Greetings from your Chairperson!

CurCom turns 40 in 2015!

To celebrate, CurCom is working with AAM staff to coordinate a webinar about label writing. Save the afternoon of February 25, 2015 for what promises to be an inspiring look at different styles of labels that make exhibition interpretation successful.

Label writing is never a one-size-fits all. In this webinar you will hear insights from past judges of the Excellence in Label Writing Competition about the variety of labels they thought were effective and the reasons why. Presenters include: Jeanine Head Miller, Curator of Domestic Life, The Henry Ford (CurCom), Liza Reich Rawson, Senior Exhibition Developer and Project Manager, Liberty Science Center (NAME) and Beverly Serrell, Serrell and Associates (EdCom). The moderators will be Leslie Bedford, The Museum Group, and Greg Stevens, Assistant Director, Professional Development of AAM.

Label writing is a process. This webinar is just the first of several label-writing programs throughout 2015. The annual Excellence in Label Writing competition is underway for Atlanta 2015. If you attend the annual meeting, check out the exhibit of winning labels in the Marketplace of Ideas. You can also look at archived examples on the AAM website. [http://aam-us.org/about-us/grants-awards-and-competitions/excellence-in-label-writing](http://aam-us.org/about-us/grants-awards-and-competitions/excellence-in-label-writing)

Registration will open in the next several weeks. This webinar will be valuable to both new curators and others who are learning how to develop exhibits and to seasoned professionals who want to reinvigorate their writing style. Sign up and encourage your co-workers to sit in on the discussion. Better yet, invite your colleagues from other institutions to add to the conversation by convening a networking opportunity at your institution and use your own exhibits to extend the learning opportunity beyond the webinar.

Inside

Stay tuned for even more label writing educational opportunities in the coming year!

### A Case Study:
**Dear Boston**

Ellen Endslow
CurCom Chairperson

### CurCom Election Info

5

Director of Collections/Curator
Chester County Historical Society

### Emergency Preparedness

6
Thanks to all our contributors and writers for this issue of Update.
A Case Study in Quick Exhibition Development:

**Dear Boston: Messages from the Marathon Memorial**

*Anne Rebecca Starr, Project Manager for Dear Boston, with Emily Shafer, Project Intern for Dear Boston*

In the days following the April 15, 2013, Boston Marathon bombing, independent curator Rainey Tisdale advocated for the city’s cultural institutions to collect and interpret this event. Her efforts eventually resulted in the exhibition *Dear Boston: Messages from the Marathon Memorial*, on view at the Boston Public Library from April 8 through May 11, 2014, for the bombing’s one year anniversary. The exhibition featured objects from the makeshift memorial that sprung up in Copley Square, which were later collected by the Boston City Archives.

Exhibition developers usually have a year or two to plan a show, but by the time Rainey secured collaborators, a venue, and funding for this unforeseen project, she had 10 weeks to go from initial planning meeting to opening for a 3,500-sq.-ft. exhibition. She quickly assembled the core team: content developer Matt Kirchman, graphic designer Helen Riegle, me as project manager, and herself as curator. This team’s skills overlapped significantly, which helped us collaborate efficiently and fill in for each other as needed to facilitate concept and design development, object selection, and label writing.

However, because of the time frame and the project’s unusual administrative structure, we constantly needed to adapt typical museum practices on the fly, modifying responsibilities, communication systems, and processes as we went. We also often needed to go outside our areas of expertise to get things done, from obtaining live trees for the Hope Tree interactive to painting borrowed display cases before the installation.

Rainey had a pretty good idea in advance of what she wanted the exhibition to be. It needed to be simple, using only objects from the makeshift memorial, plus graphics from already identified photographers to provide context and fill space. The bombing itself and the upcoming trial would not be included—the event was still too raw to be historicized effectively. The exhibition would be experiential, not intellectual, to help visitors once again feel the world’s love and support for Boston and move forward in a positive way. Besides, there was no time to carry out in-depth research or write lengthy text.

