

Land of Extremes

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NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

Museum, staff and goes to benefit from grant

In August 2011, the Imperial Valley Desert Museum created a Strategic Plan for opening the museum in Ocotillo. Of the four main goals, the last one was “Develop Sustainable Funding.” This week the museum moved forward with that goal and established its first endowment to support permanent staffing.

In 2011, funding the Desert Museum seemed like a pipe dream. We had very little money in the bank, one person on staff, and we were hoping to open the museum with a temporary art exhibit sometime in 2012. We have not quite achieved all the goals of the funding goals established in the 2011 Strategic Plan, but we have come a long way.

National Endowment for the Humanities Challenge Grant

In December 2014, the museum received a \$265,000 challenge grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. This was the single-largest grant given to a museum in California in the 2014 grant cycle. There is a catch to the NEH grant — it requires a 1-to-3 match. NEH is an independent federal agency created in 1965. NEH has a mission to serve and strengthen our republic by promoting excellence in the humanities and conveying the lessons of history to all Americans. They accomplish this mission by awarding grants for top-rated proposals examined by panels of independent, external reviewers. NEH grants typically go to cultural institutions, such as museums, archives, libraries, colleges, universities,



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE Humanities

public television and radio stations.

Within the Imperial Valley, we have a rich culture and history that is humanities-rich.

At the museum, we worked hard for two years to develop a good grant application and to develop a successful fundraising track record that we

felt would be necessary to get a grant award from NEH.

We were excited to be awarded the grant, but it requires a lot of work, that is why it is called a “challenge” grant. Each year the museum will need to raise \$195,000 in non-federal dollars, which will be matched by \$65,000 federal dollars from NEH. At the end of

the four-year grant, we will have built a million-dollar endowment.

Our first year ended on July 31, 2015, a combination of clean energy mitigation funds, private donations and our members, we made our match this year. On Aug. 19 we endowed \$259,311 in an account with First Foundation Bank.

Our NEH Endowment Challenge grant is all about sustaining jobs at the museum.

The grant specifies that dividend and interest earned from the endowment would fund two permanent positions at the museum — 100 percent of a part-time Cultural Collections and Programs Manager position and 50 percent of a Head Curator position.

The Cultural Collections and Programs Manager is an innovative position and is becoming the most important program at the museum. In the past, many archaeological museums imposed a non-native cultural bias in their interpretations describing who Native Americans “were.” Our goal is to include the voice of Native American both past and present so that the



Anne Morgan came to the museum as an intern; in 2014 she returned for nine months as a contract archivist; in January 2015 she was hired as curator in support of IID Local Entity. PHOTOS COURTESY OF NEAL V. HITCH

artifacts in our care confirm who people “are.”

The position is designed to be held by a local tribal member and secures a Native American tribal liaison that infuses living culture into our collections, programs and outreach efforts. The position provides credibility for the information disseminated in our programs and exhibits, and serves

Jobs, jobs, jobs

as a bridge between Yuman language preservation projects, oral and spiritual tradition and archaeological narratives — a connection vital to meeting the needs of our diverse communities.

The head curator is one of the key positions at the museum. According to the job description, this person “implements museum professional practices matching national standards and IVDM policies in regards to artifact acquisition, de-accessioning, preservation, research, interpretation and presentation.”

This staff position also oversees and manages educational, volunteer and grant programs. The head curator coordinates public programs and ensures the integration of exhibition and education objectives. They develop field

trips. The job requires someone to wear many hats; but at its core, this position is responsible for the long-term preservation and storage of the collections at the museum.

Frank J Salazar III, is currently serving as our cultural collections and programs manager.



Thanks to our membership

The NEH Endowment Challenge grant will require large donations from clean energy companies if we are going to successfully fund these two permanent jobs. That is no secret. It will also require a commitment from our members over the next four years.

Since January we have had 90 individuals give matching funds to the endowment grant. Nearly one-third of our members gave donations to the endowment above and beyond their regular membership and other gifts. This is a statistic that any museum would be proud of, but it is especially impressive in our small community.

What is even more impressive is what happened next. At the beginning of July, we were \$22,000 short of making our annual goal of \$195,000. Over the month we sent out emails and a

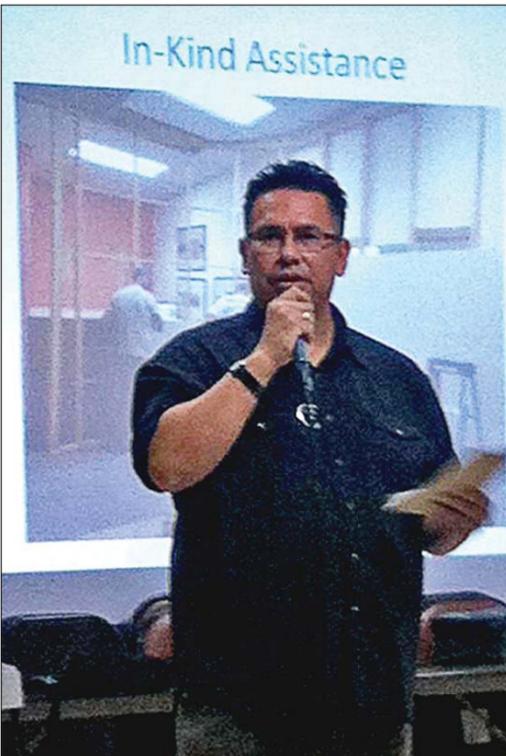
mailing to our members. We are not in a big market, and we do not have members with deep pockets. We were overwhelmed with the response.

Eighteen members stepped up to the challenge and sent in donations to see that we met our full match.

This included donations of \$5,000, \$2,000 and \$1,000. On the last day of the month we got a call at the museum, and one of our members gave \$10,000 to ensure we met our goal — the single largest donation we have ever received

from a member.

Thanks to our members we are moving forward and on the path to sustaining the exciting programs and activities that we have built over the last four years. Thank you.



ABOVE: Anne Morgan leads a fourth-grade field trip in June.

LEFT: Frank J Salazar III, cultural collections and programs manager; presents on the new exhibit at a Fundraiser in El Centro in May.

FAR LEFT: The museum will hold ten Fundraisers a year as small fundraising events to support the NEH endowment. In May, Neil Zinn hosted a behind-the-scenes tour of the new exhibit at the museum in Ocotillo.