The dynamic Perot Museum of Nature and Science opened in Dallas on December 1, 2012, expanding its exhibits and programs into a new building near downtown. AAMV asked Fyve Hilton, CVA, manager of volunteers, about the impact of the transition on the volunteer program and the museum’s active roster of 1,350 volunteers.

When planning for the volunteer program’s transition to the new Perot Museum, what steps did you take?
Active planning began in fall 2011, but I began noting areas for improvement and instituting changes to the program structure soon after I joined the museum in summer 2010. We spent much time observing, asking questions, talking to staff in many museum departments, and reflecting on the parts of the current program that volunteers enjoyed. Many people were involved, but the planning team consisted of the director of guest services, the chief operating officer, and me. One of my favorite parts of the planning was holding a focus group with several volunteers. I also met frequently with the director of public programs.

Did you look to other museums as examples?
My predecessor had done some benchmarking, and I reviewed and expanded some of the information she had gathered. Some of my benchmarking involved reviewing websites, and I held several phone conferences and corresponded via email with five other museums. I did have the opportunity to visit personally for a day with the volunteer department staff at another museum.

Did you change the volunteer program model?
Before the move, we invested quite a bit of time in infrastructure review and improvements. We updated our volunteer handbook, policies and procedures, job descriptions, and website information. We introduced new job types, set minimum hour requirements, and structured volunteer benefits. Orientations were scheduled months in advance; uniforms were selected and ordered; and shift times and number of volunteers were computed. Some of these revisions would stay in place, yet we knew that many would need to be revised again and again as we learned about our new building and how visitors, staff, and volunteers used it.

How did you engage volunteers in the transition?
Three months before our transition the new model was in place, and I... continued on page 4
Letter from the President

AAMV is a member of the American Alliance of Museums’ (AAM) Council of Affiliates, which gathers organizations of varying sizes and focuses to share information and discuss common interests. The council communicates with the AAM Board about its members’ concerns and supports AAM’s advocacy for the museum world. Each member organization prepares an annual report that presents its accomplishments and provides an honest evaluation of its challenges—and we all have some! I hope that the following report will give AAMV members a better idea of the AAMV Board’s work over the past year.

Who We Are. The American Association for Museum Volunteers (AAMV) was founded in 1979 as a national organization to represent museum volunteers and staff members who work with them. Its purpose is to provide a network for the dissemination of ideas and information on the local, regional, and national levels.

AAMV is an all-volunteer organization with a board of 15 to 20 members who are museum volunteers/docents and paid staff who manage volunteer programs. We have no office space. Positions on the board include the president, vice-president, immediate past president, treasurer, secretary, program director, membership director, and two regional directors from the New England, Mid-Atlantic, Midwest, Mountain Plains, Southeastern, and Western regions, as well as several at-large board members. Regional directors serve as direct contacts with AAMV members in their regions. Board members come from across the United States. We try to hold board meetings twice a year: in the fall and in the spring in conjunction with the AAM annual meeting.

Membership. Three-fourths of our members are paid volunteer program managers or paid staff who have this function along with other job responsibilities. Members can be individuals or groups. We currently have 100 members who are up to date with dues and an additional 50 who are due to renew.

Communications & Initiatives. The aim of AAMV is primarily to support volunteerism and the development of professional volunteer management in museums through an exchange of ideas and information. Thus, communication is key to our work and remains a challenge due to time constraints of an all-volunteer board. We have maintained a quarterly newsletter, sent by email to most members but also available in print form. To ensure professional quality, we have hired a newsletter editor on contract. We are developing our website www.aamv.org so that it can better serve as a site for news and resources. However, we are limited by a lack of time and board expertise in this area.

AAMV has an active members-only listserv (since 2006) where questions and concerns are discussed and solutions offered. Members find it to be an extremely useful tool. Topics range widely, and participants often offer samples of volunteer handbooks, applications, and other documents related to volunteer program management.

