This issue of NEMA News represents a look ahead; our contributors have identified issues that confront museum leaders today, but they have also tried to imagine what new challenges and opportunities the future will bring. We know that communities and the role of museums within them are changing at an ever-increasing pace. New technology has transformed how people obtain information and how they view authority and expertise in any given subject. And yet our core missions remain the same.

When we asked a half dozen colleagues to identify the most pressing challenge of the future, we received a wealth of diverse and interesting answers. Two directors share their views on the rewards and difficulties of leading an institution from two different perspectives. This issue also includes Harold Skramstad’s NEMA Conference Keynote, an inspiring speech that is particularly relevant to museum leadership.

ON BEING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF A MUSEUM: THE CHALLENGES AND REWARDS

By Emily Curran
Executive Director, Old South Meeting House

A staff member and I used to share a running joke. Whenever yet another painfully difficult work situation arose that required handling by the Executive Director—such as dealing with a building disaster, firing an employee or having to make painful budget cuts—the inevitable conclusion would be “Reason number 101 why NOT to be an Executive Director.” Having lived through many such situations in fifteen years of serving as Executive Director of a museum, I have had ample opportunity to reflect on the challenges and remind myself of the joys of this work.

The challenges of serving as an Executive Director are many. In fact, there are so many that a survey of non-profit Executive Directors found that most vowed they would never again hold that position. Study after study has shown that non-profit Executive Directors face a rapidly multiplying list of expectations and challenges, and serve in their positions for shorter and shorter lengths of time.

Serving as the Executive Director of an organization demands a vast array of talents. Isolated and under pressure to make difficult and critical decisions in a timely manner, the position endows a weight of responsibility that can seem crushing at times. Long hours, anxiety about finances, fundraising and the complexities of managing people are all major stress factors for nonprofit chief executives.

Many of these challenges come with any leadership position in a non-profit organization having a board of trustees. The Executive Director is uniquely positioned between the board and the staff and faces pressures from both groups. Reporting to the board rather than any one person, the Executive Director is often juggling the differing expectations of this large group of di-

continued on page 4
FROM THE PRESIDENT

This issue of NEMA News is about museum leadership and where it is headed. It seems to me that there are a few key questions to ask. What changes in audience can we anticipate; what will future demographics look like? What kind of experience will visitors expect and demand?

We must face the fact that visitors are in part consumers with expectations. This is no longer a one-sided relationship in which we tell our visitors what we think they should know. The new visitor is used to much more give and take, much more “interactivity.” The cultural visitor expects museums to be “relevant”; they want to discover something new, to actively learn, to receive a rich experience, and to be exposed to the “real” thing. A value proposition between both parties needs to be clearly articulated.

So what skills are required to lead museums into the future effectively? Interestingly, the November/December 2007 issue of Museum News published an article by Leah Arroyo, “What They Really Want to Do Is Direct,” in which she advocates for a very specific and perhaps narrow set of qualifications. She quotes Phillip de Montebello, who characterizes the problem of training the next generation of museum leaders as “the battle of the ‘curator/director’ over the ‘administrator/director.’” Where in this argument are the educators, the marketing experts, and dare I say the trained managers; have they no leadership role to play?

I believe that we are likely to see a variety of talents serving leadership roles, and rather than finding leadership in a specific part of our field, say the traditional curatorial area, we will find talent in many unexpected places. We need to look for team building talent in our leaders. Museums are more about teams than about who is at the top.

Museums must find the right leadership fit specific to their needs. Perhaps an administrator is just the right thing; maybe a skilled educator or conservator is just the ticket. What we really need is passionate, imaginative, entrepreneurial and ethical leadership. We want people who love the collections they steward. I would argue that we want leaders who are not only institutional leaders but also community leaders and vocal advocates for the entire field. Museums are no longer ivory towers. If we are to thrive we must team with our communities and visitors, be relevant to and engaged with them but also try to connect to those who do not visit museums. The best leader listens, assesses, understands and assists the team in implementing new ideas. New museum leaders will probably come from unexpected places; all we have to do is to be open to new talent, provide careful mentoring, and let them in.

