Highlights

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Learning from Others

When you became a subscriber to The Docent Educator, you joined a large and growing cadre of educators — staff members and volunteers — who are striving to improve the quality of education in museums, historic sites, zoos, parks, and gardens. Every three months, this publication serves as a mini-convention, bringing you ideas, techniques, and insights from educators throughout our profession who confront many of the same challenges you manage at your institution.

To celebrate our eighth year of publishing The Docent Educator, we decided to highlight a few of our subscribers that you may not know. We hoped that by learning how these professionals view their work, grapple with challenges, and allocate scarce resources, you would gain a better overview of the profession as well as a broader understanding of your place, role, and function within the larger community of docent educators.

Today, docents implement public programming in institutions all over the world. Education — tours, outreach activities, and classes — has become the pre-eminent enterprise of museums from England to South Korea. Whether working with school groups or seniors, docents throughout the world are challenged to teach about institutional collections and sites, serve as institutional representatives, and stimulate the public's curiosity and interest.

A Broader Perspective

As a staff member or volunteer in North America, you might not be surprised to learn that our subscribers represent facilities from Miami, Florida, to Anchorage, Alaska, and from Halifax, Nova Scotia, to Vancouver, British Columbia. But, did you ever imagine that The Docent Educator is read by docents in Perth, Australia, or County Tyrone, Northern Ireland? Or, that the Hong Kong Museum of Art is among our group subscribers, distributing multiple copies of the journal to their volunteers?

Through The Docent Educator, you can communicate with educators in all types of institutions, from the American Museum of Natural History in New York City; Colonial Williamsburg in Williamsburg, VA; the British Museum in London, England; and the Art Institute of Chicago, to such unexpected settings as the Los Angeles Public Library; the National Museum of Dentistry in Baltimore; and the Canadian Opera Company, in Toronto, Ontario. You can speak with, or hear from, representatives of institutions as large as the Smithsonian complex in Washington, D.C. (which consists of 14 museums and the National Zoological Park), or as small as the Old Schoolhouse Museum in Goldie, ID, which has just one volunteer staff member.

A Closer Look

As an educator, you hold a most important and consequential position. An excellent teacher can inspire others to interest and beyond ... a poor teacher could prompt others to retreat or even revile. Therefore, it is essential that you remain alert for new or different ideas that can make your teaching and public programming stronger.

Consider the many ways that institutions prepare docents for their responsibilities. A few of the institutions we surveyed provide their docents with only a few contact hours of training and, then, hand them a script. More typical, however, were the institutions that did not rely upon scripted tours. Training in these locations consisted of both subject-matter content and teaching methods and techniques.

After a three-day training session, the Historic Annapolis Foundation, in Annapolis, Maryland, puts their volunteers directly into action. At the Kelowna Art Gallery, in Kelowna, British Columbia, docents receive four, four-hour training sessions and teach for no less than two months with a senior docent before touring on their own. Following this first year's training, Kelowna Art Gallery docents receive periodic training updates to stay current on new exhibitions and teaching strategies. Docents serving the Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle, on the other hand, receive 126 hours of classroom training and then must accomplish 10 hours of touring practice before they are allowed to teach independently.

Ironically, institutions with the toughest requirements for docent training seem to have the least
problem recruiting and retaining docents. Consider The Minneapolis Institute of Arts. The M. I. A. asks docent applicants to make a five-year commitment to their program before joining — two years of training followed by three years of touring (with a minimum of 40 tours per year).

Each year, the Minneapolis Institute of Arts places a call for docents in museum publications and the local newspapers. People who respond have their names placed on a list, and are sent a letter and an application form. The requirements of the training course and expectations thereafter are explained in this letter, as well as the qualities needed to be a docent.

If the applicant remains interested, he or she requests an interview time and commits to attending one of three information sessions. At the interview, prospects are told, once again, of the five-year commitment, including two years of training before touring on their own as an M.I.A. docent. The entire interview committee, which consists of docents (one from the most recent class, the docent chair, and a long-term docent with 15 years or more of experience) and staff members, participates in the information sessions. Recruits have an opportunity to ask questions and participate in an inquiry-based discussion of an art work.

Those who are selected from the applicant pool and accepted into the M.I.A. docent training program sign a letter of agreement, which details duties and responsibilities, and are asked to submit a picture and brief paragraph about themselves. These are placed on a bulletin board in the docent study and each trainee is selected by a senior docent who becomes a “big buddy.”

Throughout their training, docents are routinely videotaped while making oral presentations before their classmates and receive a one-on-one conference with staff members who critique their talk. Diane Levy, who retired this summer as Supervisor of Tours and School Services after 20 years at the Institute, describes videotaping and critiquing as, “… one of our best innovations. We’ve done it now for about 10 years. Staff begins by taping themselves to lessen the fear.” Docents also critique themselves, using special, self-critiquing forms.

As for teaching methods, most institutions we contacted employ a combination of inquiry (questioning techniques) and exposition (lectures). Historic Annapolis relies upon scripted tours when working with older children and adults, while using inquiry techniques with younger children’s tours. Less typical is the Minneapolis Museum of American Art in St. Paul, which offers inquiry-type tours to all age groups. Docents at the Minnesota Museum of American Art also participate in media experiences, learning first-hand about the process of making prints and photographs, drawings, sculptures, and paintings so that they have knowledge of practice, as well as product.

Most docents are evaluated in some form or another. While the videotaping mentioned above is less common, many institutions provide visitors and groups with evaluation forms so that they may comment on the quality of their guided experience. At the Woodland Park Zoo, docents also conduct informal evaluations of their peers. Docents at the New Orleans Museum of Art participate in open discussions and evaluations with fellow docents at the conclusion of their touring responsibilities for the day.

