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Museum professionals visit historic fort

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More than 100 museum professionals from throughout the state attended the 48th annual Kansas Museums Association Conference Nov. 2-4 at Fort Leavenworth.

Attendees toured sites of interest in the Leavenworth area the first day, then met at the Frontier Conference Center for presentations, roundtable discussions, exhibitor booths and a business meeting.

“We are a statewide organization that provides educational training and services to our constituents,” said Lisa Dodson, executive director of KMA. “Most of our members are professionals in the field, and we are pleased to have our conference here this year. Additionally, the city of Leavenworth (Convention and Visitors Bureau) provided bus transportation to take our members to three area museums. We went to the Frontier Army Museum, we went to the Richard Allen Cultural Center and we went to the (C.W. Parker) Carousel Museum.”

Fort Leavenworth’s Frontier Army Museum Director George Moore led a moderated open forum discussion that addressed basic collection management principles, including how those principles affect museum acquisition policies and procedures.

“As an example, in the area of gifts, it is important if an acquisition is an unconditional gift that you have an actual document on file stating that fact. I make a practice of informing any potential donor about this part of the process by making sure they understand that their gift is now federal property,” Moore said. “There are documented cases where the specific individual who donated an item subsequently passed away and a family member comes along and wanted the donated item returned. If there is no document on file stating the item is an unconditional gift, an unnecessarily complicated situation can develop rather quickly.”

Presenting a roundtable session at KMA was a way to get feedback from others and to gauge interest in a more in-depth presentation. Each of the roundtable sessions was about 25 minutes long and was presented three consecutive times when participants rotated from table to table.

Russell Ronspies, museum specialist, Frontier Army Museum, spoke about collection storage concerns at facilities with limited space, poor environmental controls and limited resources in his roundtable session, “Issues and Concerns in Managing Artifact Storage.” He spoke in detail about artifacts, archives and how to protect collection source materials.

“I want to hear what kind of issues you are dealing with so that hopefully we can come up with solutions,” Ronspies told attendees. “The handout materials are designed as a resource to assist in getting you help if you need it. It’s generally always a process. When I first started at our museum, we only had about 10 cabinets. Our existing climate control, enclosed area and storage cabinets were all added progressively over the last 25 years.”

Vendors and exhibitors also attended the conference to network and disseminate information about their organizations and businesses to KMA members.

Brianna Lee, funding officer at the Lowell Milken Center for Unsung Heroes in Fort Scott, was a convention exhibitor. The center works to transform classrooms and communities through various student-driven projects that discover unrecognized individuals from history.

“As an example, our cornerstone project is titled ‘Life in a Jar’ and highlights Irena Sendler. She was a social worker who risked her own life to rescue over 2,500 Jewish children from the Warsaw Ghetto during the Nazi occupation of Poland in World War II,” Lee said. “Three students from Uniontown (Kan.) High School discovered her by way of a National History Day project they were working on. We are an educational center and want to collaborate with museums. Our curriculum has been utilized by over 1.3 million students and in over 9,000 schools worldwide.”

The conference changes locations each year; this was the first time Fort Leavenworth hosted the group.

“This is our first year ever on the military post of historic Fort Leavenworth. It is exciting for our attendees to get a behind-the-scenes look at the notable buildings on the grounds and learn from military educators about the importance of history and museums to their operations,” Dodson said. “These opportunities are not often available to the public, offering an added bonus to KMA’s usual slate of excellent sessions and workshops and opportunities for collaboration, networking and renewal.”



PHOTO/ PRUDENCE SIEBERT, FORT LEAVENWORTH LAMP

Keynote speaker Dr. J. Britt McCarley, chief historian, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, and director of the TRADOC Military History and Heritage Program, begins his address, Using Museums to Educate and Equip the Army, Nov. 3 during the Kansas Museums Association Conference at the Frontier Conference Center. Photo by Prudence Siebert/Fort Leavenworth Lamp