Kent dur Russell
President
Salary & Benefits Survey
NEMA will publish the 2007/2008 Salary & Benefits Survey in the summer of 2008. Many members tell us that this is one of the most used and valued publications that we create, and we have made a very important change this year to make the survey easier to complete. This year, the survey will be sent to member institutions electronically as an Excel spreadsheet and will also be available in hardcopy upon request. We hope that you will find this new format user-friendly and take the time to complete it. The Salary & Benefits Survey can only be as good as the data that we receive! To produce a useful and representative survey, we must have accurate responses from as many museums as possible. Those museums that complete and return the survey will receive a complimentary copy. All non-participating museums may purchase a copy of the survey at the member rate of $60.00.

NEMA 2008 Conference—Sustaining Communities: The Power of Museums
What does it mean to “sustain a community”? Museums hold public lectures and programs, partner with schools to meet educational goals and help drive the creative economies of their regions. The power of museums lies in what happens next. Consider the college museum that nurtures an entire community of student artists, faculty, and cultural agencies. Think of the small historical society or the large historic site that offers citizens a touchstone to their colonial history or their immigrant past or the children’s museum that fosters pride in a child’s own heritage and an appreciation for the richness of other cultures. Museums sustain and engage with communities in ways that are profound and immeasurable. Like the proverbial butterfly whose wings spark a tornado, museums gather forces and effect change even though we may not spot their subtle movements. Let’s rededicate ourselves to this endeavor. Join us November 12-14 in Warwick, Rhode Island, for “Sustaining Communities: The Power of Museums.”

Session proposals are due February 1. The Call for Proposals guidelines and form are available online at www.nemanet.org. Proposals will be reviewed in March and notifications will be sent in early April. We offer our welcome and thanks to Hope Alswang of the RISD Museum, Ron Potvin of the John Nicholas Brown Center and Pieter Roos of the Newport Restoration Foundation, our conference co-chairs. They and the Local Planning Committee will begin preparations in January.

NEMA Publication Awards
The NEMA Publication Awards honor excellence in design, production and effective communication in museum publishing. The Call for Entries will be mailed to all Institutional Members in early January. Please consider entering your 2007 publications: categories include books, posters, annual reports, invitations, annual fund mailers and websites. The deadline for entries is March 3.

New Graphic Identity
You may have noticed that NEMA has a new look! You can see our new logos and read more about the design process on page 13.

Successful NEMA Conference in Maine
We are still receiving high praise for the individual sessions, offsite and evening events, energy and enthusiasm that made up the 2007 NEMA Annual Conference in Portland, Maine. From the warmly-received keynote address by Harold Skramstad, co-author of The Power of Museums, Ron Potvin of the John Nicholas Brown Center and Pieter Roos of the Newport Restoration Foundation, our conference co-chairs. They and the Local Planning Committee will begin preparations in January.
verse individuals who are volunteering their time to the museum. At the same time the director supervises a paid staff and experiences all the complexities that entails. There are no counterparts to the Executive Director within an organization, and at times the old saying “it’s lonely at the top” rings very true. The Executive Director should not expect to be thanked or recognized for his or her work, but must be accountable and responsible for everything that goes on in his or her institution. The director must be able to take the heat when the going gets rough and share the credit with the staff when things succeed. Because of the central importance of the role of Executive Director there is a perhaps justifiable expectation of perfection in that role on a daily basis.

On a broader level, expectations of non-profit governance and management have continued to increase. Financial pressures have mounted over the past decade, as proliferating museums and other non-profits seek funds from the same donors and earned revenue sources, making each Executive Director’s position more and more challenging.

The majority of New England’s museums are relatively small—but this does not mean that they are less complicated to operate. To the contrary, in a smaller institution the position of Executive Director is often more complex, as he or she is required to wear multiple hats. Today a museum director is required not only to be well versed in the content matter of his or her particular museum, be it art, history, or science—but also to be highly skilled in planning, marketing, human resources and personnel, budgeting, financial management, risk assessment, fundraising, corporate sponsorship, building systems, retail and product development, property management, collections, preservation and maintenance. One minute the director is immersed in complex negotiations for six-figure funding, while the next minute he or she is confronting a toilet broken beyond repair by a visitor’s cell phone lodged inside. These unrelenting day-to-day demands must constantly be balanced with an institution-wide focus on a collective vision and ensuring that the museum’s many activities support its mission.

Unique Rewards

While many of the challenges inherent in the position of Executive Director are common in other non-profits, for me many of the rewards are unique to the museum setting. All of us who are employed in museums are fortunate to work daily with compelling structures, collections and content. For me this has always been a touchstone that renews my faith. Taking a moment to experience the museum collections, historic sites, exhibits and programs that draw so many people is a powerful reminder of the reasons that we are engaged with our work. Office spaces that are just steps away from objects that are uniquely beautiful, historic, or inventive offer opportunities for personal renewal.