Continued on next page.
Many of the institutions we canvassed are trying to extend their modest financial resources. The Walker Art Center and The Minneapolis Institute of Arts (two totally independent entities) collaborate on school mailings to save on printing and mailing costs. They send out one, joint mailing. Their handsomely-designed packet presents teachers with two, similarly formatted, yet independently produced, brochures held within one folder. Each brochure describes its respective institution’s collection, educational philosophy, and programming, as well as presenting its institutional mission statement.

Give and Take

As you read this issue — and learn of your colleagues’ ideas, programs, institutions, and challenges — we ask you to participate in a future issue of The Docent Educator. It is in the best tradition of educators to share their successes and failures. “Why re-invent the wheel?” as the expression goes. We hope you will use this journal as YOUR professional network. Like those who presented themselves in this and previous issues, we invite you to contribute your anecdotes, ideas, and articles and make a contribution to teaching in all our museums, historic sites, zoos, parks, and gardens.

Submit an Article!

Publish and share your teaching ideas and techniques. Address one of the following themes of an upcoming issue.

- **Constructing Relationships with Schools** Spring 1999
  Submission deadline: December 1, 1998

- **Teaching and Technology** Summer 1999
  Submission deadline: March 1, 1999

- **Training, Touring, and Terminologies** Autumn 1999
  Submission deadline: June 1, 1999

- **Questioning Strategies** Winter 1999-2000
  Submission deadline: September 1, 1999

Send your text and photos to:
The Docent Educator P.O. Box 2080 Kamuela, HI 96743-2080.
To receive writer’s guidelines send us a self-addressed, stamped envelope. All articles are edited for publication.
The American Museum in Britain

by Christina Parker

The American Museum in Britain is a museum of American decorative arts displayed through a series of room settings from the late 17th century to the eve of the Civil War. Located in Bath, England, the American Museum in Britain also maintains an outstanding collection of textiles, as well as folk art and Native American Indian galleries.

The "public face" of the museum is run by 125 docents. The majority of our docents are women, though the number of men are growing. Ages range from 18 - 85, but the majority are 50 - 70. Many have been with us since the 1960's and 70's, and have made the museum their "unpaid career."

Docents are mainly recruited by word of mouth, but we have also enlisted through a local volunteer bureau and the National Association of Decorative and Fine Arts Society. Most recent recruits are retired professionals, especially teachers, not all of whom want to conduct educational tours!

Training consists of room studies, lectures, workshops, and much "shadowing" of other docents, but those who start mid-season are often thrown in at the deep end. We are fortunate to have a wonderful museum library so docents are expected to be self-motivated. We don't have a formal evaluation procedure, and rely on visitor surveys, teachers' comments, and post-tour discussions to lead to changes and improvements.

Education is fundamental to our museum's philosophy. The education department deals with formal education from kindergarten to university and beyond, but the museum also offers a lively program of workshops and events on craft or historical themes to the general public. Docents have been involved in the running of some of the craft workshops and special children's events.

The museum receives approximately 50,000 visitors per year, of whom 10,000 come through the education department. The latter is staffed by an education officer, we have seemingly limited relevance to the new curriculum. The majority of our education group visits are by high school students studying the native American Indians as part of the history curriculum. The National Curriculum, however, is not just about subject matter, but skills, and our tours and our object handling and costume activities are also aimed at developing pupils' skills of observation, communication, recording, and the evaluation of sources. This has proved very challenging for our docents, many of whom started in the days when all that most teachers wanted was a "nice day out." Now, teachers are very demanding because all school visits have to be justified in terms of the National Curriculum.

We are currently developing programs to attract schools to use our collections to teach the Art, Craft, and Design curriculum. We are the ideal place for them to visit with our wide variety of media, and the different cultures and time periods represented in our collection. They just don't know it yet!

We initially offered a program for primary schools (5 - 11 year olds). The tours are very interactive, with each docent touring just a few pupils and concentrating on a selection of ten objects or working in "expert" groups focusing on just one media, e.g. - textiles, pottery, or furniture. We have also adapted our current object-handling and costume sessions to give them more of an art focus.

Janet Parrott, a docent at The American Museum in Britain, teaches students about Plains Indians' ceremonial costume. Photo: courtesy of The American Museum in Britain

assistant, and 28 docents who are booked for tours and activities. Many of our docents do not give tours, but are based in one room or gallery.

The school's program is heavily influenced by the British National Curriculum. Introduced in the late 1980's, it has had a deep effect on all British museums; adapt or die. Our numbers have fallen because

Christina Parker is the education officer and guides organiser at the American Museum in Britain, located in Bath, England.
Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute

The Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute (STRI) is the unit of the Smithsonian Institution that was established to further our understanding of tropical nature and its significance to the world at large; to train students in tropical research; and to promote conservation by making the public aware of the beauty, importance, and fragility of natural environments in the tropics. STRI is located in the Republic of Panama where it maintains a series of facilities at various locations.

Public programs of STRI include academic programs for undergraduate and graduate students, postdoctoral researchers and visiting scientists from around the world, and public programs for members of the community, as well as visitors to Panama. The academic program has existed for many years and is highly integrated into the research program of the scientific staff. The outreach programs to the community have expanded substantially in recent years. These programs interpret STRI's research to the general public — primarily school groups — and promote conservation of the natural environments studied by researchers at STRI.

STRI maintains two on-going public programs that are aimed at students. Docents lead educational visits to our Marine Exhibition Center (MEC) on Culebra Point (a coastal area) off Panama City’s Amador Causeway and day-visits to the Smithsonian’s field station on Barro Colorado Island, a tropical forest reserve in the Panama Canal. On occasion, we also offer docent-led educational visits to our Tupper Center Exhibit Hall in Panama City, where we are currently showing an exhibit on the insects of Panama.

We recruit our docents by advertising in the local universities and by word of mouth. Most of our docents are biology students or biology graduates, and we do have various nationalities represented. We aspire to have bilingual docents (Spanish - English), but they are difficult to find.

