

THE CENTER

Nature Center Directors and Administrators Section Newsletter

Mission: To provide leadership and inspire excellence in nature center administration



Important dates

Submit newsletter articles and information by:

March 1, 2009

July 1, 2009

September 1, 2009

December 1, 2009

Roadshow Impression

Claire R. Coco, Director
Angela Evans, Education Curator
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Angela Evans and I attended our first NIW back in 2006. We didn't register early enough to attend that year's Interpreters Roadshow – and we had no idea what we missed. In 2007, we made sure we registered as early as possible, guaranteeing our spots in Wichita's Roadshow. WOW. Two full days of touring facilities big and small, while benefiting from the experiences of peer professionals – it was like therapy! We realized that there are many others out there struggling with dwindling budgets, employee retention, programming issues, visitor management issues, public perception, marketing problems, volunteer coordination... (I could go on and on) WE WEREN'T ALONE!

That we weren't alone in our struggles was a most empowering idea. We had peers to reach out to in the future. We had other nature center directors and education curators to contact for advice. And we felt a renewed sense of our own facility and programs as we offered up advice to others based on our experience.

Portland's Roadshow was just as sustaining. I joked stating, "If my agency realized that the most benefit we get from attending the NIW was what we gain during the Roadshow, they'd send us home on Wednesday." Of course, the insight we gain from the concurrent sessions is critical to our NIW experience, but what stays in our minds is our conversations and contacts made during the Roadshow. Our agency may not yet recognize the value of interpretation in what we do on a daily basis, but it does support our yearly attendance at the NIW, and our participation in the Interpreters Roadshow.

With a bit of luck (and early registering!), Angela and I will remain on the Roadshow's roster for years to come. We hope to see y'all in Hartford in 2009!

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Life is too busy... think about this!

When things in your life seem almost too much to handle, when 24 hours in a day are not enough, remember the mayonnaise jar and the 2 Beers.

A professor stood before his philosophy class and had some items in front of him. When the class began, he wordlessly picked up a very large and empty mayonnaise jar and proceeded to fill it with golf balls. He then asked the students if the jar was full. They agreed that it was. The professor then picked up a box of pebbles and poured them into the jar. He shook the jar lightly. The pebbles rolled into the open areas between the golf balls. He then asked the students again if the jar was full. They agreed it was.

The professor next picked up a box of sand and poured it into the jar. Of course, the sand filled up everything else. He asked once more if the jar was full. The students responded with a unanimous, yes. The professor then produced two beers from under the table and poured the entire contents into the jar effectively filling the empty space between the sand. The students laughed.

Now, said the professor as the laughter subsided, I want you to recognize that this jar represents your life. The golf balls are the important things---your family, your children, your health, your friends and your favorite passions---and if everything else was lost and only they remained, your life would still be full.

The pebbles are the other things that matter like your job, your house and your car.

The sand is everything else---the small stuff.

If you put the sand into the jar first, he continued, 'there is no room for the pebbles or the golf balls. The same goes for life. If you spend all your time and energy on the small stuff you will never have room for the things that are important to you.

Pay attention to the things that are critical to your happiness. Spend time with your children. Spend time with your parents. Visit with grandparents. Take time to get medical checkups. Take your spouse out to dinner. Play another 18. There will always be time to clean the house and fix the disposal. Take care of the golf ball first---the things that really matter. Set your priorities. The rest is just sand.

One of the students raised her hand and inquired what the Beer represented. The professor smiled and said, I'm glad you asked. The Beer just shows you that no matter how full your life may seem, there's always room for a couple of Beers with a friend.

A Parallel Thinking Primer

By Frank Partridge

Book Review

What if there was a framework that would help you think differently?

The concept of lateral thinking is presented in “Six Thinking Hats” by Dr. Edward de Bono. The premise is that the inherent confusion of using the Western thinking model causes all of our difficulty in communication. We descendants of the Western thought process model have evolved from the Socratic/Platonic through Aristotelian/Locke modes where “argument is everything”, and “something must fit into a box”; if it’s not in the box it must be something else. The concepts are based on seeking elusive and often redefined “truth.”

The Eastern model is based more on “what can be” rather than “what is.” Dr. de Bono gives the example of evaluating a large house for purchase. The Western model is to position a person in the front, one in the back, one on a side, one inside, and so forth. All can argue (via radios) over what is the correct value of the house. In the Eastern paradigm, all move as a group from one vantage point to another. Argument is not possible, since all persons view with the same perception. If there is disagreement over a perception, it is not argued but is kept in parallel as part of the whole view.

The Six Hats method is about having all persons think while wearing the same hat, which is a figurative way to say everyone is thinking with the same goal at the same time.

- The White Hat is factual, neutral and objective.
- The Red Hat is the emotional view.
- The Black Hat is careful and cautious, the “devil’s advocate” hat.
- The Yellow Hat is the sunny and positive hat.
- The Green Hat is associated with fertile growth, new ideas and creativity.
- The Blue Hat... the color of the sky above all else... is for the organizing process.

Dr. de Bono provides many examples of how this process can be used to make your organization more efficient and effective. It can also be used in your personal thought processes by taking a more holistic view instead of only taking the traditional, linear method of incrementally finding solutions to problems. Confusion can be prevented by simply thinking about only one aspect of something at a time.

