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# Visitors' Voices

THE NEWSLETTER FOR THE AASLH VISITORS' VOICES AFFINITY GROUP

December 2012 Volume 5

## Meet the New Visitors' Voices Co-chairs



Hi, my name is Kerry Lippincott and I'm the executive director of the Geneva Historical Society in Geneva, New York. When people ask what I do, the simplest answer I've come up with is that I tell stories. Whether through programs, exhibits or publications, my job is sharing the stories of the community and how local people,

events and places fit into state and national history. I also do a lot of listening. In addition to their own personal stories, visitors have given me, among other things, their opinions on speakers (the good, the bad and the ugly), possible exhibit topics or books for the gift shop and suggestions for the refreshment table.

Over the years, my "listening" has taken many forms. Tracking attendance figures, collecting zip codes, conducting community conversations and surveys, and Post-it notes in exhibit spaces have been some of my methods. Why evaluate? Evaluation provides important information that can help me better fulfill the museum's mission and demonstrate the museum's value to stakeholders. But, I like to bring it back to the visitors. Acting on the gathered information proves to visitors that I'm listening and the museum is really *their* museum.



Hi, I'm Kristie Smeltzer, and I work at Thomas Jefferson's home, Monticello, as manager of visitor evaluation and correspondence. Since my position is relatively new and my background is

## Visitors' Voices

**Visitors' Voices** is a quarterly e-newsletter for members of the Visitors' Voices affinity group. Membership in the group is free. Join us by either [updating your record](#) in AASLH's database or [creating a new one](#). Be sure to look for the list of affinity groups and click on Visitors' Voices.

## Want to Learn More?

Check out our web page at [www.aaslh.org/visitors-voices.htm](http://www.aaslh.org/visitors-voices.htm) to learn more about the Visitors' Voices affinity group.

## Small Museums Toolkit Now Available

neither in visitor studies nor history, I've spent the last two years doing a lot of listening to and learning from colleagues at Monticello, other museum professionals, and evaluators. In my role, I use the information provided by visitors in various ways to advocate for them and enhance the overall visitor experience at Monticello. What visitors share helps us as a staff better connect with them as we strive to achieve our mission and vision.

One of the things I've learned is how important it is for those of us interested in visitor research and evaluation to come together. Though visitor studies and program evaluations at history institutions are becoming more common, we don't have as many resources and as much experience as other museums and cultural sites do. This is why I'm so grateful to be co-chairing the Visitors' Voices Affinity Group and look forward to us sharing and learning as we go.

### Members of the Visitors' Voices Advisory Committee

**John Blexrud** worked for thirty years in the newspaper industry in a variety of positions including research manager, marketing director and new business development. He currently lives in Asheville, North Carolina and is owner of Market Soundings, Inc., a full-service research firm working primarily with museums and nonprofit organizations.

After a thirty-year career as a social work practitioner, administrator, professor and evaluator, **Sheila Brommel** recently joined the Minnesota Historical Society as evaluation coordinator. While new to the history museum field, in previous work with nonprofits she has implemented and managed a multi-state quality outcome initiative as well as collaborated on national outcome studies. A member of the American Evaluation Association and the Minnesota Evaluation Studies Institute, she continues to volunteer as an accreditation peer reviewer, team leader and commissioner.

**Chris Catanese** is the director of visitor experience at the New-York Historical Society. He has worked at several other New York City museums including the Museum of American Finance where he served as director of education. In his current position, Chris is responsible for all elements of visitor services, accessibility and hand-held interpretation including audio tours and apps. Chris enjoys working on issues related to overall visitor experience and how that leads to more positive learning experiences.

**Marjorie Fechtig** is a retired public school speech pathologist. She has served on the board of directors of the White County Historical Society in Carmi, Illinois for about twelve years. During her service as board president, the historical society hosted two Smithsonian exhibits and



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### Join the Discussion

To join the Visitors' Voices discussion group, go to the [Visitors' Voices homepage](#) and click on the "Join" button.