We provide initial training to our docents usually on the content of the tour or exhibit and on methods of dealing with our various audiences. The themes and messages of our tours are presented at the training sessions but docents tend to personalize their tours, and some choose certain themes over others. Teachers that bring groups receive evaluation forms that they complete and return. Occasionally, we ask an outside professional to evaluate a specific program.

Our greatest challenge is how to break away from the traditional methods of teaching and make our program more participatory and experiential, to provide students with an opportunity for discovery and analysis.

Our docents seem to greatly enjoy their work. They draw the greatest satisfaction from opening their students’ eyes to a whole “new world.” Although Panama is a tropical coastal country, we have students at our Marine Exhibition Center who have never seen sand. Panama has 30% of its territory as forest, yet for many student visitors that take guided tours on Barro Colorado Island this is their first educational experience in a tropical forest.

These facilities primarily support the research of STRI’s permanent staff of 35, visiting scientists and students (approximately 400 per year), but also make possible STRI’s education and conservation mission.

A Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute docent and students observe the spines of a pencil sea urchin in the "touch tank" area of the Marine Exhibition Center. (photo: M. A. Guerra)

by
Georgina de Alba
As one of the few institutions that offer informal educational programs in environmental/science education in Panama, we strive to strengthen our programs and to make them relevant and educational for our visitors. This year, we received approximately 60,000 visitors; approximately 20,000 take part in the educational programming.

Our educational programs are relatively new and growing. We have found in *The Docent Educator* an excellent resource that addresses many issues that are relevant to our work. We find many new ideas and techniques that we can adapt to our specific situation and that help us improve our docent programs.

Georgina de Alba is the coordinator of visitor services for the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute in Balboa, Panama.

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- **Interactive Teaching** - a general introduction to inquiry learning and participatory teaching techniques. Alan Gartenhaus, instructor.

- **Questioning Strategies** - an examination of open-ended questioning, language use, and ways to respond to visitors. Alan Gartenhaus, instructor.

- **Creative Thinking** - methods for provoking visitors' interest, participation, imagination, and expansive thinking. Alan Gartenhaus, instructor.

- **Teaching Through the Ages** - age-graded routes for working with elementary, middle, and high school audiences. Alan Gartenhaus, instructor.

- **Get Real! Using Objects to Teach Across the Curriculum** - a co-operative in-service event for your area's classroom teachers. Jackie Littleton, leader.

- **Little Ones** - successful touring techniques and teaching methods created specifically for pre- and primary-school visitors. Jackie Littleton, instructor.

For further information write *The Docent Educator*, or call us at (808) 885-7728.
The Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, in Bonn, is a museum of contemporary history of the Federal Republic of Germany. Displays feature contemporary German history from the end of World War II to the present day. The exhibition is chronologically structured, offering a route full of visual and acoustic impressions. The museum presents political, economic, and social history, everyday living conditions, and important aspects from the world of art and culture.

Most German museums refer to their guides as “Führers” (leaders). As a museum for post-War German history, we are sensitive to the negative connotations of that word; thus, we prefer to use the German word “Begleiter” (guide). This term more closely reflects our museum education approach; we see ourselves as facilitators who help visitors examine and understand exhibitions so that they can then better explore them on their own.

It is our goal to have a diverse docent corps that reflects the diversity of our visitors. Therefore, in addition to the large group of students who form the core of our docent staff, we have a (volunteer) business manager, a retired army officer, and housewives, many with teaching backgrounds.

The defining characteristics of our docents are: 1) an interest in and familiarity with contemporary German history, which is usually demonstrated through appropriate education, 2) strong communication skills, increasingly in foreign languages, and 3) an understanding of the unique mission of the Haus der Geschichte. Since Bonn is both a government and a university town, our docents hail from all over the country, and are not predominantly locals.

Since opening our doors in June, 1994, we have not yet conducted any official recruiting. Beginning this year, however, we plan to advertise for docents at selected departments of the two nearest universities (Bonn and Cologne) in order to attract students with specific language skills or other area/discipline specializations.

Applicants go through a two-phase group interview procedure. The first interview concentrates on communication skills, interest, and motivation. Selected applicants are invited to a second interview, which focuses on content questions about German history as presented in the exhibition. Successful applicants are then invited to attend a two-day training workshop. The coordinator of visitor services, the museum educator, and a curator conduct the interviews and lead the training workshop.

After successful completion of the training workshop, docents are given a three month contract. During this time, the coordinator of visitor services, the museum educator, and the curator who participated in the interview/training process randomly evaluate selected tours and conduct an individual evaluation based on previously established guidelines. Docents are then evaluated on an ongoing basis for the duration of their employment.

Continuing training includes presentations by curators on topics that concern the exhibition and collection areas, and by outside experts on such concerns as non-verbal communication, “interviewing” objects, and interacting with special needs visitors. Our touring technique combines both expository and inquiry methods.

Educational programming is a vital part of our institutional mission. As a national museum, targeting visitors from all over the country and internationally, the education program is designed to appeal beyond the local area. Examples of educational programming include: Family Days; Activity Sundays, a series of theme-based activity tours; and a “generation-chain” program.

The museum educator cooperates closely with teachers and other educators (adult education), assisting them in developing individualized programs for specific topics. On request, educators, administrators, and other "multipliers" can meet with the museum educator, curators, or the information center librarian, for instance, and discuss how to use the museum to receive assistance in planning future visits.

