



SMITHSONIAN INSIDEOUT

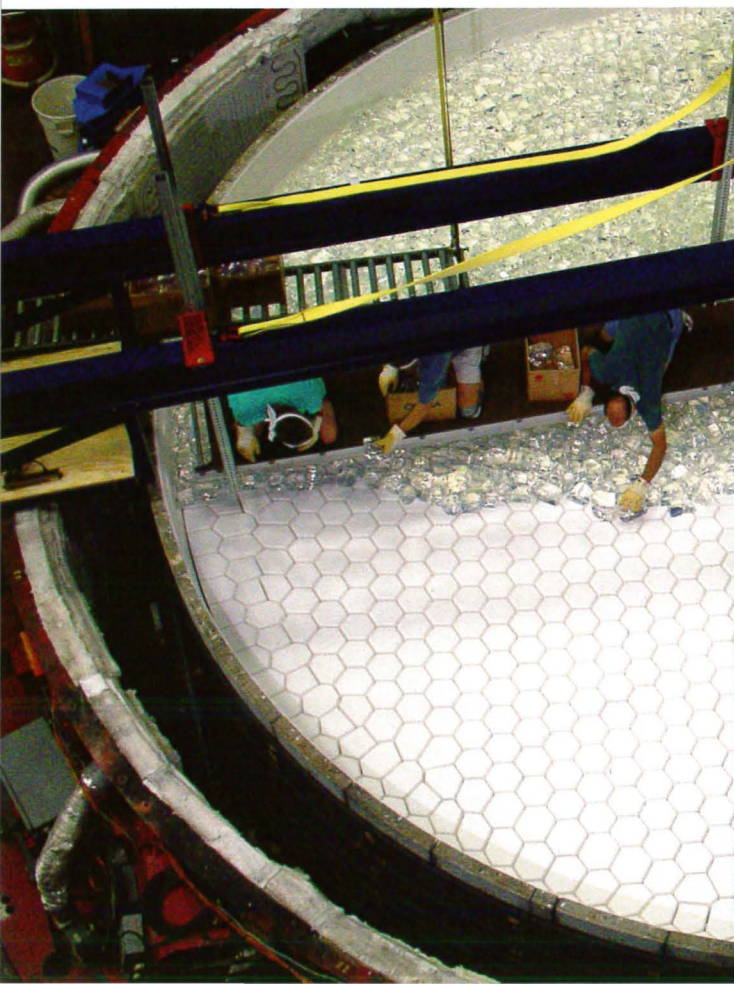
Crafting a Folklife Festival Program on the Smithsonian **Betty J. Belanus**

The *Smithsonian Inside Out* program of the 2010 Smithsonian Folklife Festival celebrates the culture of Smithsonian workers. The program explores the daily tasks of the Institution's approximately six thousand employees, as well as its thousands of volunteers, interns, and research fellows. The range of jobs at the nineteen museums and nine research centers of the Smithsonian, not to mention its central support offices, truly boggles the mind. Staff members maintain buildings, care for collections, conduct field and laboratory research, organize archives, present public programs, create exhibitions, feed animals, tend gardens, update Web sites, arrange travel, manage funds, and much, much more.

THE SMITHSONIAN'S 4 GRAND CHALLENGES

The work of the Smithsonian is undergoing exciting new developments as the result of a recent comprehensive Strategic Planning process. Staff members have been charged with developing programs around four Grand Challenges cutting across disciplines represented by the Smithsonian's world-class research and collections. At the Festival, there is a tent for each of the Challenges, featuring the work of staff from the various museums and research centers. The explanation of the Grand Challenges (shown at right) comes from the Smithsonian's Strategic Plan document, available at www.si.edu.

Technicians work on the construction of a gigantic telescope mirror for the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory (SAO). Glass chunks are heated until they flow together to create a twenty-seven-foot diameter mirror, which is then combined with six more mirrors to form one eighty-foot telescope. Located in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the SAO combines the resources of the Smithsonian and Harvard College Observatory to study the basic physical processes that determine the nature and evolution of the universe. Photo courtesy Carnegie Observatories



UNLOCKING THE MYSTERIES OF THE UNIVERSE

The Smithsonian will continue to lead in the quest to understand the fundamental nature of the cosmos, using next-generation technologies to explore our own solar system, meteorites, the Earth's geological past and present, and the paleontological record of our planet.

VALUING WORLD CULTURES

As a steward and ambassador of cultural connections, with a presence in some one hundred countries, and with expertise and collections that encompass the globe, the Smithsonian will build bridges of mutual respect, and present the diversity of world cultures and the joy of creativity with accuracy, insight, and reverence.