What if there was a framework that would help you think differently?

Roadshow Stops



Participants in the 2008 Interpreter's Roadshow!

See insert for highlights of the 2008 Interpreters's Roadshow!

2008 Interpreter's Road Show 2008 Portland, Oregon

Once again, 27 hearty souls headed out from the Oregon Convention Center on a quest to discover how other interpretive centers operate. Each site provided information on their daily operations. The group was able to mingle and network with each other to share how their own organizations operate during the van rides, meals and those few moments spent parked on the sides of unknown streets looking for the restaurant that was supposed to be expecting us for dinner!

The group first headed out to Tryon Creek State Park on Monday, November 10th. The park was located about 15 minutes from downtown Portland and in a very suburban neighborhood. This land was slated for development until a group of local residents banded together and worked with the state to buy it. The Friends Group maintains a strong relationship with the State Parks, providing seven full-time employees to assist with fundraising, programs and other pertinent projects for Tryon Creek State Park. Another unique element found there was their 'Natural Cycles' Trail. Local artists submit applications for outside natural sculptures. The pieces chosen are assembled on site and remain in place for a year. The natural weathering process is a part of the artwork. Interpretive panels are erected at the beginning of the trail so that visitors can hear directly from the artists' about their pieces.

The second stop brought us to Jackson Bottom Wetlands Preserve, a former private, non-profit entity that is now part of the local government. This 725-acre wildlife preserve is located within the city limits of Hillsboro, Oregon. The Preserve is a fantastic place to learn about wetlands and the plants and animals that rely on that habitat. The interpretive center has a huge Eagle's nest as its centerpiece, surrounded by engaging exhibits that can be changed out easily.

Monday ended with a stop at the Tualatin Hills Nature Park and Interpretive Center. This organization is part of a Parks District, which overlaps several political jurisdictions. The Interpretive Center operates a nature-based preschool and has a separate building built specifically for that purpose. The park can be accessed by Portland's light rail system, which has a stop right along the trail.

The group was ready for more on Tuesday, so we headed out for Tillamook Forest Center, a little more than an hour away from Portland. This newer center opened in 2006 and was built sustainably. The roof collects rainwater, which averages 120", a year into a pond around the building. This water is used to flush the building's toilets and for their fire suppression system. It has also provided a breeding pond for local amphibians! The building is heated with wood pellet furnaces, which utilize the leftover waste products from the lumber industry and creates very little waste when burned. The exhibitry is designed to tell the story of the Tillamook Forest-fires and all. Every sense is engaged and the hall is designed in such a way to lead you right outside into the Forest.

The final stop of the day was at the Audubon Society of Portland. What a gem of a place in the middle of the city! We toured their wildlife rehabilitation building and discussed the services they provide to area residents concerning injured and orphaned wildlife, not just birds! We had time to discuss their educational programs, from school groups to day camps and the ecotours they offer and what benefits those programs had for their organization. But for many of the participants, the highlight was walking to the Old Growth fir trees. It was amazing to see such giants so close to downtown Portland!

Fund raising, friend-raising, exhibit planning & construction, volunteer programs, educational programs, gift shops were just some of the topics we covered during the two day trip. I cannot thank the organizations enough for opening their doors to our groups and sharing how they do their jobs with us. It was a valuable learning tool and from what was said on the pre-workshop evaluations, everyone walked away with information they needed. Please go to www.naisections.org/NCDA to see pictures of the trip.

Roundtable Session Held on Nature Center Issues at NIW

NCDA's officers held a roundtable-style workshop session at the NIW in Portland, OR. This session continued a discussion of current nature/visitor center issues and possible solutions. Topics of interest included funding sources, marketing, programming, and ways NCDA can promote and serve the membership.

Funding was a major topic of discussion and identified potential new sources for nature centers. Some recommended sources include:

- Land & Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) - <http://www.nps.gov/lwcf/>
- Forest Legacy Program - <http://www.fs.fed.us/spf/coop/programs/loa/flp.shtml>
- Preserve America - <http://www.preserveamerica.gov/federalsupport.html>
- Local Public Works/Utilities for partnerships/funding opportunities
- Local/State agencies for ADA compliance, components, and programs
- Local banks, REI or other outdoor stores/corporations
- Partnerships with chambers of commerce/tourism departments/business associations

Some ideas for operations and grants included these:

- outreach programming as a funded/sponsored program
- utilizing state/regional power companies for funding/conservation initiatives
- funding seasonal positions through partnerships and sponsorships
- using a friend's group/support group to fund positions
- collaboration with universities/community colleges for support
- capitalize on "children outdoors" initiatives and efforts

Another important topic was the continued struggle to produce and create topical and relevant exhibits for centers in a cost effective manner. An idea was presented to create a "Craig's List" type of bulletin board for trading/selling/lending existing exhibits, graphics, and interpretive materials. NCDA/NAI would maintain the listing and help centers connect with each other to make exhibit development easier and to share materials.

Attendees were also reminded of the services offered by NCDA such as the website, the newsletter, and the Roadshow prior to each NIW. The Association of Nature Center Administrators (ANCA) <http://www.natctr.org/> website and other resources were also mentioned.

NCDA's officers will strive to improve our newsletter and to fill the website with helpful resources. Look for more in-depth information on these and other topics in upcoming publications.