

Education Coordinator Update- Winter 2019- (January 2020)

Amanda Kucharek

Over the last few months, I have extra busy with the fun work that comes with our “Season of Light”. This included nearly 500 guests who visited as part of the Winter Field Trip season. I worked closely with Johnathan in the planetarium as he shared our newest program with the public, Star of Bethlehem, and old favorite, Santa’s Secret Star. From December 9th-December 20th, we had approximately 465 students in the building (not including parents and teachers). Due to the way that the Thanksgiving holiday fell late before December, the field trip season was not especially long. No teachers were interested in coming the first week of December, and local schools let out for the holiday break on the 20th. This meant that we hosted 11 visits within a span of two weeks before Christmas (the 12th was cancelled due to a snow day). We had two visits who brought sack lunches, and two who visited the gift shop.

The school program included the following activities: Planetarium Show, Trees of Nations, Community Trees, Avenue of Shops, and a seasonal Craft. For the first week, the students used recycled toilet paper tubes to make Yule Logs, and the second week we made festive paper Dala Horses from Sweden. I knew that we wouldn’t have quite enough paper tubes to make it though the season, but rather than hold a last-minute collection, I felt it would be easier to make a natural transition into a different but comparable (skill-wise) activity. As is happened, the students of the second week trended to the younger side, so this as a coloring activity was better suited to their skills anyway. Depending on timing, some of the visits to the Avenue of Shops were accompanied by the story “The Night Before Christmas” (originally published in 1820s, would have been popular in Early Alpena).

Planning the trips with teachers went smoothly. I observed that most of the groups were 4th grade and younger, which meant that the teachers were mostly interest in the “Santa’s Secret Star” program. I did receive feedback from some of the teachers of the older students that they felt more comfortable with the Santa program due to the religious background being given in the new Star program. Although it falls in a realm of historical context, since the students are visiting the museum on a Public-School trip, the teachers just wanted to be safe. I understand, I think that this is a different situation than when a guest comes on a standard tour day and chooses their own planetarium showing. Only one class came with a substitute, but this was announced ahead of time, so I knew what to expect. Fortunately, as our schedule filled up, extra requests petered out. Many classes chose similar start and end times, which is very helpful for me, staff and volunteers. (Most common time- 9:15-11:45.)

Unfortunately, this season was peppered with many full schedules and illnesses for my volunteers, so there were a few days where we had to do a little strategic “musical chairs” on the schedule. Despite this, I received all good feedback from teachers, some who were here on their first visit. I personally contracted a head cold on some of our busiest days but made it out just fine in the end. I worked with a few new faces this season, which was especially helpful during these times. My youngest volunteer, Miriam Denstaedt is currently attending school to become an elementary teacher and needs volunteer hours for her degree. Claudine Howard is relatively new to the area and has a background in teaching and history. Through her time volunteering for the school trips, it seems promising that Claudine may join the collections effort. I’m very pleased that my volunteers seem to be satisfied and comfortable in their roles. At the beginning of the season, we hosted an optional lunch and information brainstorm session, which was attended by about half of volunteers. Unfortunately, it had to be held the

Wednesday before thanksgiving due to the schedule we were working with at the time. I hope to continue hosting these sessions and improve attendance over time.

Due to my own personal calendar, I had a vacation scheduled for the first week of November, which is of course when much of the Season of Light decorating begins. The Saturday before I left town, I did come and take care of most of the Avenue of Shops decorating that would need to be done before Katrina's ornaments (stitched cloth) were completed and sent from Texas. We kept things old fashioned and rustic, which was overall very fitting. I am so appreciative of the work that was done by volunteers and staff while we were gone.

As mentioned in my last report in the Fall, I had a few goals for the season of light opening reception. The Opening night has not been a real fundraiser, and we weren't seeing young guests, even though we had included family style activity stations for a few years. The Opening also seemed to be a party for frequent guests/supporters and wasn't seeming to pull many new attendees year to year.

So in order to:

- Draw in more first-time guests
- Draw in more families
- Be more inclusive/open to the community
- Offer more activities for all ages
- Serve as a small fundraiser

I proposed a few alterations for the Season of Light Opening Reception. This includes:

- Changing the time- Instead of an evening event, offer an afternoon (12:00 noon-2 or 4 pm)
- Changing the ticket price-\$1 admission/shows for each attendee (follow guidelines from LC and FH)
- Change the focus- Market this as a holiday open-house, family activity day. Planetarium shows are holiday themed, find a "Santa" or "Mrs. Claus" for the event. Crafts for kids + parents + grandparents. Instead of catering, think reception food (cookies, hot cocoa, cheese tray).

The Season of Light Opener was called a "Crafternoon" and held from 12:00-3:00. I think this was a good middle ground of time, not too long for volunteers, but long enough for guests to see everything in the museum. We were so fortunate in a little "Christmas miracle" in that our perfect Santa Claus had showed up to the Museum on an unrelated task during the preceding week. We hosted crafts and cookie/donut decorating stations on the lower level, and music and Santa on the Main floor. I think this was a good arrangement. More notes have been added to event notes taken this year. (See following pages). I worked with Katrina on a separate craft day aimed at adults, and despite our good intentions, we didn't receive any sign-ups. Afterwards, we found that showing off the completed crafts at the opener or reception may have garnered a little more interest than the online posts. I look forward to trying out new ideas for crafts in the future.

I had an interest in tying in a cookie exchange to the Opening, but it would have been far too many details to mix into an already full day. The cookie exchange became part of a December event called the "Evening of Lights", and while not heavily participated, did gain some supporters. We ended up with extra cookies, and some non-baking guests paid a donation to take them home. The left-over cookies were donated to a church activity the following day. The surrounding evening of lights event came to be hosted by the Founders, and you will find my reflection on the following pages after my event notes.