In the months since the memorial had been dismantled, the objects had been dried, fumigated, and boxed, but there had been little time for significant collections review. So that’s where we started. Themes emerged quickly and didn’t change substantially. On her first day at the Boston City Archives, Rainey identified about 15 message types, which we quickly narrowed down to 11. In one of our many conference calls, the core team settled on organizing the exhibition as

*Continued, Page 4*
an emotional journey in 3 sections, progressing from the initial shock and horror to more thoughtful viewpoints about what had happened, and finally, to a sense of hope.

Throughout February, team members met at the Archives to sort through hundreds of boxes of objects to make selections. Rainey warned us after her first visit, “Bring tissues—the first box you look through will put you back in the first week of the bombing.” And she was right. Although we didn’t have a lot of time to linger over individual objects and think about what they meant, we all were often tearful during the sorting process.

A Museum Studies instructor, Rainey then brought in two former students—Emily Shafer and Tiffany Locke—to help with collection review and preparation. Team members paired off and condensed the usually time-consuming curatorial activities—categorizing, cataloging, and photographing—into a quick-fire process. In addition to recording information typical for a museum object list, we included fields specific for this project—message category, names, and text. About 500 objects made this first cut.

We took one day to narrow down the list. We physically sorted objects into their message categories, and ranked them from “message spot on” to “a little off topic” to “tangential.” We also figured out how much material would fit in each display case, selecting the most evocative items while trying to maintain a diversity of object types and media. In certain categories, it was difficult to find a balance between paper and 3D objects for visual interest. The final list comprised about 240 objects, including 150 pairs of running shoes.

In the next few weeks, we continued this breakneck pace as we cleaned and prepared the objects for display, wrote the text, and designed and produced the graphics. We stayed on schedule because we always made the project a priority, reviewing materials immediately after receiving them, no matter what the hour.

This exhibition was a labor of love, by Bostonians for Bostonians. It required tremendous effort and flexibility to produce it in such a short timeframe. The payoff: during its five-week run, Dear Boston received 52,000 visitors. Even more rewarding than the crowded gallery, however, was the visitors’ reactions. They lingered. Some came back multiple times. They left powerful messages on the four Hope Trees. And they cried. The collective energy and the emotional catharsis in the gallery were palpable to all who entered. One year later, the objects from the makeshift memorial became touchstones, helping visitors reflect on their experience and articulate the ways they had come to terms with the bombing.
The officers of CurCom are completing their terms at the Atlanta 2015 Annual Meeting. The following slate will be voted on in Winter 2015. Please look for the election e-mail from AAM after the holidays. The Treasurer position will be eliminated. AAM now handles all financial transactions for Professional Networks.

2015 Curators Committee Officer Slate

Chairperson
James Burns is Director (and de facto Chief Curator) of the University of Arizona Museum of Art in Tucson, AZ. Most recently he held the position of Executive Director for the Desert Caballeros Western Museum in Wickenburg, Arizona, where he transformed a once small-town historical museum into a nationally recognized center for Western art, history, and culture. James holds a B.A. in History from the University of Arizona, an M.A. in Public History from Arizona State University, and a Ph.D. in Educational Policy Studies from Georgia State University. He is a graduate of the Getty’s Museum Management Institute, and has worked in history, anthropology, and art museums since 1990 at organizations in Arizona, Georgia, Virginia, and Louisiana.

James has served on a number of state and regional museum association boards and currently serves as the Vice Chair of CurCom, a Board Member-At-Large of the Western Museums Association, a Commissioner on the Arizona Historical Advisory Commission, as a Board member of the American Heritage Center LGBTQ Archives of the Rocky Mountain West at the University of Wyoming in Laramie, as a peer reviewer for the Museum Assessment Program, and as a reviewer for AAM’s Accreditation Program.