Examples of public programming include an ongoing series of symposia on important historical figures (“Thinking about ...”), on museum issues (“Museum Questions”), and on current affairs and contemporary history (“Zeitfragen” - not easily translated — literally means “Time Questions”). Each temporary exhibition is accompanied by special...
programming, for example, a film series, public discussions, etc.
In addition, the museum co-sponsors numerous events, such as the official presentations of commemorative stamps as issued by the Post Ministry, historical and museum-related conferences, etc. Finally, museum space is rented to third parties for private events, such as annual meetings, commemorative celebrations, etc.
The primary focus of docent tours is to provide a general overview of the museum and the permanent collection. Requests for exclusively theme-based tours are relatively rare. Often, visitor groups request a particular focus (economic history, daily life, etc.), but make it clear that they still want to see the exhibition in its entirety. It is important to remember that our museum is relatively new (having opened in June, 1994) and that many visitors are visiting our institution for the first time.

Our experience has shown that repeat groups tend to request theme-based tours. We are experimenting with offering theme-based tours. This past summer we initiated a garden tour (the museum gardens reflect the development of the back yards and playgrounds from 1945 through the present). The response up to now has been very positive.

In 1996, we counted approximately 700,000 total visits to the permanent exhibition and 250,000 total visits to the various temporary exhibitions. Some 110,000 persons received guided tours. We count an average of 100 groups per week.

Any group with a minimum of 15 persons can reserve a free guided tour through either the permanent collection or the current temporary exhibition. Tours are individually designed, though our experience shows that most groups want a general introduction to the museum and its exhibitions. At request, our guides offer overview tours with a specific focus or a specific time period. School programs are developed individually in conjunction with the teacher or educator. We do not yet advertise separately for adult or special needs groups.

While we consider the strength of our docent program to be the strong focus on visitor needs, which results in the creation of individualized programs, we continue to work on expanding our educational programs and improving our docent selection and training.

In 1995, the European Council awarded the Haus der Geschichte the Museum Award of the Year. In 1997, the Haus der Geschichte was winner of the prestigious "Quandt-Stiftung" Media Award for its temporary exhibition, "Market or Planned Economy." Our director, Dr. Hermann Schäfer, was elected to the Board of the Visitor Studies Association. He is the first non-American on the board. He is also a member of the Steering Committee of the European Museum Forum. Dorothee Dennert, the museum educator, serves on the board of the German Museums Association, a member of the Network of Museums Associations (NEMOC), and a board member of ICOM/CECA.

Helena von Wersebe is the Coordinator of Visitor Services at the Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland in Bonn, Germany.
Finally, all the planning is complete! The speakers are confirmed, the homework assignments for each week are prepared, the sponsors are matched up, and I’ve double-checked that all the buildings are still standing!

As I put together the docent education program for the upcoming training class, I get a rush of excitement knowing that soon I will initiate a new class of 50 enthusiastic men and women from many different backgrounds. Each of these docents-in-training comes together in the name of one mission: to educate the public about architecture and the built environment in Chicago.

I’m always amazed that people wait in line to join this program each year. In the next ten weeks, they will be working on homework for two hours each night, spending approximately four hours each week outside looking at buildings, and practicing, revising, and practicing again!

Each docent-in-training starts his or her career at The Chicago Architecture Foundation (CAF) with two downtown, or “Loop,” walking tours. “The Early Skyscrapers Tour” highlights commercial buildings from after the Great Chicago Fire of 1871 until the beginning of World War II.

“The Modern and Beyond Tour” focuses on Modern and Postmodern architecture from 1950 to present day commissions.

Each year, the volunteer coordinator and the curator of education prepare a course in which speakers from all over the city of Chicago are invited to discuss issues related to these two Loop walking tours. In the weeks ahead, the docents-in-training will meet architects, urban planners, university professors, and construction consultants. Experienced CAF docents will introduce them to the process of theme building, creating cohesive tours, and presentation skills. The city is our museum and working professionals are our resources.

History of CAF

The Chicago Architecture Foundation is a not-for-profit organization that is the only group dedicated exclusively to enhancing the public’s awareness and appreciation of Chicago’s outstanding architectural legacy.

CAF was started in 1966 when a group of concerned preservationists saved the Glessner House, one of the few examples of architect H. H. Richardson’s work in Chicago, from destruction. Since then, this outstanding example of 19th century design has been restored and opened to the public. In 1995, it became its own museum along with the Henry B. Clarke house, the oldest building in Chicago. (These two houses are now officially called Prairie Avenue House Museums.) The split from the houses allowed the Chicago Architecture Foundation to focus exclusively on a comprehensive offering of tours, lectures, exhibits, and youth education programs in the Chicago metropolitan area.

The Docent Body

Our intense docent education program was developed in 1971 to prepare volunteers to lead a wide variety of architectural tours throughout metropolitan Chicago. More than 1,000 docents have completed this program.
We currently have 350 docents on our roster, with 335 docents active each year and fulfilling their 30 required annual tour hours. Approximately fifteen docents hold emeritus status, meaning that they are exempt from fulfilling this annual requirement.

The tours are a combination of exposition and inquiry format. Docents conduct tours on foot, bike, bus, and river boat. Our volunteers stand up to Chicago’s extremities whether it is a hot, sticky 110 degrees, or a bone chilling -30 degrees!

CAF docents are lifelong learners who want to teach others about this city’s architectural treasures. They possess a civic pride for Chicago, an enthusiasm for intellectual challenges, and a strong sense of sharing. For the most part, they have earned a higher degree at the university level.

The least similar characteristics among docents are geographic location, age, and economic background. Docents come from all over the metropolitan area of Chicago, including city neighborhoods and suburbs. Docents include younger men, who are scarce at most art and history museums. Interestingly, twenty-six percent are men and seventy-four percent are women, and ages range from recent college graduate to the retired. Approximately twenty percent are in the 25–40 year old bracket, fifty-five percent range 40–60 years of age, fifteen percent are age 60–70, and ten percent are above 70 years of age.

Several occupations are represented among the docents, including university professors, television producers, architects, homemakers, paralegals, real estate brokers, elementary school teachers, dentists, nurses, administrative assistants, and librarians, to name just a few. Men and women of all ages and backgrounds work together at CAF, making the organization feel like a community.