### [Check out Visitors Count!](#)

The most comprehensive visitor research tool available to mid- and large-sized history organizations!

### More AASLH Resources

started teas and tours for second graders and Pioneer Days for fifth graders at the society's historic house museum.

**Conny Graft**, Williamsburg, Virginia, is a consultant in interpretive planning and evaluation for museums, parks, and other nonprofit organizations. She retired from the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation in 2010, where she worked for twenty-seven years as director of interpretive planning, director of interpretive education, and manager of research and evaluation. She is the coauthor of the chapter "In Lieu of Mind Reading: Visitor Studies and Evaluation" in [The Small Museum Toolkit](#) and has published several articles in *History News* and *The Visitor Studies Journal*. She is past president of the Virginia Association of Museums and past co-chair of Visitors' Voices.

**Anne Guernsey** is manager of institutional advancement at the Connecticut Historical Society in Hartford. She is relatively new to evaluation but educated herself through research and by networking with colleagues in the field. She gets excited when sheet upon sheet of Excel data come together with formulae and one can see the "big picture." She feels fulfilled when anecdotal comments can be substantiated by stats. Evaluation has enabled CHS to make smarter decisions and better serve its audience. Anne is a past co-chair of Visitors' Voices.

**Dale Jones**, founder of *Making History Connections*, helps museums and sites create experiences that connect with visitors. Through designing live interpretation – museum theatre, tours and living history; training staff; and conducting visitor evaluations – he assists sites in determining what types of experiences resonate with visitors and then developing engaging interpretation that connects with them. Dale lives in Glenwood, Maryland and is a past chair of Visitors' Voices.

**Doug Price**, a native of San Antonio, Texas, has been associated with the Witte Museum, Spanish Governors Palace, San Antonio Conservation Society, Imperial War Museum London, and the British Museum. Currently the executive director of the Brenham Heritage Museum in Brenham, Texas, Doug believes strongly in the power of museums to build lasting inter-organizational partnerships and in the rights of a community to govern their own heritage. Currently Doug is involved in the creation of three international partnerships with museums in the UK and Germany, as well as with a number of organizations in Texas.

### Visitors' Voices in Birmingham

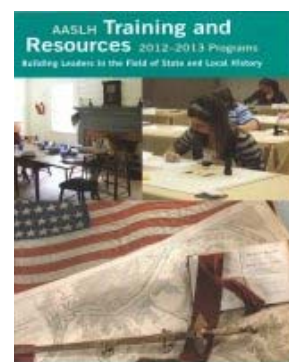
Members who have attended the early morning Visitors' Voices breakfast events at past AASLH annual meetings will be happy to hear that we've snagged a luncheon slot for the 2013 annual meeting. Hurray! So make plans to



[Read how this program can benefit your organization!](#)



**AASLH PATHWAYS** is the must have guide—written specifically for history professionals interested in creating successful public programs from the beginning to the end, including how to market your program, and get others involved.



The **NEW** AASLH Training and Resources 2012-2013 Programs - Building Leaders in the Field of State and Local History. Everything from traditional workshops and online courses to vast networking opportunities. AASLH has the tools you need

join us in Birmingham, Alabama on September 18, 2013 when our group will hold a joint lunch meeting with members of the Corporate History affinity group. Bookmark <http://www.aaslh.org/am2013.htm> for updates on AASLH's 2013 annual meeting and look for more information in our next newsletter.

for an effective career and successful organization.

### HOT TIP!

Check out the American Evaluation Association's *AEA365: A Tip-a-Day by and for Evaluators* blog at <http://www.aea365.org/blog/>. Covering topics from innovative evaluation methods, data visualization, and useful technological tools, this chock-full-of-info blog can be read on the website as well as subscribed to via RSS feed or email. The blog includes valuable tips and "Rad Resources" to help you learn more and get connected.



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