UNDERSTANDING AND SUSTAINING A BIODIVERSE PLANET

The Smithsonian will use our resources across scientific museums and centers to significantly advance our knowledge and understanding of life on Earth, respond to the growing threat of environmental change, and sustain human well-being.

UNDERSTANDING THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

America is an increasingly diverse society that shares a history, set of ideals, and an indomitable, innovative spirit. The Smithsonian will use its resources across disciplines to explore what it means to be an American and how the disparate experiences of individual groups strengthen the whole.



The Folklife Festival first featured Smithsonian workers during the Institution's 150th anniversary in 1996; the articles from that year's Festival program book still make for relevant reading (you can find them on our Web site, www.festival.si.edu). However, in many ways, the Smithsonian has reinvented itself since 1996. There are now two new museums—the National Museum of the American Indian and the Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center—and much has changed inside the physical structures. The interiors of the National Museum of American History, Smithsonian American Art Museum, and National Portrait Gallery, have all been completely renovated. The National Museum of Natural History, the National Air and Space Museum, and others have installed exciting new permanent exhibitions. The Arts and Industries building, too, is currently being remodeled.

Along with the physical manifestations of change since 1996, the new millennium has brought an information explosion via the Internet, making the work of Smithsonian employees much more accessible to visitors all over the world. Even more recently, new leadership at the Institution has identified four Grand Challenges that will inform the research process, the acquisition

National Zoological Park veterinarians Suzan Murray (left) and Carlos Sanchez (right), along with primates curator Lisa Stevens (center), examine Tai Shan 126 days after his birth at the Zoo on July 9, 2005. Like his giant panda parents, Tai Shan is owned by the Chinese government and was sent to China, following a tearful farewell by Zoo staff, in February 2010. Photo by Jessie Cohen, Smithsonian Institution

and maintenance of collections, and the planning of exhibitions. This revitalized vision for Smithsonian staff encourages the continuation of excellence and prioritizes collaboration within the Institution, with outside agencies, and across disciplines. Building on past success, innovative programs will engage educators and the public in lifelong learning using Smithsonian resources, and will also broaden the public's access to Smithsonian materials.

This article presents a behind-the-scenes view of how Folklife Festival staff proceeded from idea to reality with this year's *Smithsonian Inside Out* program. Producing a Folklife Festival program on the wide scope of Smithsonian staffers' expertise in the twenty-first century was a daunting task. But in the end it had to be approached like any other Smithsonian project—through months of research and fieldwork, careful planning, and collaborative consultation.



Bracket-maker Howard Clemenko from the Office of Exhibits Central (OEC) preps Rowlf the Dog for the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (SITES) exhibition Jim Henson's *Fantastic World* (on tour 2007–2011). SITES and OEC work together to design, fabricate, pack, and maintain traveling exhibitions. SITES has been a part of the Smithsonian since the 1950s; OEC is a relative newcomer, established in 1973. Photo by Angela Roberts, Smithsonian Institution

OCCUPATION AS CULTURE

One question we often get at the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage (CFCH), the parent organization of the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, is "How do you choose topics for the Festival?" The simple answer is, through many different means. Because the 1996 program on Smithsonian workers was so successful, many within CFCH and around the Smithsonian had thought about revisiting this topic. With the four Grand Challenges in place, the year 2010 seemed like a good time to showcase ongoing and new initiatives by using the idea of collaboration across museums, centers, units, and disciplines as a unifying theme. The title *Smithsonian Inside Out* signifies the notion of bringing staff from inside our offices, workshops, or laboratories out to the National Mall to show visitors what we do.

While programs often feature states, regions of the United States, or countries of the world, the Festival has also presented a wide variety of occupational culture programs since its start in 1967. Some of these have concentrated on livelihoods most people would ordinarily consider "folk"—such as basketmaking, coal mining, and farming. However, many other programs have focused on occupations that deliberately challenged preconceptions about folk groups—such as White House workers, trial lawyers, NASA scientists, forest rangers, and Wall Street traders. Once visitors realize that these groups possess their own skills, learning processes, language—and, therefore, culture—they appreciate why occupational culture programs should be included in our Folklife Festival.

Programmatically, a complex organization such as the Smithsonian can be likened to a large country. Indeed, if the Smithsonian were a country, each of its museums, centers, and units would be a province possessing its own government, customs, and dialects. In planning a Festival program, the first job of the curator is to research these cultures, working with their members to learn how to best represent them.

ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

"Ethnographic research" or "ethnography" is a term used for the type of work that Folklife Festival curators do. This definition, from the syllabus of an advanced course on ethnographic research from North Carolina State University taught by professor G. David Garson, presents a good summary, especially for the *Smithsonian Inside Out* program:

Ethnography is a form of research focusing on the sociology of meaning through close field observation. . . . Typically, the ethnographer focuses on a community (not necessarily geographic, considering also work, leisure, and other communities), selecting informants who are known to have an overview of the activities of the community. Such informants are asked to identify other informants representative of the community, using chain sampling to obtain a saturation of informants in all empirical areas of investigation.

A number of "informants who are known to have an overview"—in other words, Big Picture People—are key Smithsonian staffers. For instance, Pam Henson, the director of the Institutional History Division of the Smithsonian Archives, has interviewed hundreds of staff members for an ongoing oral history project, has traveled to remote parts of the Institution such as the Tropical Research Institute in Panama, and is currently working closely with National Museum of Natural History staff members in planning programs for their one-hundredth anniversary. Pam knows a wealth of information about colorful Smithsonian staff from the recent and remote past, such as one gentleman intriguingly dubbed "the Naked Janitor." John Barrat, until recently the author of *Inside Smithsonian Research*, and Beth Py-Lieberman, who writes the "Around the Mall" column for *Smithsonian Magazine*, are two other Big Picture People with whom we met early in the program planning. Talking to them and others with an overview of the Institution gave us ideas of people to contact at the various museums and units, and helped us come up with some potential thematic structures.

"Ethnography is a form of research focusing on the sociology of meaning through close field observation."—G. David Garson

Lynn Parenti, curator and research scientist in the Department of Vertebrate Zoology, Division of Fishes, National Museum of Natural History (NMNH), stands among a small portion of the museum's four million fish specimens in 2007. The huge collections of animal and plant specimens of the NMNH are housed in storage facilities measuring several football fields in length. Photo by James Di Loreto, Smithsonian Institution

Another technique of the ethnographer when entering unfamiliar territory is the employment of a "native guide"—someone similar to a Big Picture Person, but who serves a more specific purpose, negotiating through the culture on an ongoing basis rather than simply pointing in the right direction. In the case of the Smithsonian, this is extremely helpful, especially in planning visits to the large museums such as Natural History. (There, the joke in the Anthropology Department is that the skeleton collections are augmented by visitors who get lost in the labyrinthian hallways of the "Staff Only" research and collections areas.) Accordingly, the next step in research at the various museums and units was to designate a guide or "point person" who could assist us in identifying potential Festival participants and act as a conduit of information as the program progressed. While actual research trips to every part of the Smithsonian would have been impossible, these point people helped facilitate our in-person site visits.

RESEARCH VIA SITE VISIT

During a site visit, the ethnographer can get a firsthand look, feel, and even smell of the native habitat, observe the informants in situ, and ask questions about their culture. We were especially keen on traveling to some of the lesser-known sites, many of which can be accessed via Smithsonian staff shuttle buses. For example, the Office of Exhibits Central is located in the Pennsy Building somewhere in the wilds of Prince George's County, Maryland. Guided by program manager Paula Kaufman, we came face to face with workers manipulating high-tech gadgets straight out of science fiction, such as a 3-D printer that uses special powder and glue to translate a multi-angle scan of an object into an exact three-dimensional replica. We held a copy of a bronze of Abraham Lincoln's hand, and learned how physical anthropologists use copies of ancient skulls to examine intricacies without damaging the original.



