

Mormon Pioneer National Heritage Area

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Program gives training, resources for small-museum exhibits

MT. PLEASANT — The Mormon Pioneer National Heritage Area* (MPNHA) is encouraging museums throughout the south-central Utah area to take part in the Utah Humanities Council's (UHC) Museum Interpretation Initiative.

The initiative program is a series of three full-day workshops giving hands-on training about museum interpretation and exhibit development. The workshops prepare participants to develop exhibits at their own museums. Participants will receive additional one-one-one assistance from workshop leaders, as well as free equipment and materials from the UHC.

Museums must apply to participate, and the application deadline is quickly approaching — January 13, 2012.

The project is an effort to help small museums display their collections in a way that better tells the stories of their communities. Indeed, the full name of the effort is "Museum Interpretation Initiative: *Telling Our Stories.*" ** It is in telling those stories that the goals of the UHC, MPNHA, and local museums converge.

"In promoting and sharing the compelling history of the Mormon pioneers, their achievements, and their continuing legacy in central and southern Utah, the Mormon Pioneer National Heritage Area supports efforts to help communities appreciate their own stories," said Monte Bona, executive director of the MPNHA.

"Along with that, we want to assist institutions such as museums in communicating

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those stories to their own residents as well as to visitors,” Bona said. “Museums throughout the heritage area should take full advantage of the Museum Interpretation Initiative opportunity provided by the Utah Humanities Council.”

In addition to the assistance provided by the initiative program, museums that participate could also be eligible to apply for matching grants from the MPNHA to help improve the quality of their exhibits.

Often, small museums have exhibit items, but perhaps lack the know-how or other resources to display them in ways that are most interesting, informative, and effective. The Museum Interpretation Initiative seeks to provide some of what those museums lack.

Five museums in the MPNHA took part in last year’s workshops, and found the program to be hugely beneficial. Small museums in Fairview, Mt. Pleasant, Manti, Ephraim, and Spring City (all cities in Sanpete County, the northernmost part of the MPNHA) developed exhibits after training and other assistance from the UHC’s program. The exhibits include:

- “Talkin’ Tukey” at the Fairview Museum of History and Art, about the role and importance of turkeys and the turkey industry to Sanpete County and its residents in both ancient and recent history, and today.
- “Pioneer Texting” at the Mt. Pleasant Pioneer Museum, about how the Deseret Telegraph was the “information highway” of a century-and-a-half ago, and how it changed the region at a time when Pony Express mail was the only other means of communication.
- “Early School Houses in Manti, 1850-1900” at the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers Patten House Museum, which is actually housed in one of the first schoolhouses built in the small town. The exhibit highlights buildings, teachers, and limited resources available to early teachers and students.
- “How Do You Do?” at the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers Hansen House Museum in Ephraim, which illustrates the very different ways in which

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An exhibit at Patten House DUP Museum in Manti illustrates what early schools were like in Manti between 1850-1900. The exhibit was done in conjunction with the Museum Interpretation Initiative: Telling Our stories, a project sponsored by the Utah Humanities Council and Utah Museums Association to help small museums in Utah improve their exhibits.



rural Utah's frontier women in the late 1800's lived than do their counterparts today.

- "Entertainment Tonight Spring City Style (1915-1927)" at the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers Spring City Museum, which exhibits items turned up during a recent renovation of Spring City's entertainment hall (Victory Hall), revealing the building's previous role as the center of social life in the small town.

To a person, exhibit coordinators at all of these museums spoke of the value of the program to their exhibits and museums generally:

- "I do believe that a project like this can have a major impact on bringing different community entities together. I believe this has given a much needed boost of interest in the museum. I also believe that with the skills learned and tools provided, that this museum will continue to refine, perfect, preserve and promote its place in our little community." — Margaret Riding, Hansen House Museum.

- "Before the project, our schoolhouse was nice to look at but lacked professionalism. Visitors just came in and walked around and looked. Now we have labels that interpret the photos and artifacts, hands-on items, and a self-guided tour." — Ruby Stull, Patten House Museum.

- "The project provided us with a more educated view of what some visitors might look for when visiting our museum." — Peter and Kathy Hafen, Mt. Pleasant Pioneer Museum.

- "The program has inspired us to do better and has helped us to look at our museum in an entirely different light." — Lana Gardner, Spring City DUP Museum.

- "The experience has revitalized our energy, enabled us to improve communication skills among our staff, and opened new possibilities for our museum." — Suzan Rasmussen, Fairview Museum of Art and History.

More information and the application form are available online at <http://www.utahhumanities.org/MIIHome.htm>. Or, contact Megan Van Frank at UHC at (801) 359-9670, ext. 110, or at vanfrank@utahhumanities.org.

For information about applying for grants from the MPNHA, contact Monte Bona at (801) 699-5065.

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*The Mormon Pioneer Heritage Area (MPNHA) is a federally designated area of central and southern Utah running along the beautiful and historic U.S. Highway 89—including the scenic by-ways of Utah state routes 12 and 24 which both intersect with U.S. 89 and, together, form the MPNHA's Boulder Loop. The area includes the counties of Sanpete, Sevier, Piute, Wayne, Garfield and Kane.

The Utah Heritage Highway 89 Alliance is the local coordinating entity of the MPNHA. Its purpose is to preserve, tell and interpret the stories, history and heritage of the area, and to promote its culture and value.

www.mormonpioneerheritage.org

** The Museum Interpretation Initiative is a joint project between the Utah Humanities Council and the Utah Museum Association, with major funding provided by the Institute of Museum and Library Services.