Of course, in terms of tangible rewards, Executive Directors are usually the most highly compensated individuals in their institutions. This is a recognition of the unique role and responsibilities of the director, and as such it is important. But, like most people working in the museum field, it is not the financial rewards that keep most Executive Directors in their positions. Instead, it is the less tangible rewards that compel us to engage with the many challenges of our work.

For me and many other museum directors, one of the greatest rewards of working in a museum is playing a central role in meeting the mission of our institutions. The sense of purpose and the energy that the mission generates can be profound. I cherish the joy of working with board and staff members who are likewise motivated by a larger vision and a true commitment to the mission of our museum. The realization that I share the stewardship of the museum with so many others is a source of great strength.

While this shared sense of purpose is important, the Executive Director has the unique ability to shape his or her workplace in ways that are not possible in other positions. The director plays a central role in articulating the museum’s vision and ensuring that all the diverse activities of the institution—from programming, to visitor services, to development activities—uphold this vision on a daily basis.

The Executive Director enjoys the privilege of representing his or her museum in the wider cultural community, before legislators, civic leaders, and the general public. Trustees and staff members also are essential museum representatives in the community, but it is the Executive Director who plays a pivotal role in connecting the museum’s specific activities to “the big picture,” sparking new connections with potential funders, program partners, and audiences, and nurturing new ideas into action.

Being a part of the museum community is both a privilege and a tremendous source of personal and professional support. I stand in admiration of so many of my fellow Executive Directors here in New England. Their dedication to their institutions and our profession is inspiring, and at the same time they are unstintingly generous in sharing their time, experience and expertise. As a museum director, I am in the enviable position of being able to call on any number of talented colleagues who will readily share their approaches to the daily...
In 2004, at the age of 50, I began looking for employment in the museum field for the first time. A friend arranged a mock interview between two “public historians” and me. Within the first few questions, it was clear I was over-matched. They asked me about “Civic Engagement,” a term with which I was unfamiliar. “You discuss exhibits as a visitor would,” they said, “and not as a museum professional would.” Only now do I realize that, with this last comment, they had flattered me, albeit unintentionally. How had I come to find myself in this position?

When I had decided a few years earlier to apply to graduate schools, I had never even heard of Museum Studies. I had been a trial lawyer for more than 20 years. I felt it was time for me to move on, but I was not sure where the pursuit of a second career would lead me.

Further investigation revealed a program in “Historical Administration and Public History” at Florida State University. The program description was like an epiphany to me. The course of study was designed for people who love history, but did not want to teach. That sounded like me. Approximately a year later, I entered a similar program, but at a different school, the University of Delaware.

A Museum Studies education would fully equip me, I thought, for a career in museum work. My training at Delaware has been enormously helpful in my job. As with my legal education, however, I found that many museum-related lessons could not be learned in the classroom.

In May 2004, I graduated from the University of Delaware with a master’s degree in History and a certificate in Museum Studies. Three days after graduation, I began work as the director of Portland Harbor Museum in South Portland, Maine. On my first two days driving to the museum, I got lost. I hoped it was not a sign of things to come.

In many respects, my first career has served me well in my second career. Both positions require strong advocacy skills. I rely everyday on the problem-solving abilities I developed in my law practice. Because of my legal experience, I am not easily intimidated. I have no fear of public speaking.

Few of the cases I handled, however, involved issues directly related to my future work at the museum. I worked rarely for or with nonprofits. I gave little thought to the intricacies of Board-staff relations, mission fulfillment, or community outreach.

In addition, the differences between the two positions—lawyer and director—ensure that a transition from one to the other will have its challenges. The lawyer’s client is easy to identify—he or she is the one paying the bills. The client seeks and, in most cases, follows the lawyer’s advice. The entire process is straightforward—or at least it seemed that way after 22 years.

The director is the leader of the museum, but he or she answers to several constituencies: the membership, donors, the public, foundations, and the Board. Nevertheless, the mission drives what we do.

While interacting with people currently involved with the museum, the director must always be attentive to the institution’s purposes, history, and traditions. The process is complicated—or at least it appeared so to a new director.

Practicing law can be a relatively private way to make a living. The communications between attorney and client are confidential. Despite what we see on television each day, the public has no interest in most cases. During the course of my legal career, I spoke to reporters less than 25 times.

