/direct questions to:
Elizabeth Pickard,
Director, Interpretive Programs
Missouri History Museum
epickard@mohistory.org
314/361-4305

Registration and lodging information will be posted on the website, <http://imtal-us.org>, as soon as the details are in place.

Announcements & Calls for Submissions & Auditions

Crossing Bridges: IMTAL World Congress Conference

September 10–13, 2015, Hollviken, Sweden
CANCELLED.

AZA Annual Conference

September 17–21.
Salt Lake City, UT
<https://www.aza.org/annualconference/>
Hosted by Hogle Zoo

IMTAL Americas Conference: Once More with Feeling

September 25–27, 2015
St. Louis, MO

Better than Broadway: How to use theatre to create and present amazing interpretive programs

November 9–10, 2015
2-day pre-conference session, National Association for Interpretation Annual Conference
Virginia Beach, VA
<http://interpnet.com>

For two challenging and exhilarating days, experience and experiment with theatrical techniques, from creating and researching stories, characters, and costuming to performance techniques and program assessment. We'll take you through every step of the process, moving you out of your comfort zone without letting you fall into the abyss. By the end of the workshop, you'll have participated in the development, rehearsal, presentation, and critique of a complete performance. Participants are invited to submit ideas for performance development; the instructors will select up to 6 concepts for development during the workshop.

Better than Broadway is presented by six interpreters with extensive experience both in using performing arts in interpretation (including museum theatre, living history, storytelling, play and interpretive writing, research, and assessment) and in teaching others how to use these techniques. All presenters also hold or have held leadership positions in the field.

National Association for Interpretation Annual Conference

November 10–14, 2015
Virginia Beach, VA
<http://interpnet.com>

Grants

Grant funding initiative to celebrate the arts and national parks
deadline July 23, 2015
“Imagine Your Parks” is a new grant initiative created as a partnership between the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Park Service to celebrate the intersections between the two agencies in honor of the NEA's 50th anniversary in 2015 and the National Park Service's centennial in 2016. Part of the NEA's Art Works category, “Imagine Your Parks” will support art projects that encourage the creation of and greater public engagement with art around the National Park System. Deadline is July 23, 2015 for projects beginning no earlier than June 1, 2016. NEA guidelines with further details: www.arts.gov. Email tighet@arts.gov with questions.

Auditions

History's Most Misunderstood Character: Application deadline July 31, 2015. A special event of the National Association for Interpretation's annual conference, hosted by Cultural Interpretation and Living History (CILH)

If you have a strong character portrayal which you can perform in a 7–10 minute presentation, please apply to compete in this year's contest. Presentations aren't restricted to human characters! One of our most popular contestants in 2014 was Octavia Octopus, played by IMTAL's own Simone Mortan! So if you or a colleague have a dynamite character portrayal, whether from human or natural history, submit your application.

Questions? Contact Bill Weldon, CILH Director, at billweldonhistory1@gmail.com.

Job Openings

Colonial Williamsburg is hiring: Manager of Dramatic Arts: https://www.hrapply.com/cwf/AppJobView.jsp?link=12965&page=AppJobList.jsp&skimSessionName=com.hrlogix.view.content.cs.req.JobListTable&skimName=requisition.requisition_id&skimNdx=0&op=reset

Announcements continued...

Program Manager - Kimball Theatre:

https://www.hrapply.com/cwf/AppJobView.jsp?link=12922&page=AppJobList.jsp&skimSessionName=com.hrlogix.view.cont.table.cs.req.JobListTable&skimName=requisition.requisition_id&skimNdx=0&op=reset

Calls for Submissions

Scripts on a science-related topic or person,

20–45 minutes in length, no more than 2 actors, for Carpenter Science Theatre Company’s quarterly staged readings of “science theatre” scripts at Science Museum of Virginia’s Lunch Box Science events. Submissions are accepted on an ongoing basis; royalty payment of \$50.00 for single staged reading performance of accepted scripts.

Email copy of your script to lgard@smv.org OR submit hard copy to:

Larry Gard	OR:	Larry Gard
4716 Scouters Pl.		Science Museum of Virginia
Chesterfield, VA 23832		2500 West Broad Street
		Richmond, VA 23220

Be Included on a Map of Conservation Theaters

Bricken Sparacino is creating a map of Conservation Theaters to share with teachers, community leaders, and others who bring groups on field trips or have tours visit their facilities. Conservation Theater uses theatre as a teaching tool to inspire young people and their families to love wild things and wild places, helping to create the next generation of conservationists. Here is what the map looks like so far.

<https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=zYPI9ZckjnWc.k7YnqoF4Gjgk>

If you feel that your work fits under the Conservation Theater umbrella, please fill out this survey and she will add you to the map:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1zDJ8t1tN2Aduo6xBaTO_QL0u5eyYUG5X3KIwcUyVSxI/viewform?usp=send_form

Once it is finished, it will be searchable on a blog and Facebook.

Submit articles, news, and ideas for the next issue of Insights!

We’re looking for articles, opinions, and news about events, programs, your site, and your self. Articles and opinion pieces can be from 250 to 2,000 words long; must be in MS Word (.doc preferred, please); and it would be really nice if you could format your file to be double-spaced, first paragraph indented, 11- or 12-point Times new Roman or similar. But the most important thing is to send us your article, opinion, or news to publications@imtal-us.org no later than June 22, 2015. (It doesn’t have to be perfect; it just needs to be reasonably coherent. If we have questions, we’ll contact you.)

The interpretation always comes back to, “Is it the most appropriate use of technology or tool to tell the interpretive story?” That’s an important thing. These programs—the PORTS programs—are all good interpretive programs, and that’s what’s made them successful. Not this cool, hip, fun use of technology, but using the technology to tell the story effectively for the audience. And having people i.e., the interpreters, to facilitate that is key to that process. **Having somebody who is creative and who is energetic and enthusiastic and has a camera presence, and all of those good interpretive skills, that’s the people we have doing this. And that is the magic, really.**

Brad Key, PORTS Program Manager
(page 6)

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The International Museum Theatre Alliance (IMTAL) is a nonprofit, professional membership organization and an affiliate to the American Alliance of Museums. IMTAL’s mission is to inspire and support the use of theatre and theatrical technique to cultivate emotional connections, provoke action, and add public value to the museum experience. For more information, to become a member, or to volunteer, please visit our website, <http://imtal-us.org/home>, or contact a board member via email.

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