We share information with members and nonmembers alike by participating in and presenting at local, state, regional, and national conferences and workshops. We organized two sessions for AAM in May 2013—“Transforming Museum Volunteering 101: Back to Basics” and “Transforming Museum Volunteering 201: Beyond the Basics”—as well as a Table Talks roundtable, “Talking Shop with Volunteer Managers and Docents.” AAMV Board members will participate in a session at the Southeastern Museums Conference Annual Meeting in October 2013 (see page 5), and AAMV will sponsor two sessions.

AAMV presented two successful webinars with AAM and Learning Times: “Planning or Transforming Your Museum Volunteer Program Infrastructure” on December 5, 2012, and “Staffing Your Museum Volunteer Program” on March 20, 2013. More than 150 people signed up for each program. We hope to continue this webinar series, which is based on the AAMV book Transforming Museum Volunteering: A Practical Guide for Engaging 21st-Century Volunteers.

Excellence. AAMV is often called upon to define standards for museum volunteer programs. Despite the range of museums and diversity of volunteer programs, we have drafted and continue to refine a set of standards for museum colleagues. The standards were published in our newsletter and are available on our website.

Challenges. As with any small, all-volunteer organization, the biggest challenge for AAMV remains the continued on page 3
limited time board members are able to contribute. Both professional and personal responsibilities have tested our capacity to pursue our goals: more regular newsletters, the development of our website, more communication with our membership and with each other, participation in more workshops at regional or local museum conferences, taking advantage of social networking to promote AAMV and museum volunteerism, and researching and pursuing ways to reach a wider museum community.

We are also challenged by an identity issue. Should AAMV focus its limited time and resources on serving paid museum volunteer program professionals, or should it develop initiatives that more directly serve museum volunteers? How can we focus our limited financial and human resources to best support museum volunteerism?

Vision. AAMV continues working to raise its profile in the museum world and to build its membership. We hope to continue expanding our programming presence at the AAM annual meeting and offering regular webinars. Because of the challenges described above, we will look more strategically at projects and basic tasks that are essential in fulfilling our mission. We will also re-examine our mission in light of a changing museum world.

Comments for the AAM Board. Our work with AAM on the development of webinars during the past year was gratifying and encouraging. We were also pleased to see “volunteer management” added to the list of “functional roles” on the annual meeting registration form this year. We continue to hope that volunteer program management will be viewed in the museum world as a field requiring unique professional training and skills and that this role will cease to be tacked on to the end of other job descriptions.

Lois Kuter, AAMV President
Volunteer Coordinator, Academy of Natural Sciences of Drexel University, Philadelphia, kuter@ansp.org
AAMV

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Perot Museum of Nature and Science continued from page 1

held an all-volunteer meeting to relay information about the move and future plans for the volunteer department. With approximately 100 volunteers present, we asked each to let us know if they planned on transitioning with us. A few chose not to, but the majority of our volunteer force was extremely excited.

To allow museum staff to adjust to our new home—and with construction in full force—we did have one month with no volunteer opportunities. During the transition, part of the Fair Park campus was still operating (and still does, as the Perot Museum of Nature and Science at Fair Park), and those volunteer opportunities were put on hold for a short period as well.

Once most of our staff was settled in the new facility, we held another large orientation. We encouraged volunteers to spend as much time as possible there to learn about the exhibit halls and become familiar with the building before it opened in December 2012. Much of this planning had to occur around the construction timeline. Two more large orientations for new applicants were held in early November 2012, and very soon after, we began organizing and scheduling volunteers for a number of “soft opening” events.

Since the building was new for everyone, including staff, I reassured all volunteers that it was perfectly acceptable to learn by working with the visitor to discover answers to basic questions—finding out where that restroom was, for example! Many of these events were structured in order to give us a good idea of traffic patterns, dwell time—all the nuances of public use. We requested constant feedback from staff, volunteers, and the public and established survey portals. A task force met each morning, seven days a week, before and for a while after opening, to go over survey results and make adjustments.