The director’s job is a public position. The museum distributes the director’s remarks in newsletters, appeals, emails, and press releases. Civic groups expect the director to speak about the museum’s role in the community. For the museum to succeed, the director must immediately embrace this public role.

Fortunately, I always welcome the opportunity to share my vision. The office dynamics are different in the two fields as well. A clearly defined hierarchy exists in the law office. In the small museum, teamwork is the touchstone of success. At Portland Harbor Museum, each staff member has at one time or another guided tours, painted the gallery walls, licked envelopes, and cleaned the restroom.

Despite these differences, the legal and museum fields are both thoughtful disciplines; they deal with evolving intellectual landscapes. At the recent NEMA conference, a participant said that museum professionals take themselves too seriously. I disagree. We take the responsibilities seriously, not ourselves. Directors wrestle with significant issues, many of which threaten the survival of their institutions, almost every day. In the absence of these challenges, however, the job would be mere administration. The problems may be serious, but they make the work meaningful.

From the financial perspective, I have learned that marketing plays a larger role in both positions than most people would suspect. In the mid-eighties, I read Guerilla Marketing by Jay Conrad Levinson and applied its teachings to the marketing of my nascent law firm. A few weekends ago, in thinking about the positioning of Portland Harbor Museum, I read The Brand Gap by...
Reflections on the Road Ahead

Stephen Perkins, Executive Director
Bennington Museum

In the next ten years, rural museums, and their leaders, must realize that with the changes in American travel habits and information gathering, their core audience will shift from out-of-town tourists to their own local communities. This means changing our idea of a museum as repository and academic ivory tower to that of community resource center and active community partner. Active partnering with all types of non-profits, businesses, and government to enrich the quality of life for our patrons will be one of the primary roles of museum leaders in the future. A strong community base and proven track record of community enhancement will then have to be parlayed into endowment building, sponsorships, and grant support. Funding this model will be very difficult in the short term, but should help ensure the viability of these institutions into the future.

Ford Bell, President and CEO
American Association of Museums

Museum directors, over the next 25 years, will have to confront the challenges and opportunities that will come with an increasingly pluralistic American society. As I mentioned in my recent column in Museum News, people of color now form the majority in nearly one-third of the country’s most populous counties. Some commentators have stated that 50% of the United States will be Hispanic by 2050. Museums clearly face a challenge in making their institutions both welcoming and relevant to racial and ethnic groups that have traditionally viewed museums as being largely white—from the look of the building to the composition of the staff, board, volunteers and visitors to the museum, to the content of exhibitions and programmatic offerings.

Wendy W. Lull, President
Seacoast Science Center

New England weather drives visitation and determines the success of many fundraising events. Our climate even sets the seasons of our operations: in winter, many close or reduce hours. By 2033* seasons will have changed enough to alter the way we follow them. Summers will be “shortened” by more rainy or 90° days, but shoulder seasons will be longer, flattening traditional fluctuations in visitation (and cash flow). In 2033 providing an energy efficient, comfortable internal climate will become just as important to the quality of our visitors’ experience as are our staff, programs and exhibits.

*From Climate Change in the U.S. Northeast, the 2006 report of the Northeast Climate Impacts Assessment.

Mark Bessire, Director
Bates College Museum of Art

Academic museums in New England conduct scholarly work, display challenging work, commission new works of art, build audience and, with a dedication to educational programming, are curatorially driven and dedicated to artists and audiences. The most pressing challenge in the future will be to continue to act as the testing ground for innovations in contemporary art. Another challenge will be to encourage art museums to use alternative energy and make alignments with the green movement and green artists. I hope that future new academic museum buildings will take a leadership role toward the greening of the museum world and the construction of spaces designed for artists’, not corporate museum needs.

Carl R. Nold, President and CEO
Historic New England

Museums have changed dramatically over the last 30 years, a period when they increasingly recognized that they are not just about the art
or artifact, but about connecting audience with the artifact in meaningful, enjoyable ways. Museum leaders have had to manage unprecedented change, and that will remain one of the greatest challenges for the next 25 years. Special attention must be paid to the changing characteristics of our audiences, with efforts to diversify not only whom we serve but also who supports museum activities. Traditional supporters must be sustained, while new constituencies are nourished among immigrant, minority, and non-traditional audience groups.

