



Ontario Museum Association Awards of Excellence 2019 Recipients

Distinguished Career Award of Excellence

The OMA Distinguished Career Award of Excellence is presented to individuals who, over an extended period of time, have created a lasting and meaningful legacy in the Ontario museum community.

Marty Brent

Manager (Retired), Peel Art Gallery, Museum and Archives

For more than four decades, Marty Brent has been instrumental in the development of heritage and exhibition spaces, museum policies and museum communities across Ontario. Her career has been shaped by a deep belief and commitment to the ideal that our quality of life is enriched by a multifaceted engagement with arts and culture in their many forms. Guided by the belief that museums play a vital role in creating vibrant communities, her deep commitment to the arts has had a long lasting impact on museums across the province.



Marty Brent

Highlights of Marty Brent's professional life include 10 years with the Ontario Ministry of Culture, where she was Supervisor for the Community Museums and Heritage Organization Program; 20 years as General Manager at Black Creek Pioneer Village; and 8 years at the Peel Art Gallery, Museum and Archives (PAMA). Marty joined PAMA in 2011. Amidst massive construction and expansion projects, she skillfully guided a new beginning for this unique institution which combines a regional archives, museum and art gallery in one setting. Embracing the diverse communities across the Region of Peel, encouraging the use of new technologies in exhibitions spaces, and acting as a mentor to so many, Marty championed community building and visitor engagement as a touchstone at PAMA, challenging both professional and cultural silos that separate communities and institutions.

Marty served on the Ontario Museum Association Council, and participated on task forces, as a professional development mentor, and on peer review and advisory panels for both Federal and Provincial governments.

Marty Brent has been an outstanding leader and mentor, sharing with others her innovative practice and positive energy in every role that she's filled. Her many years of dedication have left us with a strong vision for a strong museum sector that we will continue to build on for years to come.

"The museum community of the province and the nation are better for Marty Brent's vision and skills and further her ability to evolve her museological vision throughout. Her passion, commitment, expertise and leadership can be observed at every step of her career and stand as a shining example for all museum professionals" - Prof. Lynne Teather, D.Phil,

Volunteer Service Award of Excellence

The OMA Volunteer Service Award of Excellence is presented to individuals who have made a significant contribution to a museum or museums through volunteer work.

Bill Jeffery

Volunteer, Textile Museum of Canada

Since starting his journey as a volunteer in 2013, Bill Jeffrey's passion and commitment to the Textile Museum has touched countless lives. His contagious positive energy has created a welcoming environment for the museum staff, volunteers and visitors, ensuring that their time spent at the museum ends with a positive experience.

From recruiting to training volunteers and writing a new shop procedures manual, his approach to his work as the Museum Shop Coordinator has had a significant impact on its operations. In his day to day role, he is responsible for scheduling over forty individuals and works closely with the shop manager to ensure that all of the shifts are covered, even if it means doing them himself.



Bill Jeffery

Bill has wholeheartedly embraced this position, and has been strong, adaptable, creative and extremely hardworking. He is the backbone of the shop volunteers, and by extension, an essential and positive leader in the museum.

Bill is a charming and caring individual who values and respects his peers and the museum staff. He is a true representation of a volunteer whose management and leadership skills have not only helped ensure that the shop's daily operations run smoothly but have also contributed to improving it as a workplace.

“Bill is a humanitarian; he values his peers, respects the museum staff, and is a fabulous ambassador for the Textile Museum and for the arts scene in the city of Toronto” - June Lee, Shop Manager at the Textile Museum of Canada

Excellence in Programs

The OMA Award of Excellence in Programs recognizes programming that creatively engages new audiences, or provides exemplary service to existing ones.

Dundas Museum and Archives

Finding Hazel

Finding Hazel is a project that first came to life in Robert Bell’s fifth and sixth grade classroom at Dundas Central Elementary School. What first began as a social studies project on the history of the impact of the Spanish Influenza in their town quickly transformed into a unique moment of community collaboration.

Inspired by the museum's discovery of records detailing the life of Hazel Isabel Layden, a 14-year-old who succumbed to the pandemic in 1918, Robert Bell partnered with the Dundas Museum and Archives, McMaster University and Knox Presbyterian Church as well various individuals from the community to develop a student-curated exhibition.