By opening weekend, we had resolved many issues, but as with any new building, we did work through some unexpected challenges. What an incredible learning experience we had! An interesting development for our volunteers was the need to serve as traffic coordinators. This became an additional volunteer post that we had not anticipated, requiring a lot of time and effort. For our opening, we focused on volunteers serving as greeters and way finders. We even placed them inside the elevators to help guests get from one floor of the museum to the next.

Were there other challenges during the transition?
One challenge was educating the museum’s staff and departments on the best ways to maximize the potential of the volunteer program, such as the ways volunteers may benefit a specific department or the most efficient procedure for finding a volunteer through our department. We resolved the challenge by taking the time and making the effort to explain how our volunteers could be of use and the protocol for letting our department know of a departmental need.

Have you made any post-opening modifications?
Each week, we realize that some procedure, schedule, or methodology needs to be changed. We have had to rethink the number of volunteers required in certain areas and adjust our available openings. We are delighted to have learned that our volunteers want to be involved in the future of the museum, which has challenged me and my staff to provide opportunities for growth. We’re always looking for ways to improve and streamline procedures, schedules, and methodologies, such as how volunteers sign up for special events and whether we hold more frequent, smaller orientations or less frequent, larger ones. Overall, the current program sets a standard for volunteers. For instance, if potential volunteers miss their interviews, they are given one chance to reschedule; the same rule applies to orientation. Our volunteers are expected to honor their hour commitment, and if they’re not able to, then they will be temporarily removed from the roster.

How has the museum’s success affected the volunteer program?
I decided from the beginning that I would do my very best to take care of continued on page 5
AAMV regional director Richard Harker will moderate an AAMV-sponsored roundtable workshop on “Museum Volunteering: Overcoming Obstacles and Strategies for Success” during the Southeastern Museums Conference (SEMC) annual meeting in Savannah, Georgia. The informal, discussion-based session on Tuesday, October 8, from 3:30 to 4:45 p.m. will explore common challenges in volunteer management: recruitment, retention, training, reliability, and more. Participants will discuss different scenarios and possible solutions, brainstorm new ways to enhance a volunteer program (including engaging university students), and create a checklist for success. For more information about the October 9–13 annual meeting, visit the SEMC website: http://www.semcdirect.net/conference.

Perot Museum of Nature and Science continued from page 4

the museum’s needs and the needs and passions of my volunteers. If there is one pressure, it would most likely be attributed to the large crowds that visit. We find that we need to spend a little more effort than we may have originally thought in determining how our volunteers will do in certain areas that have the potential for being more crowded than others.

As you look around the museum, what is most gratifying?
What makes me proud? The volunteer who comes to the volunteer lounge at the end of the shift, eyes aglow, telling us how much fun the day has been. The volunteer in his 70s who has developed and implemented a way to train and engage teen volunteers in the Bio Lab, an exhibit in the Being Human Hall where visitors participate in experiments to find, stain, and examine their own cheek cells, isolate and spool DNA from new wheat germ, and more. The volunteers who proactively update and even write the docent guides for our exhibit halls. The comments from guests about how friendly and knowledgeable our volunteers are. An amazing array of individuals have chosen to share their talents and time with us, and each day I feel a deep sense of gratitude for what they bring to the table.

What words of wisdom do you have for volunteer program managers who are preparing for an expansion?
Plan, plan, plan, and plan some more! Developing timelines and project goals is crucial. Be flexible. Be ready to ditch it all and begin again. Have your volunteers be a part of the planning. Always let new volunteers know that you are learning, and ask them to learn along with you. Most of all have fun. Expansion is an incredible opportunity full of unknowns, challenges, “aha” moments, team building, surprises—and, in the end, the chance to look back and say, “Job well done!”

To learn more about the Perot Museum’s volunteer program: http://www.perotmuseum.org/about-the-perot/Volunteer.
Heard on the AAMV Members’ Listserv

Q: Our board would like us to add a dismissal policy to our docent policies. What should this policy include?