Elaine Heumann Gurian
Senior Museum Consultant

My answer to the question of the “Most Pressing Challenge” will surprise some because it is not financial sustainability expected by most. The most pressing issue for all of us who love museums is to fundamentally recreate our beloved institutions changing them from those with a monopolistic control of information to those that dynamically facilitate, review, validate and make available information from many sources. The users of the Internet and all other forms of technology will continue to demand that our trusted institutions shift from being the unitary pipeline of one-way content they are now, to actively becoming organizations that search out, include, welcome and present a dialogue of information gleaned from other knowledgeable though often less well-known participants.

Jock Reynolds, The Henry J. Heinz II Director
Yale University Art Gallery

1. Strengthen and maintain a clear artistic and educational mission and vision for the museum.
2. Create and bolster endowed museum funds whenever possible to ensure the long term viability and artistic independence of the institution.
3. Hire the best and brightest young people you can find and use senior staff members to mentor and train a new generation of arts leaders.
4. Increase the ongoing care and maintenance of museum collections at every turn, creating as much direct and unencumbered access to them as possible.
5. Support the work of living artists and provide them significant opportunities to participate in the life of the museum. After, all museums ride on the backs of those who have made or are now making art.
6. Support meaningful scholarship and a strong publication program.
7. Recruit and maintain the best board of directors that can be assembled, being mindful that volunteers strengthen the good health of a museum not only making gifts of money and art, but by giving generously of their time, talents, and knowledge.
8. Recognize and steward every constituent relationship as though it matters most.
9. Be vigilant to insure that the museum’s collections, exhibitions, programs and publications faithfully exemplify its mission and vision statement.
10. Enjoy a life lived with art.

On Being Executive Director continued from page 4

dilemmas that we all must face. The spirit of collegiality and collaboration in the museum profession is an unfailing source of support for all of us. In the often-isolated role of Executive Director it is especially important. I am not sure that other professions are as fortunate as we are in this respect.

All of us who work in museums are privileged to spend our time and abilities and efforts on things that are truly unique, beautiful and meaningful. Museums are an exciting and rewarding place in which to work. In the end, for many of us, it is the lure of our museum’s public mission and sense of purpose that keep us in these positions. I believe we truly are richer for the experience.

Emily Curran is Executive Director of the Old South Meeting House, a museum and National Historic Landmark in downtown Boston, and previously worked as a developer of programs and learning materials at The Children’s Museum, Boston. She holds an MS in Museum Leadership from Bank Street Graduate School of Education. She recently returned from a four month mini-sabbatical in Beijing, where she had the opportunity to explore museums and historic preservation issues.
Leading a museum well requires a solid understanding of what it is that makes your institution, and indeed all museums, matter in contemporary life. In his keynote address at this year’s conference, What Makes a Museum? It’s Not as Easy as It Sounds, Harold Skramstad offered unique insights as well as encouragement and inspiration for today’s museum leaders.

The theme of your conference this year, “What is the heart and soul of the museum mission” is an important one; the sub theme, finding an accurate but not helpful.”

The word ‘museum’ has lost its power to adequately define a coherent body of institutions that have similar missions, goals, and strategies. To define a major research driven natural history museum, a regional science and technology center, an encyclopedic art museum, and a local volunteer-run historical society as a ‘museum’ is like describing General Motors, Kmart, a regional bank, and a local convenience store as a ‘business’—accurate but not helpful.

I feel this even more strongly today: there is no safe haven in our definitions from the past. As we address the challenge of what makes a museum we must go forward in our thinking, not backwards.

First we must acknowledge some major changes in museums and communities in America.

From the beginning of our history, museums in the United States have been rooted in community; like libraries, colleges and universities, and other cultural organizations, they have been an essential part of the community building process. Laurence Vail Coleman, in his wonderful study of The Museum in America (1939), wrote, “The museum, like the library, is a community enterprise in its very nature.”

It is important to remind ourselves that this process still goes on. As new physical communities (or communities of interest) are established, museums will be part of them. An Institute of Museum Services study in the 1980s reported that over half of the museums in US had been created since 1960.

As institutions, museums have continually tried to shape and reflect the communities in which they live.

• The most traditional role of the museum has been to act as antiquarian or aesthetic refuge for the privileged. The key strategy for realizing this role was of course to keep the doors shut.

• Museums have also seen themselves as educational institutions, as teachers. The key strategy for carrying out this role has been for museums to attach themselves to schools and to the formal teaching process.

