

REPORT
VOLUNTEER COMMITTEES OF ART MUSEUMS Region 1 Conference
“VOLUNTEERING IN ART MUSEUMS: LEARN, SHARE, COMMIT”
Monday, April 11, 2011, Museum of Anthropology, Vancouver, BC

The Volunteer Committees of Art Museums (VCAM) Region 1 Conference was held in Vancouver, BC on Monday April 11, 2011 at the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia (UBC). It was co-hosted by the Associates of the Vancouver Art Gallery and the Volunteer Associates of the Museum of Anthropology.

This conference followed on the success of past regional conferences, most recently in Seattle (2008) and Victoria (2005). To meet in between the triennial conferences organized by VCAM has become a networking tradition within the ten regions of VCAM in Canada and the US.

The conference was attended by forty-six registrants from the Associates of the Vancouver Art Gallery (VAG), the Volunteer Associates of the Museum of Anthropology (MOA), the Associates of the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria (AGGV), the Surrey Art Gallery Association (SAGA), the Volunteers of the Seattle Art Museum (SAM), the Volunteer Council of the Portland Art Museum (PAM) and the Bill Reid Gallery in Vancouver. Peter Milne, co-president of VCAM, also attended from Detroit, MI. Volunteer coordinators from the Art Gallery of Art, Edmonton, AB and the McKenzie Art Gallery, Regina, SK sent their regrets. Participant list attached.

The conference organizing committee consisted of Annick Boisset, VCAM Region 1 Director, and President, Associates of VAG, Grace Robin, VCAM Past-President, and Director, Associates of VAG, Beverley Tamboline, VCAM Representative, Volunteer Associates of MOA, Cathy Patel, VCAM Immediate Past-Representative, Volunteer Associates of MOA, Sheila Carnahan, President, Volunteer Associates of MOA and Arlee Gale, President-Elect, Volunteer Associates of MOA. The committee was pleased with the success of the conference – program, participation and logistics.

The Program. The program featured three guest speakers, two half-group breakout sessions held concurrently which switched at half-time, and a panel session of four panelists. Program attached.

- Dr Gage Averill, Dean, Faculty of Arts, UBC, who was introduced by Moya Waters, Acting Director, MOA, spoke eloquently about the *Importance of Volunteering* and the happiness of serving the community.
- Kathleen Maki, Volunteer Coordinator at SAM, gave a convincing PowerPoint presentation on *The Blockbuster Show Effect*, identifying the opportunities, the risks and the lessons learned from such massive undertakings, and the positive impact on volunteers.
- Heidi Reitmaier, Director and Curator of Education & Public Programs at VAG, shared her enthusiasm for *Art Museum Renewal*, as she explores new approaches to “learning” in a museum environment, moving away from learning art facts to experiencing the art in a social space. Her approach, based on her recent years at Tate Modern, is increasingly used in educational and public programs at VAG.

All three addresses were very well received. In addition, VCAM co-president Peter Milne addressed the participants thanking them for their volunteer effort, and announcing the 21st Triennial VCAM Conference to be held October 9-12, 2012 in Cleveland, Ohio. Save the date! He also distributed the just published VCAM Spring Newsletter (couriered from Detroit, then taxied to MOA the same morning!). Details at www.vcam.org

The two breakout sessions provided participants with an opportunity to share information and ideas on:

- *Luring the Modern Volunteer*, facilitated by Jane Coull, Second Vice President, and Associates of AGGV: know your volunteers; provide flexibility, enrichment programs & good communications.

- *Collaborating with Parent Institution for Success*, facilitated by Louisa Jefferys of the Volunteer Council, PAM: diverse organization structures were presented.

The afternoon panel provided an opportunity for panelists from participating organizations to “show off” their chosen *Volunteer Success Stories*: Joan Owen (President, Surrey Art Gallery Association) described the high-tech *Surrey Urban Screen*; Walter Beaumont (President, Seattle Art Museum Volunteers Association) spoke of his personal sense of accomplishment as a volunteer within the Association; Anne Russell (First Vice President, Associates of AGGV) gave a preview of an exciting *Art Attire* fundraising event, involving artists in the community; and, Maureen Richardson (Immediate Past President, Volunteer Associates of MOA) spoke to MOA’s success in retaining volunteers and its outreach programs.

The session was moderated by Sheila Carnahan, President, Volunteer Associates, MOA. The number of panelists was limited to four to keep the discussions lively and short, but the audience was invited to contribute additional success stories. A package of organization profiles and success stories was made available as a handout at the end of the panel session.

This format of keynote presentations, breakout sessions and a participatory panel discussion, fostered lively exchanges among participants.

The Theme. The theme of the conference, “**Volunteering in Art Museums: Learn, Share, Commit**”, was chosen to reflect on the mutual needs and objectives of today’s volunteers and visual art institutions.

- LEARN: art museums are places of learning; volunteers value the opportunity to learn about art
- SHARE: volunteers want to share their experience and skills to benefit the institution; the institution shares with its volunteers in the success of achieving its goal
- COMMIT: volunteers commit time, money or both to benefit the institution; in turn, they expect recognition for their role in enhancing the museum experience for the public.

In the process of exploring ways to achieve these objectives, an underlying theme developed during the conference: the **diversity** among the participating organizations in size and structure (from gallery or museum units, to Board committee, to independent society), yet sharing a **common goal** to support the parent institution.

The logistics. The day started at 8:00 am with registration and a continental breakfast, followed by the program from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm with buffet lunch served on site and coffee breaks between sessions. The registration fee was \$65, including all food and beverages.

The recently expanded and renovated Museum of Anthropology provided a spectacular backdrop and exceptional facilities for the conference: the Michael M. Ames theatre, the community lounge and adjacent meeting room for the breakout sessions, and the Café MOA for food moments. MOA staff and several volunteers ensured the operations ran smoothly from greeting participants at the registration desk with a beautiful MOA bag containing goodies from MOA and VAG, to assisting speakers with the electronics, even providing flowers on tables.

In conclusion, participants commented positively on the value of having strengthened the network of sister organizations from cross-border Region 1, and taking home ideas to explore in their own organization. An exercise in lateral thinking!

Report prepared by conference organizing committee members: Annick Boisset, Grace Robin, Beverley Tamboline, Cathy Patel, Sheila Carnahan and Arlee Gale.
April 30, 2011