A: Jan Milroy, manager of volunteer services at Living History Farms in Urbandale, Iowa, shares the language her museum uses in its volunteer handbook:

1. The avoidance of tardiness or absenteeism is vital to the success of the daily operation of LHF. In case of an illness, vacation or other absence, please contact [name, phone, and email address, manager of volunteer services and alternate staff contact]. A replacement may need to be found immediately, depending on your site assignment and work schedule.

2. To ensure a satisfying experience for the volunteer and museum, if a concern should arise by either party, immediate discussion is important. Please contact [manager of volunteer services]. While we anticipate a long and enjoyable relationship with all of our volunteers, in the unfortunately circumstance that misconduct may occur, the manager of volunteer services will take necessary remedial action. Remedial action may include any or all of the following:

   • Written warning
   • Suspension from volunteer assignments
   • Dismissal as a LHF volunteer

   Examples of misconduct include the following, nonexclusive list:

   • Performing volunteer position while under the influence of alcohol or drugs
   • Theft
   • Deliberate injury to another person or property
   • Violation of safety rules or engaging in conduct that creates a safety hazard
   • Repeated unexplained absences
   • Failure to cooperate and work harmoniously with other staff and volunteers
   • Failure to remain neutral or nonadversarial on many subjects which may be brought up in the course of contact and interpretation with visitors
   • Unauthorized promotion of personal causes, political opinions, or religious beliefs while representing Living History Farms

For more responses to this question and many others—or to start a new discussion topic—visit the AAMV members-only listserv at http://groups.yahoo.com/group/AAMVlist.

Teens’ Vision for Docent-Led Tours

When the Milwaukee Art Museum asked teen interns what makes a successful school tour experience, the interns had insights worth implementing. Chelsea Emelie Kelly, the museum’s manager of digital learning, reflected on their good ideas in a blog post for Art Museum Teaching (http://bit.ly/11q8diH).

How do we engage teenagers at art museums? Our museums offer powerful classes, internships, and multivisit programs, but their reach is limited. For many teens, their first (and sometimes only) exposure to an art museum is through a school field trip. Most conversations about suggestions and challenges for school tours consider the needs and perspectives of the museum educator and the classroom teacher.

But what about asking the students themselves? At the Milwaukee Art Museum, we did just that. Five of the museum’s teen interns held a conversational panel for our 200+ docent corps about engaging with high schoolers. What I found particularly powerful about the teens’ suggestions is that they are not only relevant to teen audiences, but younger and older visitors, too. You can find the video recording of their session on the museum’s website at http://mam.org/learn/teens.php. Here are some of my take-aways, illustrated with the students’ own comments:

Take the time to get to know each other (even if the tour is only an hour). I began our sessions with a “check-in” activity as a way for us to get to know each other. If you know your audience, you can tailor your tour to their interests from the get-go.

Be aware of your group—and do what they want to do. Be in tune with your group and their reactions. If something’s not working, move on rather than pressing it.

Be yourself. Share your passion, and be friendly and relaxed. As Sensei said, if you are enthusiastic about what you’re discussing, chances are good that your group will respond to your enthusiasm.

Museum tours can be intimidating. Teens are aware that docents and educators are extremely knowledgeable, and it’s scary to offer your thoughts in front of not just a docent but also your peers. To support conversation, Steven suggested using clear, simple language (without being patronizing), and Rosehaydee encouraged us to acknowledge student voices, even if they’re not the “right” answer, so teens know they’re being heard.

Technology is a tool, not a goal. When asked if museums should use more technology to engage teens, responses were mixed. Yes, technology is cool and lots of teens use it. But not all teens have access, and technology is not always successful or necessary. If the continued on page 7
AAM TrendsWatch Report
AAM’s Center for the Future of Museums’ second annual future forecasting report—TrendsWatch 2013—highlights trends that museums and their communities should track and respond to. As food for thought and fuel for conversation, the report is recommended reading for staff and volunteers who want to connect their work to a broader context. For each trend, the report provides a brief summary, lists examples of how the trend is playing out in the world, comments on its significance to society and to museums, and suggests ways museums might respond. Links to additional resources are also provided. Download the report here: http://bit.ly/15gigaC.