• Many museums have seen themselves as research institutions engaging in scholarship. The key strategy here has been to try to attach themselves to colleges and universities.

• In recent years museums have been seen by many minority groups as cultural colonizers who have appropriated their property and legacy. The major museum strategy in response has been to return the goods.

• In attempts to compete with organizations in the entertainment field many museums have begun to introduce theme-park elements. Now they have to compete with Disney!

• And of course many museums have tried to position themselves as cultural attractions for tourists as well as locals. Now the goal is to bring in the money.

• Some museums have seen themselves as “experience providers” in an “experience economy.” Now they have to compete with everyone.

• Other museums have begun to see themselves as social service providers. The result is yet another level of responsibility.

• And finally many museums and a broad cross-section of the museum field have seen museums as instruments of civic renewal. Now the weight of the world is upon us and we don’t know quite what to do about it.

While this is a gross oversimplification of the trends in the museum world during the last generation, my point is that there has been an exponential explosion of unmet desires in contemporary American society and that museums have tried to come to the rescue. And that is a good thing. One of the great strengths of our field is its continuing attempt to address new needs and interests.

There is, however, a danger that in the process of trying to address every potential new claim on our museums, we will further erode our distinctiveness as institutions. We are presently in a time in which there are extravagant expectations of museums. We have encouraged this and we are now living with the results. Grandiose attendance and revenue projections for new museums that are impossible to live up to; a feeling among many museums that they should try to meet all community needs; and a general lack of distinctive mission and purpose among individual museums are all symptoms of extravagant expectations.

Before we go any further I think we must acknowledge several big and dramatic internal changes in our field, changes that have impacted
the world of museums during the past generation or so.

First is the change from professionally driven organizations to mission driven organizations. Thirty years ago clearly enumerated “professional standards” were normative for museums. If the museum had a staff member with museum training, appropriate policies and procedures for dealing with its collection, exhibits, and was open to the public a reasonable number of hours, etc., it was able to call itself a proper museum. In the world of today’s museums, there are very few rules from “the profession” that can tell us what to do since the diversity of museum purposes assumes a great diversity of institutional procedures and external strategies to assist the museum in moving its particular purpose forward in the world.

Second, increasingly the quality of the individual museum enterprise is dependent less on the quality of its collection and more on the quality, creativity, and imagination of its staff. We need to remember here that some of our most successful museums do not even have collections, such as art centers, and science and technology centers; what they do have are engaging, mission-related programs and experiences.

As museums have changed, so too have the communities they serve. Traditional communities were based around need, mutual obligations and benefits that tied people together. They provided care and nourishment, the sharing of risks and benefits, intergenerational support, socialization, defense, entertainment, and spiritual belief. They were fairly homogeneous and cultivated a spirit of belonging, a sense of us against the world.

Communities in modern America are very different; they are more transient, mobile, constantly changing, and diverse. To give you a sense of the magnitude of the change, in 1955 60% of American families lived in a two-parent, male worker, wife at home, two children household; in 2000 that described about 6% of American families.

We have entered an era defined by “communities of choice” rather than “communities of need.” Individuals have the ability to pick and choose the costs and benefits of being a member of any particular community of choice. In this kind of world the word “community” is no longer a useful descriptor. The new reality is that the relationship between any organization (such as a museum) and the many “communities” it serves is complex and contradictory—and always changing.

As individual museums confront this new reality it is useful to look at models of museum identity that lie at opposite ends of the continuum of museum practice. The traditional model sees the museum as a very special and distinctive organization characterized by the following:

- A source of special authority represented by its collections and its content
- A staff with a special blend of education, expertise, and training
- It does a few things very well; better than others can do them
- There is no overt political motive to its actions.

The community-based model has as its core:

- A sense of community partnership in all that it does
- Shared authority that does not claim the exclusive prerogatives created by special education, expertise, and training
- An environment of active participation; a responder to community need
- A sense of its place in the political environment in which it operates. It is an organization “in play.”

It is folly to assume that these models can be easily reconciled or integrated. Until we acknowledge this, we will experience a continuing frustration that will erode both the expertise and professionalism expected of us, and the requirements of effective community involvement.

If I am correct in defining the present world as one of “communities of choice,” what is an individual museum to do?

My answer is to become a distinctive “community of choice.”

In attempting to become a community of choice our museums can’t look to the AAM, “best practices,” professional standards, or other models external to their own unique circumstances. Increasingly, each museum is going to have to find its own distinctive way in the world. So how do we accomplish this?