James has been involved with CurCom for 10 years serving as a Board-Member-At-Large, regional representative, fellowship committee chair, and member of the Code of Ethics Task Force. James looks forward to serving CurCom as Chair, championing the importance of curators in the profession and working with AAM to further its strategic objectives.

Vice Chairperson
Cindy Olsen is currently the Director of Material Culture at the Edsel & Eleanor Ford House. She is responsible for the oversight and care over 10,000 objects and pieces of art in a 30,000 square foot mansion in the Detroit Metro area. In her 15 years in the museum field, she has had the opportunity to work in a wide variety of museums and historic sites. Early in her career, she developed a collecting plans, a collections policies and procedures manual, and a code of ethics for two different museums. She had the privilege to be part of developing a new museum including overseeing the development and research for 25,000 square feet of permanent exhibits. For seven years, she worked at the Minnesota Historical Society.

As Site Manager for the Alexander Ramsey House, she developed new programs that balanced the visitor experience with the care of over 14,000 original artifacts. As Administrator for the entire Minnesota state wide historic sites division, she facilitated communication, tracked budgets, and managed special projects.

In addition Cindy is a successful grant writer for collections care and preservation, has developed strategic plans, and has served as the treasurer of CurCom for the last six years. She was also a CurCom Fellowship recipient.

Secretary
Stacey Swigart is the Director of Collections & Research/Curator for Please Touch Museum in Philadelphia, PA. Previously, she served as the Collections Director/Curator for The Valley Forge Historical Society in Valley Forge, PA. She holds a BFA in Historic Preservation from Savannah College of Art & Design and an MA in Museum Studies from the University of Leicester. Stacey was President for the Council of American Revolutionary Sites and has served as a board member on a number of cultural and arts related organizations.

With CurCom, she has been a judge for the Excellence in Exhibition competition and currently serves as the 2015 coordinator. Her experience, research/lecture background includes an eclectic blend of museum and exhibition development, collections planning and policy development, major collections moves, museum education programs, Revolutionary War, the 1876 Centennial Exhibition, carousels, toys, play and childlife.
Winter storms. Tornadoes. Hurricanes. Floods. Earthquakes. Even man made catastrophes like chemical explosions or even terrorist events put collections at risk. Unfortunately, 8 out of 10 museums or cultural institutions either do not have a complete and up to date emergency response plan, or lack the trained staff or resources to carry one out. As ‘storms of the century’ seem to be appearing every few years, the need for an organized response to improve disaster preparedness, response and recovery have become more necessary than ever. Fortunately, a new initiative has begun in Massachusetts, has spread throughout New England, and is poised to have national impact.

Begun as a pilot program under an IMLS grant in 2007, COSTEP (Coordinated Statewide Emergency Preparedness) is a collaborative effort between multiple public and private offices, including the New England Museum Association, the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners, the Commonwealth Archives, the Northeast Document Conservation Center, the Massachusetts Historical Society, the National Park Service, the Department of the Interior, Harvard University, Tufts University, FEMA, MEMA and many other groups. The mission of COSTEP is to build and foster a statewide disaster preparedness planning process that serves the cultural and emergency management communities and addresses disaster mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery.

Under the pilot program, COSTEP developed and tested a model of community engagement to foster cooperative defense and mitigation efforts at the town level. The towns of Lexington and Salem were among first to be invited to participate in this effort. Meetings were held, gathering representatives from each towns respective cultural assets – curators, museum directors, librarians and archivists were introduced to emergency management personal and policies, some for the first time. From this meeting, a model was developed to approach other towns as well as groups such at the local Regional Planning Authority offices, to help spread the word and increase participation.

