

Land of Extremes

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FIVE-YEAR PLAN

Strategic plan: looking back to move forward

BY NEAL V. HITCH | Special to this Newspaper / Imperial Valley

A Strategic Institutional Plan is one of the five core documents required to be an accredited museum. In May and June 2011, the Imperial Valley Desert Museum began writing a strategic plan after holding a series of public meetings to get input about what an open museum in Ocotillo might look like. The Strategic Plan that resulted from those meetings was approved by the museum's board of directors in August 2011. This week, we begin the fifth year of that five-year plan.

In the next few months, we will begin to create a new Strategic Plan that will take us into the future. The first step of a new plan is to look back at what we set out to accomplish in 2011.

At the beginning of the strategic planning process the Board of Directors at the museum expressed the following desired outcomes:

The open museum should:

- have an up-to-date, professional presentation
- meet the expectations of a public that has anticipated its opening for several years
- represent knowledge and excellent research

The board wanted a simple, easy-to-follow Strategic Plan and as written, we had four major objectives that we intended to complete.

Objective No. 2

Create active, dynamic programs and exhibits



The Coiled Clay Art program began during the summer of 2011, but was funded in 2012 and 2013 by grants from the Imperial Valley Community Foundation.

During the public forums, not one person ever said they wanted to come to the museum and read. Every comment was about "dynamic" or "interactive" exhibits. So, our first strategy became the development of interactive, informative exhibits, with a focus on technology. In August 2013, we contracted with Dean Weldon Exhibits to complete the design and development of a permanent exhibit. We completed design development for the exhibit in April 2014 and began installation of the exhibit in April 2015. The progress of the extensive design process and installation could be followed through these IV Press articles.

As this objective also included creating dynamic programs, we began to develop active programming based on traditional craft production as one of our first priorities in 2012. Our programs were kicked off by a small grant from the Imperial Valley Community Foundation. Through their youth grants programs we completed two years of testing and developing our coiled clay program. The initial grant was to take the program into art class-



Marcie Rodriguez, a new staff person at the museum, testing exhibits that were installed in April.

rooms and we were able to work with the SAVAPA arts program at Southwest High School and in the art classes at Holtville High School.

Coil Clay Art has now become one of our signature programs. It is the anchor of our fourth grade field trip program, and it is our major public outreach program we take to local fairs and festivals.

A dynamic hands-on field trip was developed in 2013. More than 400 students came through the program this spring.



Objective No. 1

Develop and pursue professional research, curation and education program

The priority at the museum in 2011 was the inventory and re-curation of the Imperial Valley College Archaeology Collection. This was a three-year program to pull artifacts out of temporary storage, re-bag them, research them and put them into an electronic database. The first staff person we hired had a specialty in emergency curation procedures. We also continued a Bureau of Land Management intern program that provided two archaeological interns that helped with curation. And as many people remember, in the end, the re-curation effort required over 6,000 volunteer hours and many, many people came out to the museum to help.

During the three year re-curation program there were several milestones and accomplishments. In January 2012, we installed our Curation Laboratory. In April 2013, we



Volunteers in the lab in 2012. Over 6,000 volunteer hours were needed to complete the re-curation of the IVC Archaeological Collection. PHOTOS COURTESY OF NEAL V. HITCH

brought a ceramic conservation specialist in for eight weeks to complete an assessment and inventory of the 219 ollas in the collection. In August 2013, we completed the re-curation of the IVC archaeology collection.



Stan Rodriguez is featured in the first Kumeyaay Stories of Change video to be hosted on the Museums website.

Objective No. 3

Emphasize voice of Native Americans past and present

In 2012, we received funding to develop a Native American Intern Program. Frank J. Salazar, III, from the Campo Kumeyaay Nation, came to the museum through this program. He was brought on staff in 2013 to coordinate the Intern Program, and was hired as our Cultural Collections and Projects Manager when we began the design of the permanent exhibit. He has been a key member of our exhibit team.

Currently, Frank, along with a new staff person, Marcie Rodriguez, has been working to develop a new project, Kumeyaay Nation: Stories of Change. This project, funded through a Cal Humanities grant, took the raw footage from the Emmy-nominated documentary "First People, Kumeyaay" and published interviews and oral histories that were recorded but not edited into the final version of the documentary. The museum has been editing short videos and putting them on YouTube.

Through these videos, oral histories that would otherwise never be seen our available to the public. Additionally, we are developing resources that can be used in the classroom. Our edited videos can be seen on the Imperial Valley Desert Museum's website, www.ivdesertmuseum.org, where they help expand our understanding of life in the desert, and the connection between all the people who have lived here.

Objective No. 4

Develop sustainable funding

Securing annual funding for a new museum has been the most challenging. Our goals in 2011 were to develop funding for the exhibit and develop a \$1.5 million endowment. These seemed like dreams.

Through mitigation funds and grants, we have been able to raise over \$800,000 for the installation of the permanent exhibit. We have secured a small portion of our annual operations through the mitigations from clean energy projects and we have developed a strong membership base that is very supportive.

In December 2014, we were awarded a National Endowment of the Humanities Challenge Grant that over the next four years will help the museum develop an endowment to support key staff positions including the Head Curator position and the Cultural



The museum hosted a series of Friedraisers over the last year that raised awareness and funding for the new endowment.

Collections and Programs Manager position. The first year of this grant ended on July 31, and the museum, with the last-minute help of our members, raised our necessary match of \$195,000.

The success of this NEH grant is an indication of how much has changed at the museum in the last four years. There was a time in 2011 when we were writing plans on paper, and we were really happy that we were successful

doing that! And now we see ourselves as successfully raising \$200,000 a year to create permanent funding for the future.

Over the next year we will be setting the direction for what the museum can become in the next five years. If you like what we have been doing at the museum, or you like these articles, come be a part of that planning. We are excited to think about the possibilities.