

NEWS

Heritage Museum receives large, prestigious grant

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By Peter Woodbrook For Vashon Heritage Museum • August 25, 2022 1:30 am



The Vashon Heritage Museum recently received a National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) award of \$287,000 which will fund the update and renovation of the Museum’s permanent exhibit space.

The museum is one of only five organizations in the state to receive the prestigious award — and by far the smallest organization of the five to win the grant. Other organizations in the state to win NEH funding were Evergreen State College, the University of Washington, the Museum of Flight Foundation and the Wing Luke Memorial Foundation.

In total, the NEH pledged \$31.5 million in grants for 226 projects around the country. The Heritage Museum’s \$287,000 grant is the 25th largest sum in this round of NEH’s funding.

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“This is a huge honor for a museum of our size to be recognized with a grant award from the NEH,” said Vashon Heritage Museum Executive Director Elsa Croonquist. “This award is the culmination of five-plus years of hard work from many past and current board members and trustees. It’s a confirmation of the quality of the hard work that has been done in the early design phase and development of the renovation project.”

The current permanent exhibit at the Vashon Heritage Museum was installed approximately 20 years ago, and although there have been updates and new content added throughout the years, the NEH grant allows the museum to fully update the text, interactives and the casework to fully tell the story of Vashon Island to recognize the contributions of diverse members of the community.

In its evaluation, the NEH praised the Museum's plan to create a new exhibit that connects island history with broader national and global themes.

"This is a well-thought-out and designed exhibit that identifies five key 'turning points' in the island's history that are both self-reflective and analytical," the grant panel wrote. "Although it is essentially the local history of a small, somewhat remote place, the applicant clearly connects its history to broader national and global themes. This is really a top-notch effort by a local museum."

The museum has a strong portfolio of special exhibits throughout recent years, such as "Natural Wonder: An Island Shaped by Water," "In and Out: Being LGBTQ on Vashon Island," and others, in which the Museum has worked closely with community experts to develop and present relevant and important exhibits.

The new permanent exhibit will continue this effort for community collaboration in order to elevate diverse voices.

In 2020, the Museum contracted with Taylor Felt as a guest curator, who worked with members of the Permanent Exhibit Committee to research, plan, and implement community engagement for the renovation.

The new exhibit's goal is to provide visitors with an understanding and appreciation for the diverse groups who have called Vashon home and will provide an exploration of the distinctive cultural and social aspects of Vashon Island and its people. Felt has been working to research the collection, create a walk-through narrative, and write label texts. He is expected to complete the planning phase in 2023.

Dr. Nancy Bristow, a history professor at the University of Puget Sound and a long-time collaborator with the Heritage Museum, applauded the Museum on its achievement.

"Receiving an NEH grant is very difficult, and so this represents a wonderful tribute to the expertise, hard work, and insightful planning done by the Vashon Heritage Museum leadership, and all who have worked on this project," said Bristow. "It is great to see our local museum recognized for the treasure that it is. This grant will allow the Vashon Heritage Museum's inspired vision of an ever-more-inclusive museum to become a reality."

With the planning work for the exhibit well underway, the next phase of the Museum's permanent exhibit renovation is fundraising for the finished project — a task immensely helped by the NEH grant, as well as additional support already received for the project by 4Culture, Royal Little Family Foundation, and the Beardsley Foundation.

In the coming months, the Museum will share more information about the project and provide opportunities for the community to learn more about it and provide support for its completion.

Since the NEH's creation in 1965, it has awarded more than \$5.6 billion for humanities projects through more than 64,000 grants. An independent agency, it is one of the largest funders of humanities programs in the United States.

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