Throughout the project, the class was encouraged to learn as much as possible about Dundas at the time of the pandemic, the study of epidemiology, and Hazel herself to understand the social and cultural environment of 1918. With the help of community partners including students and professors at McMaster University, Reverend Penny Garrison of Knox Presbyterian Church, local historian Stan Nowak, and members of the Layden family, experiential learning allowed for the students to develop a deep connection with Hazel’s story and created a strong sense of ownership for the project and exhibition.

Museum staff members gathered primary sources from the museum’s collection and helped the students develop sub-topics, create labels and choose artefacts to help guide the narrative. Staff at the Museum put together the final exhibition based on the designs the students provided and after months of research, learning, and networking, the exhibit opened on March 7th, 2019. The documentation students completed at each step of the project has also ensured that the learning, commemoration, and exhibition will be preserved permanently in the form of an interactive website.



From a school project to a museum exhibition, *Finding Hazel* combined the conventions of public learning and exhibit planning as one integrated practice. This approach to museum planning not only enriched the students' learning experience but also conveyed a strong sense of resilience that touched the entire community. Hazel Layden's story showed how a national and international tragedy impacted the lives of the people in the town of Dundas by remembering those affected by the Spanish Influenza pandemic during the centenary of the tragedy.

"It became more than just a story and you could see how the experience became truly personal to all involved" - Val Harrison, Supervisor of Visitors Services at Guelph Museums

Excellence in Community Engagement

The OMA Award of Excellence in Community Engagement is presented to individuals, institutions, corporations, or agencies that have increased the community's engagement with the museum or institution.

Khadija Aziz *Community Voices, Textile Museum of Canada*

Community Voices emerged from the Textile Museum's vision to welcome new audiences through inclusive and accessible programming initiatives. Under the guidance of the Museum's Community Art Engagement Coordinator Khadija Aziz, this five-month long series of workshops partnered with a diverse group of emerging textile artists and social agencies to create new opportunities for community building.



Artists and Coordinator (centre) at Exhibition Opening

The resulting program responded to the needs of its participants and tailored activities to serve indigenous communities, people with disabilities, people with mental illness, women and non-binary folks, youth, and seniors. As a means to create a more accessible experience, workshops were hosted at their partner organizations where individuals explored art practices such as printmaking, embroidery and fabric collage within familiar environments. This approach not only brought the museum to the communities, but also offered opportunities for participants to visit and engage with the museum galleries and staff to ensure that they had access to its cultural resources. The workshops came to a close with a community exhibition hosted by the Textile Museum of Canada, where the workshop participants were invited and encouraged to bring their family and friends to share the art pieces they created during the course of the program.

Fueled by a passion to engage with underserved communities, *Community Voices* serves as an example of a creative programming initiative that reduced museum barriers to foster an appreciation for the arts. The workshops offered a dynamic experience that challenged and inspired its participants and viewers to acknowledge how new voices can bring important perspectives to light.

“Community Voices has strengthened [the Textile Museum of Canada], increasing its impact and expanding its audiences through meaningful engagement with marginalized participants and partners that serve marginalized community” - Nithikul Nimkulrat, Associate Professor, OCAD University

Excellence in Exhibitions

The OMA Award of Excellence in Exhibitions recognizes the creation of an exhibit. Examples may include permanent, temporary, traveling or virtual exhibitions.

Brockville Museum

Travel Trunk: Unpacking Brockville's Cultural Stories

Organized in a playful yet thoughtful manner, the Brockville Museum introduced its visitors to an alternative narrative to their town’s Loyalist history in *Travel Trunk: Unpacking Brockville’s Cultural Stories*, an interactive and family friendly exhibit.

Unified under the theme of immigration, the interpretation plan included not only various waves of immigration from Loyalists to recent Syrian refugees, but appropriately started the story with the Indigenous communities who occupied the area before the arrival of Loyalist settlers.

The Brockville Museum’s Curator demonstrated leadership with this project by challenging the status quo in the community, confronting the naysayers, fostering the development of a diverse team of museum and content professionals (consultants, community leaders, volunteers, and staff), and convincing others to support her ambitious vision. The exhibit itself leads in the community by debunking the myth that Brockville’s population is all decedents of white Loyalists (a very real perception locally). Similarly, by incorporating stories of the recent Syrian Refugee Crisis, the exhibit challenges people to see history in the present.