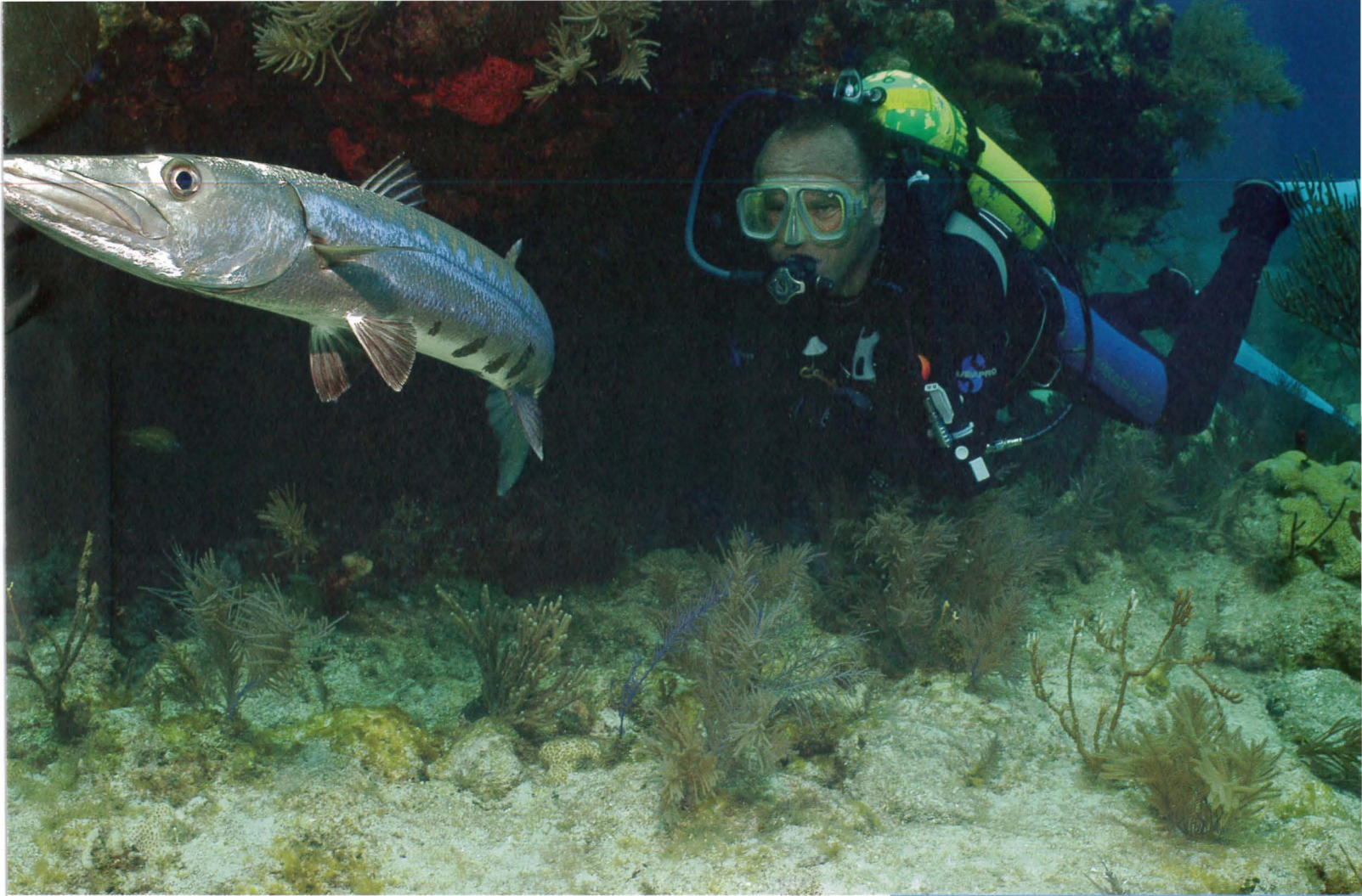


(Above) Jake Homiak (right), director of the Anthropology Collections and Archives Program at the National Museum of Natural History (NMNH), views a pictographic history of Kuna Territory with Achu Kantule, at the National Anthropological Archives in 2009. Kantule is the grandson of the artist, Chief Igwa Nigdibippi. The NMNH has launched Recovering Voices, a major collaborative initiative to document and support indigenous languages and knowledge. The Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage and the National Museum of the American Indian are partnering with NMNH on the Recovering Voices program. Photo by Amy Staples, Smithsonian Institution

(Below) National Zoo landscaper Brian McLaren and horticulturist Preston Burke help create a garden setting for "Uncle Beazley," a fiberglass triceratops statue, in 2007. The installation illustrates collaboration among Zoo staff; the Office of Exhibits Central, which restored the statue; and the Office of Facilities Management and Reliability's Horticulture Division, which grew the ferns, papyrus, and giant taro—all descendants of species that flourished in the age of the dinosaur. Photo by Jessie Cohen, Smithsonian Institution

Another shuttle bus transported us to the Museum Support Center (MSC) in Suitland, Maryland, which houses a vast collection from the Natural History Museum's Anthropology Department. From the outside, the MSC looks like a cluster of modern warehouses stretching several football fields in length. Inside, workers care for thousands of artifacts, ranging from original drawings made by Chief Sitting Bull to the oldest Hawaiian outrigger canoe in existence. The same building complex contains the Museum Conservation Institute, where point person Ann N'Gadi, an information officer who dubs herself "Miss Information," showed us through impressive laboratories where conservators study artifacts ranging from the recently acquired Rosa Parks dress to scale-model replicas of the Chinese Forbidden City. N'Gadi often fields inquiries from the public about





preserving personal items for posterity; some of her favorite callers include the home gardener who grew a tomato in the shape of a duck and the family that found a piece of grandma's wedding cake in the attic.