Docent Recruitment

The majority of applicants learn about our volunteer program through docents, on our tours, and through our membership. Docent candidates are highly intrigued by the subject of architecture and want to be among a group of people who share their same interest. Many candidates have planned for years to become CAF docents. Having given "unofficial" tours to visiting friends and family, the applicants want to be official!

Docent Training

The docent education program is one of the strongest programs sponsored by CAF. Prior to that first public tour, all docents must take a 10 week training program in which they meet once a week from 9:00 am to 4:30 pm. The success of our training program starts with the flexibility. We provide volunteer opportunities for every schedule. The training course is offered on Thursdays and Saturdays, and tours are conducted seven days a week.

Lectures, tour demonstration, tour practice, exercises, and games that solidify facts, observations, and interpretation techniques are all part of the training course. Each week, homework is assigned that helps our volunteers develop and write their own tours. Docents-in-training are also matched up with “sponsors,” experienced docents who mentor them through the entire process from the first day of class. These sponsors are responsible for practicing and certifying the docents-in-training.

Docent Program Evaluation

As with all cultural organizations, we have issues about quality that we continue to face. Ongoing evaluation is one of the biggest challenges to our docent program. The only required evaluation is a “follow-up tour” that is to be completed at the end of the docent’s first year of doing public tours. The sponsor who certified the docents-in-training takes public tours to see how they have progressed and how they interact with their audience.

The docent council provides peer evaluation in the event of a complaint from the public about a docent’s performance. If a docent receives a public complaint in writing about their tour, they are contacted by a member of the Standards Committee. If the complaint warrants further information, a member of this committee will observe that person’s next tour.

Continued on the next page.
Presently, our 31-year-old organization is looking to establish a formal process that would evaluate each docent on a regular basis.

Creating a Cohesive Tour

Docents are encouraged to write their tours using themes. Early in docent training, they are asked to incorporate a unifying thread that creates a cohesive tour (allowing the visitors to compare and contrast buildings). Themes for the downtown walking tours might be the philosophy of the First Chicago School of Architecture, zoning laws, technological advances that made the skyscraper possible, or the influence of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition on commercial buildings. Children's downtown walking tours might have themes based on structure, lines, or ornamentation. Docent-led tours interpret the architecture objectively in order for the public to form their own opinions. Their tours help the public understand the building's visual organization, historic importance, and design influences.

Educational Programming

CAF's mission statement, "to educate the public about architecture and the built environment," signals that educational programming is our primary goal. We have a comprehensive program of tours, lectures, exhibits, and youth education programs, all designed to educate the public on historic and recent architectural works in Chicago. Programs are not solely for our membership, but rather reach out to the general public. Our scope provides for the adult learner down to the elementary school child.

CAF's dedicated docents are the front line to our educational programs, providing 65 different architectural tours throughout the year. Docents are instrumental in educating the public about architecture, and CAF actively continues to educate docents through opportunities created by the docent council's Continuing Education Committee. Most docents are attracted to our volunteer experience because they are interested in working with adults, our largest audience. However, CAF's program offerings for children grow stronger and docents continue to become more involved. Docents lead a downtown walking tour for grades five through eight. CAF also offers high school groups a downtown walking tour and an Architecture River Cruise.

For more than ten years, CAF docents have been involved with the Chicago Board of Education's Off-Campus Museum Program, in which Chicago cultural institutions provide on-site learning experiences. Each Wednesday afternoon, two instructors meet a class of fifteen Chicago Public High School students and supplement their regular high school curriculum with lessons, field trips, and projects about Chicago's architecture.

CAF's Youth Education Department offers teacher training workshops that educate metropolitan school teachers about ways to use architecture in the classroom. Docent-led tours of Chicago's neighborhoods are an important aspect of these workshops. Docents also develop weekend family workshops based on our curriculum for grades K - 8. This curriculum uses a language-experience approach to teaching architecture in the classroom.

Special Tour Offerings

CAF offers a variety of public tours throughout the metropolitan area. We are always filling requests for special group tours, which may sometimes be tailored toward a civic, professional, or social group's needs.

The Audience

CAF is unique in that we have always given public docent-guided tours of our collection — the architecture of the city of Chicago. We serve an average of 75,000 visitors on docent-guided tours each year.
We serve children's school groups on field trips, as well as providing a slide presentation for less mobile groups, such as residents of nursing homes and retirement communities.

Special needs are always a challenge we are willing to work with. Chicago's architecture is an important attraction for many visitors and we often get requests for tours in foreign languages. A small percentage of docents are able to give tours in foreign languages only for prearranged groups. We continue to increase our number of bilingual docents in French, German, Japanese, and Spanish by advertising our docent program in local foreign language newspapers. If we are unable to provide bilingual docents for groups, interpreters are hired in the foreign language, as well as American Sign for the hearing impaired.

Audience members with physical limitations are welcome on tours, but wheelchair and walker accessibility are a challenge, considering we tour throughout the city. The city of Chicago provides ramped curbs, and automatic doors are found on most buildings. Docents are aware of these amenities and accommodate these needs on their tours.

Docent Program Strengths
CAF offers flexible volunteer opportunities for a variety of schedules. Not only do we schedule public tours seven days a week, but we offer the same excellent docent training on Thursdays and Saturdays. Another strength in the docent program is the high retention rate of volunteers. There is a strong fellowship that continues to year after year.

Docents always have opportunities to be more involved with different departments of the organization. They work in public programming, from scheduling lectures to developing children's programs. Volunteers also help with planning and fundraising by serving on boards, or selling raffle tickets at the benefits. They also have the ability to initiate special projects for CAF such as the New Projects Committee, which provides special tours of newly constructed buildings.

