

GAMG 2010

Georgia Association of Museums and Galleries Newsletter

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President's Message

Brent Tharp

Thank you to the many colleagues who joined together in Thomasville for the 2010 GAMG conference. To those who were unable to make it, we missed you and look forward to seeing you next year. The annual conference continues to be the most important project of GAMG. It serves many purposes and is of great value. However, in these difficult economic times how do we best judge that value?

Our host communities, such as Thomasville this year, along with sponsors, contribute a great deal to keep our costs low to encourage the greatest participation possible from Georgia's museums and galleries, thus making GAMG a great "value" in the most traditional sense. Also, the value is in connecting with those you have the most in common with, our fellow Georgia institutions and communities. We look forward to meeting in Cartersville in 2011 and Jekyll Island in 2012. Athens has indicated interest in 2013 and we encourage others to consider hosting a future GAMG meeting.

How do we measure the value we get out of attending GAMG? It is important to be innovative and GAMG's recent conference provided participants an opportunity to pick up new skills and techniques. Purchasing a book or DVD, some argue, is a better way to learn such material. However, we work in the educational field and know that everyone learns in different ways at different times. In a similar manner, our museums' programs differentiate and supplement the learning that takes place in schools. On several occasions, meetings at conferences have allowed me to better understand how a new tool works specifically in the museum environment, too. The conference also allows us time to better discover those large ideas, trends and context affecting the field. I found myself in sessions hearing about concepts that I am familiar with and aware of, but through this venue and speakers, I often better see its applicability to my situation.

I have found that some of the greatest value at GAMG's conference happens in between sessions and after sessions in the learning that happens best in the interdisciplinary, social, and unplanned moments of the conference. These moments are discoveries of great and small impact that can't happen in formal training, in a book or on a DVD. They create networks of renewal and excitement that are vital to our field.

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Administrative Director's Report



Michele Rodgers

The folks in Thomasville outdid themselves with the planning for GAMG Conference 2010. Local events were fun and the Thomas County historic and cultural sites were interesting to visit. Pat Morris did another outstanding job with the program, and the keynote speaker was inspiring. Thanks to everyone who played a part in making the conference a success.

Now, more than ever, museums, galleries, and cultural institutions need to work together to weather this challenging economic time. Many of you have heard that the Georgia Humanities Council is threatened with losing funding for all grants, and other institutions have had massive layoffs. Make sure that local and state legislators hear from you how important the museum community is to the state's economy. Also, make sure you renew your GAMG membership so that you will have access to important grant information and the wealth of knowledge that more than 200 fellow members can share.

NEWS YOU CAN USE

AASLH is offering a workshop titled "Historic House Museums Issues and Operations" March 25-26, 2010 at the Atlanta History Center in Atlanta, Georgia. This two-day workshop offers an intensive look at the management and interpretation of historic houses taught by George McDaniel, director of Drayton Hall and Max van Balgooy, Director of Education and Interpretation for the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Visit www.aaslh.org/hhissues.htm for a complete agenda. Contact Bethany Hawkins, Program Associate, at hawkins@aaslh.org or 615-320-3203 with questions. To register visit www.aaslh.org/workshop.htm.

For the first time, the Report explores best practices in areas such as sales growth, marketing and merchandising.

The 140-page report is based on more than 400 completed surveys and identifies key financial, operations and staffing benchmarks. Statistics include average inventory, visitors per square foot, gross margin, and employee salaries all broken down by museum type and annual revenue. The MSA Retail Industry Report is now available. To order, go to www.museumstoreassociation.org/pubs/09MIR.cfm or call 303-504-9223. This report was supported, in part, by: Andoniadis Retail Services and the New York International Gift Fair and PartnerShip.



The top three strategies museum stores use to help increase profits include implementing inventory controls, setting pricing controls and modifying store merchandise buying habits, according to responses reported in the recently released 2009 MSA Retail Industry Report from the Museum Store Association.

DON'T FORGET

The Museum Retail Conference & Expo will be in Austin, Texas, April 17-19, 2010.

TIPS FOR TRANSFORMING DOCENT-LED TOURS

From a Former Teacher



Andrea Childress

Remember the scene from the iconic movie *Ferris Beuller's Day Off*: students are drooling on their desks, their eyes glazed with boredom, while the teacher (Ben Stein) lectures on without missing a beat. “The Hawley-Smoot tariff raised or lowered tariffs? Anyone? Anyone? Raised tariffs.”

Research tells us that the human brain does not learn best through lecture, but it continues to be the most prevalent technique that teachers use to convey their message. Why? Well, put simply, it's easier to explain what you know rather than design a lesson that engages learners. And teachers tell themselves, “I had to listen to old Mr. So-and-so drone on when I was a kid, so these kids should sit still for it too.”