In 2011, COSTEP, now know as COSTEP MA (for Massachusetts) received funding from FEMA under the Hazards Mitigation Grant Program. This allowed for a dramatic increase in the outreach capacity of the initiative. This project was titled “Mitigation for Memory: Safeguarding Massachusetts Cultural History”. The primary goals of the project were:
Completion of at least 14 community meetings, hosting no less than three meetings in each of the four MEMA regions across Massachusetts

Completion of at least 6 meetings with various regional planning authorities in Massachusetts, with at least one meeting in each of the four MEMA regions

Hosting a series of four training sessions, one in each MEMA region

Development of a meeting ‘tool kit’, for the community meetings, including publications, promotional materials, and an informational video

Development of a framework intended to provide other interested parties a copy of the basic tools used and strategies learned in proliferating the COSTEP MA Mitigation for Memory project across Massachusetts.

At the same time that ‘Mitigation for Memory’ was being carried out across Massachusetts, similar initiatives were being developing in almost every other New England state. There are now analogs to COSTEP MA in Rhode Island, Connecticut, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine. Other communities including Salt Lake City, Utah and Savannah, Georgia have adapted the proposed amendment to the Massachusetts State Emergency Management plan drafted by COSTEP MA as the template for their own statewide emergency plan amendments.

The premise of COSTEP MA is straightforward: improve disaster preparedness and response from the institutional level up, while increasing awareness of the needs of cultural resources and participation from the emergency preparedness resources at the local, regional and national level. Beyond the most obvious reasons to preserve and protect our collective history

COSTEP MA does not attempt, nor does it expect, that cultural resources would ever take priority over life and limb in the event of a disaster of any scale. However, through the efforts of a trained and coordinated cultural resource community, damage to those resources can be mitigated, and with the cooperation and participation of the cultural community in it’s own protection and preservation, resources can be allocated more quickly and effectively in the event of an incident. The relationships developed by a COSTEP program between the cultural community and emergency management are invaluable, and critical to successful mitigation. As Salem Fire Captain Dennis Levasuer states, ‘you don’t want to be exchanging business cards on the lawn while your building is on fire.’

With the completion of the FEMA grant objectives in December 2014, a basic framework model that can be adapted to any community, region or statewide group will be made available free of charge through COSTEP Massachusetts and FEMA. For more details on the project, and to find out more about COSTEP in general, visit the COSTEP MA website at www.mass.gov/mlc/costep, or visit the ‘Coordinated Statewide Emergency Preparedness Massachusetts’ Facebook page.
Opportunity to Channel Your Inner Spielberg!

The Curators’ Committee of the American Alliance of Museums is celebrating its 40th anniversary. Help make it more meaningful by submitting a short video of the curatorial work you do!

Subject matter can range from showing off a favorite object in your collection to telling us why your office is equipped the way it is or even highlights of a typical day. It’s your chance to show off and get creative.

For more info, please contact Stacey Swigart
sswigart@pleasetouchmuseum.org

Image Credits:
Left: http://popperfont.net/2012/07/04/inside-the-museum-warehouse-amazing-photo-of-the-bird-specimen-storage-room-at-the-smithsonian/
Excellence in Exhibition Competition

The Annual Excellence in Exhibition Competition recognizes outstanding achievement in the exhibition format from all types of museums, zoos, aquariums, botanical gardens, and any other types of noncommercial institutions offering exhibitions to the public.

The competition is the joint project of the following Alliance Professional Networks (PNs): Curators Committee (CurCom), the National Association for Museum Exhibition (NAME), the Committee on Audience Research and Evaluation (CARE) and the Education Committee (EdCom).

Eligibility

Any non-commercial institution offering exhibitions to the public may participate. Exhibitions may have been designed by a commercial firm for a non-commercial institution. Each institution that enters must have a team member that is a member of the Alliance. The exhibition must have opened to the public between November 30, 2012 and November 30, 2014. To be eligible, exhibitions may not have previously won this competition. Exhibitions may be submitted only once to the competition.

Entry Fees

A $75 fee is required for each exhibition entered. Make checks payable to the American Alliance of Museums / Excellence in Exhibition. For multiple entries, submit one check for the full amount. For alternative forms of payment, contact the Competition Coordinator, Stacey Swigart sswigart@pleasetouchmuseum.org or 215-578-5163.