Docents feel a strong sense of ownership at CAF. Not only do they write their own tours, but they are a self-governing body. The docent council consists of fifteen representatives who meet once a month. There are five highly active committees on the council. The docent-at-large is a voting representative for the docent council on the board of trustees. Docents also have their own monthly publication, Docent News, which offers architectural information, social and continuing education opportunities, class schedules, tour statistics, and tour schedules.

Conclusion
The Chicago Architecture Foundation is very proud of the docent body. Without the docents there would be no CAF. We get calls and visits from many organizations from around the country that recognize and model themselves after our high quality tour and docent programs. Many V.I.P.'s, such as the 50 Democratic Senators for last year's national convention, have specifically asked for private docent-led tours of Chicago's architecture. Recently, Chicago's mayor, Richard J. Daley, requested his favorite docent to narrate a private architectural river cruise for him and the Prime Minister of Singapore.

Now that the docent training class has started, I'm inspired by the dedication towards our mission. And, I'm enthused by the discussions we have in class about architectural history, movements, and architects that shaped our city; by the architectural scavenger hunts used to teach new initiates secret architectural gems; and the feisty team spirit during Modern and Postmodern Docent Jeopardy, which solidifies facts on these styles. This is what learning is all about!

Barbara Hrbek is the volunteer coordinator for The Chicago Architecture Foundation, located in Chicago, Illinois.
Creative Funding

When you register as a guest at a Doubletree Hotel or Guest Suites in Minneapolis, you receive a slim, one-page flyer with your room key. The flyer states that “Doubletree Hotels and Guest Suites of Minneapolis is pleased to introduce you, our valued guest, to ‘Stepping Out with the Arts’, a partnership with five unparalleled arts organizations.” Turn the flyer over and it provides a description of, and the phone numbers for, five cultural institutions (The Minnesota Orchestra, Guthrie Theater, Walker Art Center and Minnesota Sculpture Garden, The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, and The Weisman Art Museum).

Even more interesting and relevant is the bold type toward the bottom of the flyer that states, “Purchase a tin of Doubletree’s world-famous chocolate chip cookies from any Minneapolis area Doubletree and one dollar per tin will be donated to an educational outreach fund for our five partners.”

This wonderful idea could be worth emulating in your community. Helping to fund educational activities is an excellent form of public relations for the businesses involved, and announces programming while helping to extend and improve them.

Inspirational Words

Perhaps you can find relevance to your educational responsibilities in the following quotations:

Great dancers are not great because of their technique; they are great because of their passion. Martha Graham

Good enough never is. Debbi Fields (Mrs. Fields Cookies)

The only place you find success before work is in the dictionary. May V. Smith

Ideas are a dime a dozen. People who put them into action are priceless. Anonymous

Volunteering and the I.R.S.

There are two very good reasons that docents and other volunteers working in the United States should keep careful records of the hours they contribute to a not-for-profit institution. For the benefit of the institution, of course, such records are useful in proving in-kind donations when applying for grant funds. Volunteers who itemize their income tax deductions can also use such records to their financial benefit.

Most people are aware they can deduct contributions of money or property they make to, or for the use of, qualified organizations such as museums. Membership fees or dues may also be deducted. However, in both cases, you can deduct only the amount that is more than the value of any benefits you may receive.

Some out-of-pocket expenses may also be deductible, if they are unreimbursed, directly connected with the services you give the institution, expenses you had only because of the services you gave, and not personal, living, or family expenses. If, for example, you are the chosen representative attending the National Docent Symposium or other such convention, you can deduct unreimbursed expenses for travel and transportation, including a reasonable amount for meals and lodging.

If you are required to wear a uniform as part of your docent duties, you can deduct the cost and keep of the uniform. You can deduct unreimbursed out-of-pocket expenses, such as the cost of gas and oil, that are directly related to the use of your automobile while serving as a docent. If you do not want to deduct actual expenses, you can use a standard rate of 12 cents per mile to figure your contribution. You can deduct parking fees and tolls, but for these and all other deductions, reliable written records are required.

As with all tax questions, you should consult a tax expert for information about your specific tax requirements. Personal assistance is also available by calling the IRS at 1-800-829-1040 during regular business hours. If you have access to TTY/TDD equipment, you can call 1-800-829-4059. Even though April 15, 1998, is long gone, April 15, 1999, is just around the corner!
Historic House Museum Conference

The McFaddin-Ward House in Beaumont, TX, will be hosting "Historic House Museums: Issues and Operations," a conference taking place on November 5-7, 1998. The conference will include sessions on museum education and interpretation. The cost of the conference is $100 per person and includes registration fees and materials, two continental breakfasts, two lunches, and one evening event with meal. The conference takes place at the Holiday Inn Beaumont Plaza. Room rates are available at $62.50 per night. For additional information, please contact: McFaddin-Ward House 725 Third Street Beaumont, TX 77701, or call (409) 832-1906.

Please, No Copying

We realize that many organizations photocopy articles appearing in The Docent Educator and distribute them to their docents. This presents us with a dilemma. While we are dedicated to serving as an informational resource and advocate for docents, we are dependent upon paid subscriptions to sustain us. We cannot exist if just one paid subscription is received by 20, 50, or more people who could be subscribing. Therefore, we ask that your institution respect our "no copying" policy and consider purchasing a group subscription of ten or more copies. Group subscriptions are discounted 20% off our $30 subscription rate (or $24 each). A minimum order of ten is only $240 per year. To learn more about group subscriptions, contact us at (808) 885-7728.

It Works for Me...
Sharing successful techniques, thoughts, and ideas.

The North Carolina Docent Symposium 1997, "Under the Oaks — Many Branches," was held in Raleigh, the "City of Oaks," September 14-15. Fulfilling a dream of docents who had attended national docent symposiums, this first statewide symposium was hosted at the North Carolina Museum of History. The 146 docent and museum staff participants came from across the state; fifty-six sites and thirty-nine counties were represented. Participants included three public history students from North Carolina State University attending on docent scholarships and a twenty-year docent "veteran" who was one of the forty North Carolina Museum of History docents working to keep the symposium activities flowing.