Despite a budget that was five times larger than any previous exhibit at the Brockville Museum, making this exhibit a reality demonstrated real creativity with the budget. Existing exhibit cases were repurposed, a window well was turned into an exhibit case, and props were donated by volunteers and sourced at thrift shops. Even interviews conducted for the exhibit utilized a free community room at the Brockville Public Library to keep costs down. The three interactive components were not only hands-on and created inexpensively, but reflective and thought provoking, engaging the visitor with the immigration experience in age-appropriate ways and in a manner that solicited discussion with family members.

Travel Trunk: Unpacking Brockville's Cultural Stories welcomed an unprecedented number of visitors into the museum. The final exhibit design created an immersive experience in which visitors could engage with dialogic questions, stories from five very different immigrant groups, six oral history videos and various hands-on activities as they embarked on their journeys throughout the gallery spaces.

Brockville Museum's great care and attention to detail created an overwhelmingly genuine exhibit that shared a rare glimpse into the lives of members of Brockville's community. Its beautiful representation of Brockville's diverse community invited new and old audiences to explore a more inclusive version of their town's history.

"Communities like Brockville have long marginalized and silenced the diverse voices of the past (and into the present) in favour of Loyalist history [...]. To have the bravery and the wisdom to honour the voices and experiences of those on whose backs Brockville was built and those who continue to build Brockville is a testament to Natalie and to the entire Museum" - Jacqueline Schoemaker Holmes, Chair, Refugees for Brockville

Excellence in Special Projects

The OMA Award of Excellence in Special Projects is presented to individuals, institutions, corporations or agencies for innovative initiatives, or new approaches or techniques that advance the museum profession.

Craigleith Heritage Depot *REEL History & VR Films:* *The Mary Ward and* *Pathway*

In 2017, Craigleith Heritage Depot embarked on a special project to commemorate the natural and cultural history of their town through a documentary film series titled

REEL History. With four short films: *The Ski Industry; The Apple Industry; Indigenous History;*



Image from Mary Ward VR Film

and *The Making of the Pathway*, along with two virtual reality experiences titled *Pathway* and *Mary Ward*, the exhibition played with new ways of including media installations in traditional museum spaces.

Accomplished through an incredible amount of collaboration among historians, archeologists, Indigenous partners, local businesses and individuals, the films project a desire to build lasting relationships and keep their community memories alive. The incorporation of a cinematic experience created a dynamic exhibition space that shed light on important historical narratives that continue to inform the town's present. Visitors were invited to learn as they listened to stories told by members of their community and to fully immerse themselves by walking the path to Village of Souls in *Pathway* and diving into the waters to see the wreck of the *Mary Ward* in virtual reality. This innovative use of technology allowed visitors to come and enjoy a new experience each time as every time they dove to the *Mary Ward* they could choose a different viewing point, gain new visual information and connect it to the gallery exhibits. These films attracted a diverse audience, drastically increased their visitor numbers and also encouraged new research projects and initiatives to form within the local community.

Craigleith Heritage Depot's *REEL History & VR Films* continue to expand beyond its gallery walls to impact a wider audience than could have been engaged with traditional exhibits in the museum's small exhibit space. As a result of this project, the museum has benefitted from a higher profile; growing an authentic voice in the community; and being seen now as a strong partner and a resource to businesses, governments and individuals. From this project the community has grown a media and technology makerspace in conjunction with the Blue Mountains Public Library LE Shore Branch, the Craigleith Heritage Depot, and Mountain Goat Film Company. The impact of these films has been huge and the result was a sharing of knowledge across the museum's network that continues to reverberate.

"I strongly believe that the film and museum fields were equally positively impacted by this project. Their fantastic marriage in this project sets an example for both for other similar partnerships. I cannot think of another example in Ontario that is such a vivid expression of innovation in both fields; this project is an education in short documentary filmmaking and community partnerships" - Madeline Smolarz, Chair, Group of Ontario Emerging Museum Professionals Committee