THE FAMILY THAT PLAYS TOGETHER
Building a Museum Community

Midwest Museums Conference 1995 Annual Meetings
Thursday, September 21  3:45 - 5:00

Tentative Agenda

3:45 - 3:55 GENE: Opening remarks and audience participation
3:55 - 4:05 DEBBIE: Chicago Area Registrar's Council
4:05 - 4:10 Discussion
4:10 - 4:20 DAN: Chicago Museum Exhibitors' Group
4:20 - 4:25 Discussion
4:25 - 4:40 GENE: Chicago Museum Softball League (video)
4:40 - 5:00 Open discussion

OPENING REMARKS

Good afternoon and welcome to "The Family That Plays Together: Building a Museum Community." My name is Gene Dillenburg, and I am Coordinator of Special Projects in the Exhibits Department at The Field Museum in Chicago.

Museums come in all shapes and sizes, from massive institutions such as The Field Museum to small galleries or historic houses which may have a staff of one.

We cover a wide range of disciplines: art, history, science, nature, culture, with nearly infinite divisions of each.

And even within our institutions, museum professionals perform an astounding variety of functions: curation, conservation, education, exhibition, security, maintenance, administration, finance, etc. etc. etc.

With all this diversity, it may seem we have little in common. But in fact, we are all interconnected. I know whenever I do an exhibit it affects not only the Exhibits and Collections Departments, but also Education, Visitor Services, and Housekeeping, and possibly Security, Special Events, Public Relations, and a whole host of others.

This session will discuss ways in which museum professionals can get together to discuss common concerns. To get things going, as long as we've got a captive audience, of museum professionals, we thought we'd do a little experiment.
We'd like everyone to talk to the people in your row and come up with three items you all have in common. No matter how different your institutions or your job titles may be, find three things you all are concerned with or interested in. And if you're not in a row, find one.

(break; get a few responses)

OK. Obviously, despite all of our differences, the fact that we work in museums means we have a whole suite of common concerns. And since those concerns are common to all museums, none of us need face them alone.

This afternoon, we will hear from representatives of three professional organizations, all active in the Chicago museum community. Debbie Grinnell will tell us about the Chicago Area Registrar's Council; Daniel Weinstock will discuss the Chicago Museum Exhibitors' Group; and then I will return with a video presentation on the Chicago Museum Softball League.

Each presentation will last about 10 minutes, and will be followed by a brief question-and-answer period. And if we can hold to our schedule, we'll have 15 or 20 minutes at the end for a general discussion about what you are doing in your communities, or what you can do. But first, here's Debbie...

SOFTBALL SPEECH

Shifting gears from the sublime to the ridiculous...

The Chicago Museum Softball League has been around for about ten years. It's a very loosely organized affair -- any museum that can round up ten healthy bodies once a week can join. The level of play is about what you would find at your average company picnic -- I'd say that about half of the home runs hit last year started out as singles, but through a comedy of fielding and base-running errors the batsmen found themselves making it all the way home. The league is co-ed and open to absolutely anybody. We have curators, registrars, security officers, educators, exhibits people, the whole gamut. There are no playoffs or championship, although there has been talk of a season-ending barbeque.

The league is not without its problems. Some have complained that the season, which runs from late May through late August, is too long. This past year many smaller museums joined the league, only to find they couldn't field a team, which led to a lot of forfeits -- which are demoralizing for both sides. And there's a disparity between the intensity of the teams -- those that have uniforms and tryouts and such on the one hand, and the others, those like The Field Museum, who's coach's number-one responsibility is making sure there's enough beer.

Nevertheless, the league is a valuable asset to the museum community, providing opportunities for socializing, networking, and working out aggressions, as you shall see in tonight's feature presentation...
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

We've got Registrars, Exhibits, and Athletics represented here; what other sort of museum professional groups might there be?

What is happening in your community? What would you like to see happen?

How can professional groups interact and cooperate?

Both the softball league and the exhibitors' group have suffered attendance declines this year. Why? Is it cyclical? Do organizations have a life-span? What can be done to reverse the trend?

What other activities, besides monthly meetings, might an organization undertake? (road trips, workshops / seminars)