Information and inspiration abounded. North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources Secretary Betty Ray McCain spoke of the importance of docents as "truly the wind beneath my wings." Keynote speaker Dr. Rex Ellis, Director, Center for Museum Studies, Smithsonian Institution, challenged docents to "seize the day," and to make their "watch" a worthwhile one. Jackie Littleton, Associate Editor, The Docent Educator, discussed the role of the docent as gardant (one who preserves), moostant (one who shows), and docent (one who teaches).

Nine group sessions provided attendees with information and skill broadening ideas. Groups toured the Governor's Mansion, the State Capitol, Haywood Hall, and the North Carolina Museums of Art, History, and Natural Sciences.

An Historical Fashion Show provided an entertaining look at women's fashions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. And, a sharing table gave sites from across the state a way to exchange information.

The idea of having a statewide symposium came after docents attended various national symposiums. A steering committee met monthly for two years, developing ideas into concrete plans. An initial survey mailed to potential participation sites polled interest and surveyed possible topics to be covered.

As an event planned by and for docents, the symposium was both a reward and an incentive. It was an opportunity to address docents' needs and interests, to reinforce their training, and to validate the importance of their work.

Among the hopes of the symposium steering committee was that the state symposiums would continue in the future. The North Carolina Docent Symposium 2000, "Crown Jewels: The Value of Docents for a New Century," will be hosted by the Mint Museum of Art in Charlotte, the Queen City, in the Spring of 2000. An accessible and meaningful docent symposium experience for museum docents and personnel will continue in North Carolina.

Lillian Kaluza is a docent at the North Carolina Museum of History. She served as publicity chairperson on the North Carolina Docent Symposium 1997 steering committee.
Storm King Art Center

The Storm King Art Center, in Mountainville, New York, is considered among the pre-eminent sculpture park museums in America. Its facilities consist of 500 acres of manicured lawns, terraced fields, and woodlands. On approximately 1/2 of the property, over 120 sculptures — many large scale — by most of this century's leading artists are installed.

Of the 30 docents on our roster, 26 actively tour. Our docents employ a combination of inquiry and lecture techniques. No standard scripts are ever used. Docents are recruited through ads and press releases placed periodically in local publications, including area newspapers and magazines.

Those volunteers interested in becoming docents at the Storm King Art Center go through a 14-week training session that is conducted by the curator of education, outside consultants who are specialists in various fields, and artists. The 14-week training session, which meets once a week for 2 to 2 1/2 hours, consists of formal lectures, group discussions, field trips, research projects, and guest presentations covering a wide range of topics including the history of modern sculpture; the careers/range of works by some of the most important artists in our collection; public speaking techniques; methods of learning in a museum setting; touring techniques including how to tour in the out-of-doors.

Primarily, docents at the Storm King Art Center are individuals who are interested in post-1945 sculpture — most of which is large-scale and abstract. They are also people interested in the environment and landscape since all tours are given outside in the sculpture park, which is surrounded by some of the most spectacular views that the Hudson Highlands have to offer. Docents are intrigued with context — examining how the art and the landscape are intertwined.

Docent performance at the Storm King Art Center is evaluated. For beginning docents, evaluation takes place at the end of the training session. Individuals are required to give a test tour to the curator of education and other staff members. If the tour is deemed acceptable, they graduate to the status of senior docent and begin touring the public. Senior docents are evaluated once yearly. They also conduct a test tour, which is evaluated by the curator of education and an outside consultant.

Docents do use themes for their tours, which are developed by the docent in consultation with the curator of education. Among the successful themes are: "Art in the Environment," "Materials and Methods of Sculpture," and "Women Artists in the Storm King Collection."

Part of the mission of Storm King Art Center is to "provide formal educational programs and to conduct, foster, and publish fundamental research in the field of modern and contemporary art, with special attention to the work of artists executing large sculpture of the kind on which the Art Center had focused." Given this fact, education plays a major role in the organizations' programming. Of the 40,000 visitors that come seasonally, approximately 1/2 participate in some type of public programming.

During the 7-1/2 month period when we are open to the public (April 1 to November 16), approximately 10,500 visitors take a guided tour. Tours for the general public are offered daily and on the weekends. Walk-in tours either highlight the collection or focus on "special topics" that hone in on specific parts of our collection or explore certain themes. In addition, we provide tours in German, Spanish, French, and Italian.

School programs are developed by a committee that consists of the curator of education and other staff, along with docent corps representatives. School programs include pre-visit lectures and activities given by the education department staff; on site projects; teacher training workshops, and a yearly conference for elementary, middle, and high school art teachers from the three surrounding counties.

The strength of our docent program is our tour guides, who are highly motivated and dedicated. They have a strong interest in post-1945 sculpture and its relationship to the landscape, and a desire to share this interest and knowledge with others. The challenges that our docent program face are how to make our collection of mostly large, abstract sculptures accessible to the general visitor who comes with little or no knowledge of the history of modern sculpture, and how to deal with the challenges of touring groups in a setting that is not regular or controlled, but is in the outdoors.

Since docents only tour the public in our "green galleries" (the museum building is not included on any tours), they must be prepared to respond to a host of problems/
Docents who teach at the Storm King Art Center are intrigued with large-scale art and the Center’s verdant park setting. The beautifully landscaped park presents some interesting challenges however, including a need to keep youngsters from playing on the sculptures, dealing with rapid changes in the weather, transiting long distances between art works, and managing insect invasions.

Luckily, Storm King Art Center docents are up to the challenge. Each docent has learned to handle these situations, and more, in their own personalized and effective ways.