1. Create for each of our museums a unique and distinctive mission that serves as the platform on which everything the museum does is built.

- Mission: What is your distinctive and special role? “Collect, preserve, and interpret” will no longer do. There needs to be action, outcome, and value (to people outside the museum) inherent in the mission; in the world of business the question would be phrased as “what is the value proposition.”

- Vision: Where, assuming that your follow your mission, do you want to be at a specific time in the future?

- Key Goals and Strategies: How you will get there?

One of the hardest things for us museum folks to acknowledge is that people can live a full and useful life without ever visiting or participating in the life of a museum. In the process of defining (or redefining) the individual museum’s mission it is essential to listen carefully to various “communities” of interest; your museum cannot craft a strong mission without a deep...

continued on following page
connection with the outside world. At the same time it is important to recognize that your museum cannot respond to everyone; the listening process helps you to set limits of who you can listen to and what you can do to respond. It is important to remember that any community has boundaries.

To define and implement a distinctive mission is hard work on the part of museum board and staff. It involves both a spirit of inclusion and exclusion at the same time in order to keep the museum’s focus and yet not be unresponsive to a changing environment. It also means that the museum’s mission, vision, goals, and strategies must be constantly monitored, reviewed, and revised.

As a practitioner who has been working at this for many years, my best guide remains the great business thinker, Peter Drucker. He argues that addressing the following questions honestly will take an organization a long way down the road to success. They are:

- What business are you in?
- Who is your customer?
- How do you measure success?
- What is the plan?

2. Create programmatic strategies that connect the museum’s mission, vision and resources to people.

Remember that your museum’s collections and its content focus do not exist in a vacuum, and their uses are not inherent in them. This is important since in my view, we are moving from a world of “outreach” to a world of “inreach.” Outreach is about taking what the museum decides is important and reaching out with it; inreach is about taking what people are interested in and finding ways to make connections between the museum’s goals and people’s needs and interests.

I will suggest below some possible strategies for connecting museum resources to people in order to create a community of choice within the museum:

Help Improve Their Knowledge: This is the most obvious strategy; an acknowledgement that people come to museums for knowledge. It is important that the museum acknowledges its own expertise and authority and at the same time acknowledges the competencies the visitor brings to the museum. It means starting with the simple and obvious and moving on to the more subtle and complex; it means answering the questions in the mind of the visitor, not the museum staff.

Find the Shared Stories: In building competence, perhaps the most powerful tool we have is storytelling. It remains the most elementary and effective form of memorable explanation and communication. An unhelpful legacy of our quasi-academic culture has been a preference for analysis over narrative, theme over story. We need to return to storytelling as an important way of communicating and cultivating community; shared stories are the essence of any community.

Foster Dialogue: Dialogue is a focused conversation in a setting of trust and is closely related to competence. Dialogue is important because it allows people to experience the security of what they know and yet be willing to listen to an alternative version of it. It is a way of introducing ambiguity, uncertainty, and even threatening ideas in a setting of trust. Here there are real possibilities of acknowledging the expertise of museum staff and the expertise of the museum audience in a give and take process. It offers all an opportunity to open themselves to the possibility that things might have been different.

Provide Validation: A positive and affirming process, validation is the experience of finding an outside source of authority that gives value and meaning to ones life. This is especially important when one’s personal or collective experience is left out as in the case of minority or other marginalized groups whose experiences are not part of “mainstream” museum interpretation. Increasingly, the museum role in our society is a legitimizing rather than a colonizing one.

Helping People Mourn: This may seem a strange kind of cultural process and experience to build on in a museum setting. But it is an important one. Formally and informally, collectively and individually, saying goodbye to something that is irretrievably lost is an essential part of any community. I suggest that our museums need to help people mourn those things that are irretrievably lost by time and circumstance.

Be a Place and Time for Celebration: Conversely, it is through celebration rituals that most of us, collectively and individually, reinforce and strengthen what is most important in our lives. Visits to museums affirm that education is an important value and that history, art, and science are important enterprises that continue to change and evolve.

Many in the museum world see a “celebratory” role as uncritical, unscholarly, and unreflective. However the concept of “celebration” needs to be seen in a more broadly defined way: as a way of focusing and paying attention to those things that are truly important in our lives.