When I left teaching to enter the world of museum education, I saw the same problem on our docent-led tours. Many docents were proud of their encyclopedic knowledge of history, and rightly so, but their tours left visitors feeling overwhelmed with facts rather than invigorated with curiosity. The truth is that adult learners need the same interaction that child learners do. Children show their boredom outwardly, so we may be more acutely aware of it, whereas adults just politely nod along. This doesn't mean that we are reaching them.

So how can you transform the tours your docents give at your institution? Here are a few practical training tips:

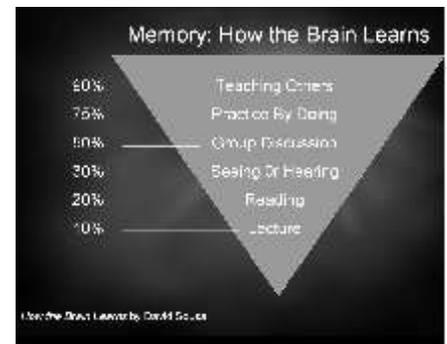
1. Determine the goals of the tour.

Ask yourself this question: What ideas do we want our visitors to come away with after a tour? The answer to this question can start with a general goal. At the Atlanta History Center, our goal is to inspire a lifelong interest in history and to ignite the curiosity of our visitors. After you think about broad goals, get a bit more specific. What are the one or two main ideas from this exhibition that the docents should get across to the visitor, and then build upon using the artifacts/objects? This will help give the tour a theme. Our brains are physiologically built to organize, and when we are given a theme we are more likely to remember what we hear. (Ex: *Today we are going to find out why there are few Native Americans left in Georgia*)

2. Train your docents to conduct interactive discussions with the visitors.

I often hear docents ask “Are there any questions?” But what they should be doing is asking the visitors questions. *What do you see in this painting? What emotions do you think are represented here? This lapel pin from the Civil War is made from a soldier's amputated leg bone. Would you ever wear a pin made from your boyfriend's own bone? What is your first thought when you look at this KKK uniform?*

Get the audience involved in their own learning, but remember that the questions are not meant to be a quiz. Questions should not require the visitor to have prior knowledge on the subject of the exhibition. They are meant to engage their brains in the process exploration, not to make them feel inadequate. According to *How the Brain Learns*, visitors will remember 40% more of the information being taught when they are actively discussing the content than when they are merely listening to a docent. In addition to remembering the facts, the docent has done something even more valuable. She has ignited an interest in the subject that will last far longer than the tour itself.



The human brain remembers more content when it is actively involved in learning. After the typical lecture-style tour, our visitors will remember about 10% of what we tell them.

3. Reinforce the concept that “less is more.”

The longer a docent has been giving a tour, the more he/she knows about the subject of the exhibition. Knowledge is a great asset, but it can also be a curse. In order to leave room in the tour for the visitor's curiosity, the docent must be careful not to fill the tour with too many facts. One of the most common concerns I hear from docents is “If I interact with the visitors, I won't have time for the whole tour.” My response: it's better to have meaningful interaction on a few topics than to inundate the group with a litany of facts that they will forget shortly after the tour. While it is true the docent may not have time to give the tour he/she was used to

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GAMG CONFERENCE IN THOMASVILLE



Thomasville Cultural Center

The weather matched the warmth of the welcome GAMG members received in Thomasville in January for the annual conference. Attendees enjoyed visiting Thomas County's cultural and historic sites, dining on locally produced foods, and attending excellent sessions geared toward "Keeping the Faith."

The Thomasville host committee did a fabulous job in planning evening events that provided intriguing settings for attendees to network. The Thomasville Cultural Center, site of conference sessions and an evening of wine and cheese, was a lovely setting for beginning Wednesday night's progressive dinner. Next, attendees traveled to the Thomas County Museum of History, where the museum's collection and its vintage bowling alley were a big hit. While at the museum, attendees dined on delicious "Wild Game Pie" prepared by museum volunteers. Dessert was found at the next stop, the Jack Hadley Black History Museum, where attendees feasted on homemade sweet potato pie and tea cakes while viewing an impressive collection and hearing moving stories from many dedicated volunteers.

On Thursday, keynote speaker, Kathy Fleming, provided inspiration during her remarks regarding "Embracing Your Entrepreneurial Spirit."

Fleming, Executive Director of the St. Augustine Lighthouse and Museum, talked of "maximizing revenue so that the institution can maximize its mission."