Wayne Lempka is the curator of education at the Storm King Art Center, which is located in Mountainville, New York.
A Museum in the Making

Like a giant magnet, the iron rails and massive steam engines of the North Carolina Transportation Museum attract visitors and volunteers from miles surrounding its location in the small southern town of Spencer, North Carolina. Fifty miles from the nearest metropolitan center, this museum-in-the-making draws in volunteers with an ease larger, more centrally located institutions might envy. What’s the attraction?

The NCTM is located on the site of Spencer Shops, once the largest steam locomotive servicing center for the Southern Railway Company, and much of its current exhibition bears directly on the roundhouse and the trains that were repaired there for more than 75 years. At its height, Spencer Shops employed more than 2,500 people and was the economic base for the towns of Spencer, East Spencer, and the neighboring Salisbury.

One of the largest of the museum’s artifacts is Number 544, a 207,000 pound steam engine built for the Russian government in 1917. When the Russian Revolution intervened and the new government couldn’t pay for the train and tender, the engine’s wheels were modified to fit American tracks, and the behemoth became part of the Seaboard Airline Railroad. Volunteers also have restored the former Buffalo Creek and Gauley Railroad steam locomotive Number 4, and they provide the narration for an on-site train ride over some of the Shop’s 57 acres.

Engines aren’t the only attraction in the 37-bay roundhouse of the museum. Private cars, too, are fascinating to both volunteers and visitors. One such car was built at the turn of the century by steel magnate Charles Schwab. Its brass, stained glass and inlaid wood, fascinating to most adult visitors, can’t hold a candle in children’s eyes to the toilets and wash basins cleverly concealed under fancy wooden seats.

Trains, of course, are just one of the forms of transportation interpreted by docents of the NCTM. Plank roads, a dug-out canoe, overmountain wagons, and the state’s first highway patrol vehicle are among the visual cues docents use to help visitors understand the part North Carolina played in transportation history and the place of transportation in North Carolina’s history. In addition to museum tours and train rides, docents provide off-site programs for civic and social groups and serve as gallery guides to answer visitor questions.

Volunteers are recruited in all the "usual" ways — word of mouth, newspaper ads and feature articles, a museum newsletter and Web site (www.nctrans.org), and multitudes of speeches before Rotary, Civitan, AARP and retired teachers groups. Many of them, however, come because it’s obvious to visitors that the docents and other volunteers at NCTM are part of a warm, friendly “family” who love the museum and what they’re doing there. Visitors often become volunteers after enjoying a tour themselves and hearing from their docent guide that volunteer opportunities are available.

Among the museum’s first volunteers is a retired Lutheran minister, who answered an ad in the local newspaper in 1993. One of his specialties has become "sponge activities" — those little fillers docents often need to soak up a few minutes during a transition or on an unscheduled stop. He may ask the school children in his group to see how their money has traveled, and show them where to find the Federal Reserve Bank on the dollar bill they’ve brought for the gift shop.

Another volunteer, a retired microbiologist, drives two and one half hours each way once or twice a week to help maintain the rolling stock that forms the core of the museum’s collection or to work in visitor services.

Unlike the volunteers in many museums, zoos, historic sites, or nature centers, the majority of volunteers at the NCTM are male. There is just something about playing with trains! Many of the docents — male and female — have local ties to Spencer Shops. Often their relatives worked there, or they lived in the community that began as a company town and is now a growing museum that welcomed more than 100,000 visitors last year.

NCTM is part of the North Carolina Historic Sites section of the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources. A top priority of the department is visitor services and the education of the visiting public. A handbook of standards for all historic site personnel ("...permanent, temporary, and volunteer ...") says, "The 'bottom line' is quality visitor service everyday." Docents in all of the historic sites under the auspices of the Department of Cultural Resources receive on-going education. At NCTM, this includes three, four-hour sessions on the history of Spencer Shops, a docent handbook, and mentor training, as well as opportunities to attend...
workshops provided by the Department of Cultural Resources and the museum.

As the museum grows, adding new buildings and new exhibits, one of the challenges of the volunteer program is retaining docents. Even in a museum as new as this one, docents sometimes find change difficult. It is already impossible to offer the "front door to back door" tour that some school and adult groups expect, so new "theme" tours designed with North Carolina history and math curricula in mind, have been developed by program writers and docents. The most successful of these tours are the ones with plenty of hands-on activities and visitor participation.

The North Carolina Transportation Museum Foundation, also a volunteer group, has completed a feasibility study and begun fund raising for the $29 million, next phase of the museum. Standing now as a derelict mass of rusting girders, the old backshop of Spencer Shops will someday be a state-of-the-art education center for North Carolina transportation history. As large as two football fields, and several stories high, the backshop now stands as a visible reminder of how far this museum-in-the-making has come and, thanks to dedicated volunteers, the direction of its future.

Docent Tip McCabren, a retired soils scientist, shares North Carolina's extensive trucking history with visiting fourth graders.

photo: courtesy of the North Carolina Transportation Museum

Jackie Littleton
Associate Editor

Information for this article was supplied by Shirley Napier, Interpretive Volunteer Coordinator and Coordinator of Children's Special Programming for the North Carolina Transportation Museum at Historic Spencer Shops.
Now You Can Own …

The Best Of

The Docent Educator

The Docent Educator has created a comprehensive training manual and extensive reference text exclusively for volunteers and staff who teach at museums with art, history, and science collections, as well as at zoos, parks, nature centers, aquariums, and botanical gardens. Among the topics thoroughly examined within its pages are: Recruitment, Training, and Evaluation; Teaching Methodologies; Understanding Audience Needs; School Groups; and Special Challenges.

“The Best of The Docent Educator,” which presents over 100 pages of articles and information from its previous years of publishing, is available for just $35 per copy ($39 when mailed to an address outside the United States). To order, please send your check, along with mailing instructions to:

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