Finally,

Inspire: This is, in my opinion, the highest level of aspiration for a museum. Any museum that can inspire people can claim a grand achievement. The real things that are a museum’s stock in trade—the people, stories, and objects of art, history and science—are the great raw materials of inspiration.

It is my sense that too many museums are spending too much time
focusing on peripheral issues and looking for magic bullets to solve their problems and not enough time focusing on how their museum’s mission can connect with and respond to basic human concerns that cut across an increasingly pluralistic society. If successful at achieving this connection, the museum can be a powerful community of choice.

If we want to cultivate communities of choice in our museums, we need to encourage museum going as a habit and ensure that our museums are more important to people’s lives.

To do this I am suggesting:

• Rigorously assure that you have defined the special role of your museum through a distinctive mission, vision, goals and key strategies to get you there—and that you have done this through a close and continuing dialogue with both present and potential museum audiences.
• That you find a way to connect your programs and activities to peoples’ needs and interests.

The great observer of cultural landscapes J.B. Jackson writes in his essay “A Sense of Place, A Sense of Time,”

Successful places (and organizations) “are embedded in the everyday world around us and easily accessible, but at the same time are distinct from that world. A visit…is a small but significant event. We are refreshed and elated each time we are there. I cannot really define such localities any more precisely. The experience varies in intensity; it can be private and solitary, or convivial and social. The place can be a natural setting or a crowded street or even a public occasion. What moves us is our change of mood, the brief but vivid event. And what automatically ensues,…is a sense of fellowship with those who share the experience, and the instinctive desire to return, to establish a custom of repeated ritual.” p. 158.

To create museums that can use their collections, their expertise, and their imagination to create the kind of experiences described by Jackson should be our goal. If we are successful we will be cultivators of the kind of communities we would all hope for. The result will not be overnight civic renewal, solving the problems of the poor, or transforming human nature—but it will have played a small part in cultivating a richer society—and one in which museums continue to have a very special and distinctive role.

Delivered as the keynote address of the New England Museum Association Annual Conference in Portland, Maine, on November 7, 2007. Reprinted with permission; all rights reserved.
Marty Neumeier. In this and other ways, the for-profit and not-for-profit arenas are more similar than their tax statuses suggest. No one in either sector ever complains about having too much money.

One of the most gratifying aspects of the director’s life is the willingness of other professionals to share. From the outset, my colleagues in Greater Portland and throughout the NEMA community have made themselves available to solve problems, listen to my complaints, and consider my ideas. In my first year at the museum, I proposed a session for the 2005 NEMA conference. I asked four of New England’s most experienced directors to serve as panelists. Without hesitation, each agreed. For someone involved in the field for such a short time, I am thankful that I can call so many other museum professionals my friends.

After three and a half years, I appreciate the many rewarding aspects of the job. Serving as a director requires that we continue to learn, remain open to new ideas, and be willing to adjust our thinking on an almost daily basis. When I was at the University of Delaware, the graduate department secretary would ask me from time to time if I ever regretted leaving the practice of law. I would smile, shake my head, and say, “Never.” No one asks the question anymore, but my answer would still be the same.

**News About NEMA cont’d from page 3**

*Museum Trustees Handbook,* through informal networking at the Closing Luncheon, 850 colleagues took part in this unique professional development opportunity.

We extend our sincere thanks to the conference co-chairs, the Local Committee, the Program Committee, session chairs and speakers, all of whom worked in partnership to create a strong program. Thank you for the contribution of your time and expertise. Thanks as well to our Corporate Members who were critical to the success of the conference. Last but not least, to our sponsors and exhibitors whose names appear on page 14: thank you, the conference would not have been possible without your support!

**Save Your Collection, Share Your Story, Sustain Your Mission: A Primer for Small Museums and Historical Societies**

The Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities and NEMA are again partnering to offer a pair of workshops for small museums and historical societies. Topics essential to all organizations will be addressed, including: mission and governance, collections care and preservation, fundraising, education and exhibitions. This is a great opportunity for even the smallest historical site or museum to engage in affordable, high-quality professional development. The workshops will take place in April 2008 at three sites in Massachusetts—locations to be announced in early 2008. If you are interested in attending or hosting a workshop, please call the NEMA office at 781-641-0013.

**Federal Formula Grants**

In October, the NEMA Board voted to join the Federal Formula Grants Coalition as part of our broad-based effort to advocate for increased federal funding for museums. Please see page 19 for further information on NEMA’s goals, the work of the coalition and how you can participate.