Notification and Awards

Each winning exhibition will be featured in a program session at the 2015 AAM Annual Meeting in Atlanta and a representative from each winning institution will be asked to do a short presentation. Winner(s) will also receive national recognition in Museum magazine as well as in the Fall issue of Exhibitionist.

Deadline

January 16, 2015

Download the entry form and view past winners:
Curatorial related sessions 2015 @ Atlanta
April 26 –29, 2015

- Big Deal: Large Objects, Expert Advice
- Focus on Archives: Museum Collections' Forgotten Stepchild?
- Collections Care Today: HHI 2014 Findings
- Collections Assessments for Small Museums
- Access from 1 Place-Artifacts, Archives, and Photographs
- Not for Display Only: Demonstrating collection objects
- Developing An Ethnographic Lexicon
- Copyright Licensing Legal Lab: Giving and Receiving
- Remembering the Past, Looking to the Future: SI Repatriation
- Accreditation 101: A Primer on the New Accreditation Process
- Addressing Gender and Sexual Orientation in Exhibitions
- Building Value: Historic Houses Serving Local Schools
- Surveying the landscape: accessibility and interpretation
- The Social Value of Bricks-&-Mortar Museums in a Digital Age
- Moving Collections from Onsite Cases to Online Conversations
- Passing it On: The Legacy of Great Exhibitions
- Helping More Teachers Discover Your Digital Resources
- Can I Handle It? Getting Kids Up-Close with your Collections
- Presidential Legacy and Interpretation (& Re-interpretation)
- Fading Memories: Perspectives on Remembering the World Wars
- Prototyping Interactives for Social Engagement
- Exhibitions Outside the Museum
- Re-imagining Family-centered Exhibit Design
- Spatially Literate Digital Experiences
- Exhibit Style Guides: They're More Than You Think!
- Object/Story Roadshow
- 27th Annual Excellence In Exhibition Awards
- Thinking visually: Creating integrated label graphics
- Anti-Orientalist, Community-Centric Exhibition Design
- Creating a Personalized and Shared Museum Experience
- Designers Deconstruct Success
- Achieving Competing Goals: Cold Storage and Energy Savings
- Systems Maintenance: Set it and Don't Forget It
- Best Practices in Museum and Cultural Property Security
- The Museum Is Obsolete: Culture Doesn't Live in a Building
- Accessibility and Inclusion: Creative Content Choices
- Using Our Words: Inclusive Language and Social Value
- Connecting Cultural Heritage through Migration Museums
- Museums Connect: Transcendence, Transformation & Triumph
- Advocacy in Global Museums: Empowering Local Communities
- Digital Storytelling: the Dream, the Team, the Results
- Tradition meets innovations; “Engaging visitors with intangible heritage”
- The British Museum in Pentonville Prison
- Changing Arctic: Barometer for understanding and action
- Tell Me Your Story: Curating Oral History for Exhibitions
- Rescuing Japan's Cultural Heritage
- Expanding Boundaries of Visual Culture in Hong Kong
- The Pontos de Memoria Program - A Memory Collection Project
- The 'Balaio da Capoeira' -Building a Mobile Museum in Brazil from Dream to Reality
- Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage with UNESCO
- Art for everyone. How to design a social inclusion program
- Interpretation of Heritage & its Social Role in Cuban Municipal Museums
Don’t forget to check out some of CurCom’s other resources...

SUBSCRIPTION AND MEMBERSHIP

Update is the periodic newsletter distributed to members of CurCom.

CurCom (Curators’ Committee) is a Professional Network (PN) committee of the American Alliance of Museums. All SPC members must join the AAM. Membership is obtained through:

Membership Department
American Alliance of Museums
1575 Eye St. N.W., Suite 400
Washington, DC 20005

Phone (202) 289 9132; fax (202) 289 6578; email membership@aam-us.org