Grant opens doors to sharing cultures

A

n important goal in the design of the Desert Museum’s new permanent exhibit was to show the important balance between science/technology and the culture of the earliest peoples of the Imperial Valley. When people talk about the “humanities,” what they mean is the process of learning how to think critically about the world and what it means to be human. Basically, we study the humanities because we desire to understand the lives and life experi-

ences of other people.

Stories of change

In December, the Desert Museum was awarded a Cal Humanities Community Stories grant to inte-

grate Kumeyaay “Stories of Change” into our permanent exhibit.

Cal Humanities is an inde-

pendent nonprofit partner of the National Endow-

ment of the Humanities that works to connect Cali-

fornia to ideas and to under-

stand our shared heritage 

and diverse cul-

tures.

They promote the humanities as rel-

evant, meaningful 

ways to understand the human condition.

The grant provided the Desert Museum with access to over 70 hours of raw footage from oral histories recorded for the award-winning, Emmy-nominated documentary “First People-Kumeyaay.”

The award of this grant makes it possible to include unseen interview footage by Kumeyaay culture bearers and tribal members that would not otherwise be viewed by the public.

This is a unique oppor-

tunity for Native American culture bearers to tell their own stories to new audi-

cences, and for that audience to reflect on how they inter-

act with a landscape that the Kumeyaay have traditionally inhabited for over 9,000 years.

Eventually, some of these stories will be made available online into the Lake Cahuilla Ob-

ject Theater diorama in the museum’s new permanent exhibit.

Mexican and Kumeyaay grants will allow us to install new computers and computer 

equipment to even more 

will explore our community’s 

shared, unique land of ex-

tremes.

Online viewing

While only a few, represen-

tative videos will be included in the museum exhibit itself, 20 videos will be available on YouTube, hosted through the museum’s website, al-

lowing these stories to reach an even wider audience.

We hope that the videos will be a new resource that will engage people in their classrooms, at home, and will encourage an increased understanding, appreciation and awareness not only of Kumeyaay culture, but also of the uniqueness of the Imperial Valley.

The first video is already available by going to the museum’s website at www.desertmuseum.org.

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the idea of shared identity in a changing landscape and to share their thoughts and ex-

perience with others. Does finding similarities within a seemingly different culture strengthen connec-

tions to a broader commu-

nity? After listening to the Kumeyaay stories, does the viewer’s perception of the landscape change?

Does our diverse communities tell the same stories about living and 

playing in the desert?

These are questions that can, and hopefully will, con-

tinue long after the museum staff has officially ended the grant project.

This project will lay the groundwork for future video exploration (70 hours is a lot of stories to tell!) both online and within the Museum’s walls.

And, like the Internet it-

self, the only boundaries this project will have are those of the imaginations of its users. Neal V. Hitch is director of the Imperial Valley Desert Museum.

TOP LEFT: Marcia Rodriguez, a new part-time staff person at the Desert Museum editing video clips for the Cal Humanities grant.

TOP: Cal Humanities Community Stories logo. ABOVE RIGHT: The Lake Cahuilla Ob-

ject theater and hands-on exhibit, part of the new perman-

ent exhibit at the Desert Museum, was designed with 

areas available for video projection so that the exhibit could be expanded in the future.

Above: As part of this grant, Conveyor Group has developed a new dynamic museum logo that will be used on all new videos produced by the Desert Museum. Photo courtesy of Conveyor Group.

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