Online Volunteering Wiki
A developing knowledge base on Internet-mediated volunteering—also known as online or virtual volunteering—is now available on the ICT4EMPL Future Work Project wiki. International volunteerism consultant Jayne Cravens is leading this research project to examine how volunteering using information and communications technologies (ICT) can lead to new forms of work and create pathways to employability. The wiki also features useful information about current trends and practices in online and mobile volunteering. Learn more here: http://ict4empl.wikispaces.com.

Millennial Impact
The 2013 Millennial Impact study is the latest annual guide to help organizations better understand the generation born between the early 1980s and the early 2000s, immerse them in a cause, and maximize the impact of their interest, time, and giving. The top finding: Millennials support causes they are passionate about, not institutions. For museums, this could mean crafting different marketing messages that stress their public value and impact. People in this age group volunteer because they enjoy peer involvement, like to hear about the positive results of their work, and prefer online training. Download the executive summary here: http://bit.ly/18AfG0C. For a blog post on engaging millennials: http://bit.ly/15gkHKk.

How Millennials Prefer to Learn about Volunteer Opportunities

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Source: 2012 Millennial Impact study

Teens continued from page 6
activity can be done equally as well or better in analog format, it’s probably not worth it to try to use a gadget. But if it’s something that can only be done with technology—like Skyping with an artist or out-of-town group—then take the time to give it a try.

Remember that we all learn differently. To combat teen boredom, Rosehaydee suggested calling on specific individuals to get them to pay attention, but Sensei noted that sometimes it can be just as effective to try a pair-share or solitary writing activity. This reminded me that museum educators and docents have a responsibility to provide many different kinds of learning opportunities. We need to know when to support and when to gently challenge them.

Respect the group; think of them as family. One of my favorite suggestions from the teens was for docents to think of them as their children or grandchildren. To me, this gets to the heart of working with any visitor who comes into our space. Respect them—their prior knowledge, their interests, their reasons for coming to museums in the first place. We can learn from visitors as much as (if not more than!) they can learn from us.
What is AAMV?

There are more than one million volunteers and volunteer program managers in all categories of museums in the United States. Founded in 1979, the American Association for Museum Volunteers (AAMV) is America’s only national association dedicated to the paid and unpaid museum staff who work together. AAMV is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization.

Who are AAMV Members?

We are volunteers, docents, and paid museum staff who bring a wealth of experience and ideas in promoting volunteerism in museums and in starting or improving museum volunteer programs. We welcome members from zoos and aquariums, botanical gardens, historic houses, and other cultural organizations with an educational mission.

What does AAMV do?

- Promotes professional standards of volunteerism
- Provides a forum for the exchange of ideas and information
- Offers opportunities for continuing education through panel discussion and workshops at local, regional and national conferences
- Encourages volunteers and volunteer managers to become familiar with project and programs both locally and nationally
- Informs and supports museums and volunteerism in advocacy for legislation at local and national levels
- Accomplishes these goals in cooperation with museum directors, staff and boards of trustees

Membership Benefits …

- Participation in a vibrant Members-Only listserv
- Quarterly newsletter
- Access to information to create and sustain a museum volunteer program
- Opportunities to take part in workshops and presentations at state, regional, and national meetings
- Access to state and regional representatives as well as a nationwide network of volunteer management professionals and experienced volunteers
- Advance notice of AAMV publications, such as Transforming Museum Volunteering, plus workshops, presentations, and meetings

Become an AAMV Member Today!

Name ___________________________ Institutional Affiliation ___________________________ Date __________

Mailing Address ________________________________________________________________

Phone ___________________________ Fax ___________________________ E-mail ___________________________

Volunteer ☐ Staff ☐ Title (if staff) ___________________________ Department ___________________________

Check here if you would like to be added to the listserv ☐

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Make checks payable to AAMV. (Membership by PayPal is available online at www.aamv.org)

*Allows 3 individuals from same institution access to AAMV listserv

**Individual membership plus $65 deductible contribution

If you have any questions about your membership send an email to Lois Kuter at kuter@ansp.org.