Throughout Wednesday afternoon and Thursday, several exhibitors were on hand to meet with conference attendees to discuss partnerships. Those attending the meeting were: Association Internet Video, Charlton Hall, Creative Company, Move Answers, and The History Workshop.

On Thursday evening attendees were treated to a tour of Pebble Hill Plantation and its wonderful collection of furnishings and decorative arts. Then everyone headed to the Plantation's Uno Hill (pronounced You Know) Barn where dinner featured locally raised and produced foods provided by the Thomas County CVB. Finally, thanks to an enthusiastic crowd and David Dundee, "king of auctioneering," the annual auction raised more than \$1200.00 for MUSE.



Arden Williams makes presentation

The highlight of the week was the Awards Luncheon on Friday, where nine awards were presented to winners ranging from volunteers, to museum professionals, to corporations. Additionally, five groups were recognized with Honorable Mention or Special Commendation. Those were: Vulcan Materials Company, for its support of Tellus Science

Museum; the John Oliver Killens Literacy Workshops, created by the Tubman African American Museum; the Margaret Mitchell House and Atlanta History Center for a museum exhibition; the City of Roswell for the Trilogy Trolley Crawl; and the Tellus Science Museum Volunteers for extraordinary service.

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Finally, the best way to learn something, to better focus your own work is to teach and present it to others. So I encourage you not only to continue to attend GAMG's conference, but send us your proposal for a session.

GAMG AWARDS PRESENTATIONS



Patrons of the Year
Mr. & Mrs. B. Heyward Allen, Jr.
Georgia Museum of Art



Lifetime Achievement Award
Jan Selman



Special Project of the Year
Category 2 – “Key Ingredients:
America By Food” (The Georgia Tour)
Georgia Humanities Council
University of West Georgia



Museum Professional of the Year
David Dundee
Tellus Science Museum



Corporation of the Year
Delta Air Lines, Inc.

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giving, there will still be time to give a different kind of tour one which “digs deeper” into some topics, while mentioning others less thoroughly.



Museum Volunteers of the Year
Bill Austin & Deborah Robinson
Dorchester Academy



Museum Exhibition of the Year
Category 1 – “Wheels of Change”
Legacy Museum on Main



Museum Education Program of the Year
Aviation Outreach
Museum of Aviation Flight
& Technology Ctr.



Museum Exhibition of the Year
Category 2 – “Paper Runway”
American Museum of
Papermaking/
Hartsfield-Jackson Int. Airport

4. Research and collaborate with others.

The above ideas are just a few that have come from years of research and practice. There are several books that I have found invaluable. They include ideas for specific training techniques as well as learning theory for museum teaching.

- *Great Tours: Thematic Tours and Guide Training for Historic Sites* (Levy, Lloyd, and Schreiber)
- *The Good Guide: A Sourcebook for Interpreters, Docents, and Tour Guides* (Grinder and McCoy)
- *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die* (Heath and Heath)
- *Interpreters Training Manual for Museums* (Cunningham)

I have also found that belonging to the Museum-Ed listserv has provided me with a wealth of information about how other museums are developing their training programs. To join, go to <http://www.museum-ed.org>.

Andrea Childress is a former high school social studies teacher for Gwinnett County Public Schools and Atlanta Public Schools. She now works for the Atlanta History Center as Lead Educator and Docent Trainer.



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NEW AND RENEWING MEMBERS SINCE SEPTEMBER 2009

Institutional

Allman Brothers Band Museum
Bartow History Museum
Beach Institute/King Tisdell Cottage
Blue & Gray Museum
Booth Western Art Museum
Calhoun/Gordon Arts Council
Church-Waddell-Brumby House
Congregation Mickve Israel
Dorchester Academy
Elberton Granite Museum
First African Baptist Church
Flannery O'Connor - Andalusia Foundation
Fort Valley DDA/Main Street
Funk Heritage Center
Georgia Southern University Museum
Hickory Hill
KSU Museum of History and Holocaust Education Program
Museum of Aviation Flight & Technology Center
Northeast Georgia History Center
Oak Hill/Martha Berry Museum
Polk County Historical Society

R.M. Gilbert Civil Rights Museum
Salvation Army Southern Historical Center
Savannah State University Archives
Telfair Museum of Art
Thomas County Museum of History
Thronateeska Heritage Foundation
Troup County Archives
Willow Hill

Individual/Student

Brenda Austin
Bridgett Battle-Mullice
Aaron Berger
Linda Bitley
Beverly Craton
Carissa DiCindio
David Dundee
Jennifer Dixon
Cece Hinton
Wiloise Jackson
Clarisse Keyes
Howard Keyes

Glen Kyle
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Move Answers
The History Workshop