We also visited the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center (SERC) in Edgewater, Maryland. Our point person there, public affairs expert Tina Tennesen, led us through several labs, including the National Ballast Information Clearinghouse. Here, ecologist Whitman Miller and his staff track the ballast water from hundreds of ships coming into ports across the United States, monitoring it for microscopic invasive marine plant and animal species. A few miles from the main SERC campus, among beautiful marshland, plant physiologist and biogeochemist Pat Megonigal oversees the world's longest ongoing research project on the effects of CO₂ on plant life. Along with a great deal of scientific equipment explained to us by environmental engineer Gary Peresta, we noticed evidence of a "cat in residence" inside the lab workshop. Apparently, mice enjoy chewing on the tubing that pumps the CO₂ to the plastic chambers controlling the experiments; thus the cat provides an important preventative measure in the name of ground-breaking science.

Few people know about the Smithsonian's research center on a tiny, idyllic-looking island off the coast of Belize. No doubt we would have enjoyed visiting it, or the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute in Panama, or the Smithsonian Marine Station in Fort Pierce, Florida, especially since much of the Festival's research took place during a record winter of cold and snow in Washington, D.C. But for these and many other Smithsonian locations, virtual visits had to suffice, via secondary sources.

(Above) Michael Lang swims near a barracuda in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary in 2006. Lang is the diving officer for the Smithsonian Scientific Diving Program, a multi-disciplinary group of rigorously trained researchers who use scuba diving in their work. Traveling from the tropics to Antarctica, they represent six of the Smithsonian museums and research centers, creating one of the largest scientific diving programs in the country. Photo by Carl Hansen, Smithsonian Institution

(Below) Security officer Brian Koelsch, Office of Protection Services, works at the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center (SERC). Located near Annapolis in Edgewater, Maryland, SERC serves as the world's leading research center for coastal zone environmental studies. Each of the Smithsonian's museums and research centers is serviced by security officers who rise to the challenges of ensuring visitor safety in a wide variety of settings. Photo by Ken Rahaim, Smithsonian Institution





Lonnie Bunch, director of the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC), addresses a Contributing Membership gathering at the Smithsonian Castle in 2008. Bunch and his fellow Smithsonian museum directors must raise funds as well as oversee museum operations and staff. The NMAAHC will break ground in 2012. Meanwhile, its staff is organizing several exhibitions in galleries at the National Museum of American History, and is collaborating with the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage on Festival programs. Photo by Ken Rahaim, Smithsonian Institution

RESEARCH VIA SECONDARY SOURCES

For ethnographers, a secondary source includes any previously published report with information pertinent to their own research. This type of source is used to build on previous studies and gather other points of view about the culture. Admittedly, secondary research can make a pale substitute for actually visiting the native habitat. But relevant secondary sources can also be extremely helpful in supplying points of comparison for one's own research.

In the case of *Smithsonian Inside Out*, as with many other Festival programs, reliance on secondary sources was absolutely essential. The sheer scale of the Smithsonian and the breadth of its staff, as well as a relatively short research period, prohibited even a representative sampling of face-to-face site visits, much less in-depth research at each. Fortunately, publications, media products, and the Internet all boast an array of easily accessible information about the work of Smithsonian staff.

For instance, during a preliminary visit to the National Zoological Park in December, we obtained current and back issues of the Zoo's excellent publication, *Smithsonian Zoogoer*. The magazine features articles about the work of various Zoo staff, including animal keepers, nutritionists, and veterinarians. By pairing it with several excellent Internet videos available on topics such as feeding and caring for animals, and even live coverage from inside some animal cages, you can formulate a good idea of daily activities at the Zoo.

Moreover, many Smithsonian staff members now write blogs, which make extremely useful tools for those researching their work. One posting on the National Air and Space Museum (NASM) blog explains how the NASM Collections Department transported an eighteen-foot-wide Beechcraft D18S (a twin-engine airplane) from the downtown museum to the Stephen F. Udvar-Hazy Center in Chantilly, Virginia. Another blog follows curator Valerie

Neal as she searches an on-line NASA catalog for artifacts to augment the museum's Space Shuttle collection.

Secondary sources can also help sharpen the focus of our fieldwork by facilitating the selection of possible interviewees. Several of our Folklife Festival interns identified topics that interested them via secondary sources, and then followed up with telephone calls and in-person interviews. For example, Erin Ryan selected the Migratory Bird Center of the National Zoo and interviewed Robert Rice about the Center's efforts to research and promote "bird friendly" shade-grown coffee. Another intern, LaTasha Johnson, researched photography collections depicting minorities and interviewed several Smithsonian staff members, including curators Paul Gardullo of the National Museum of African American History and Culture and Steve Velasquez of the National Museum of American History.

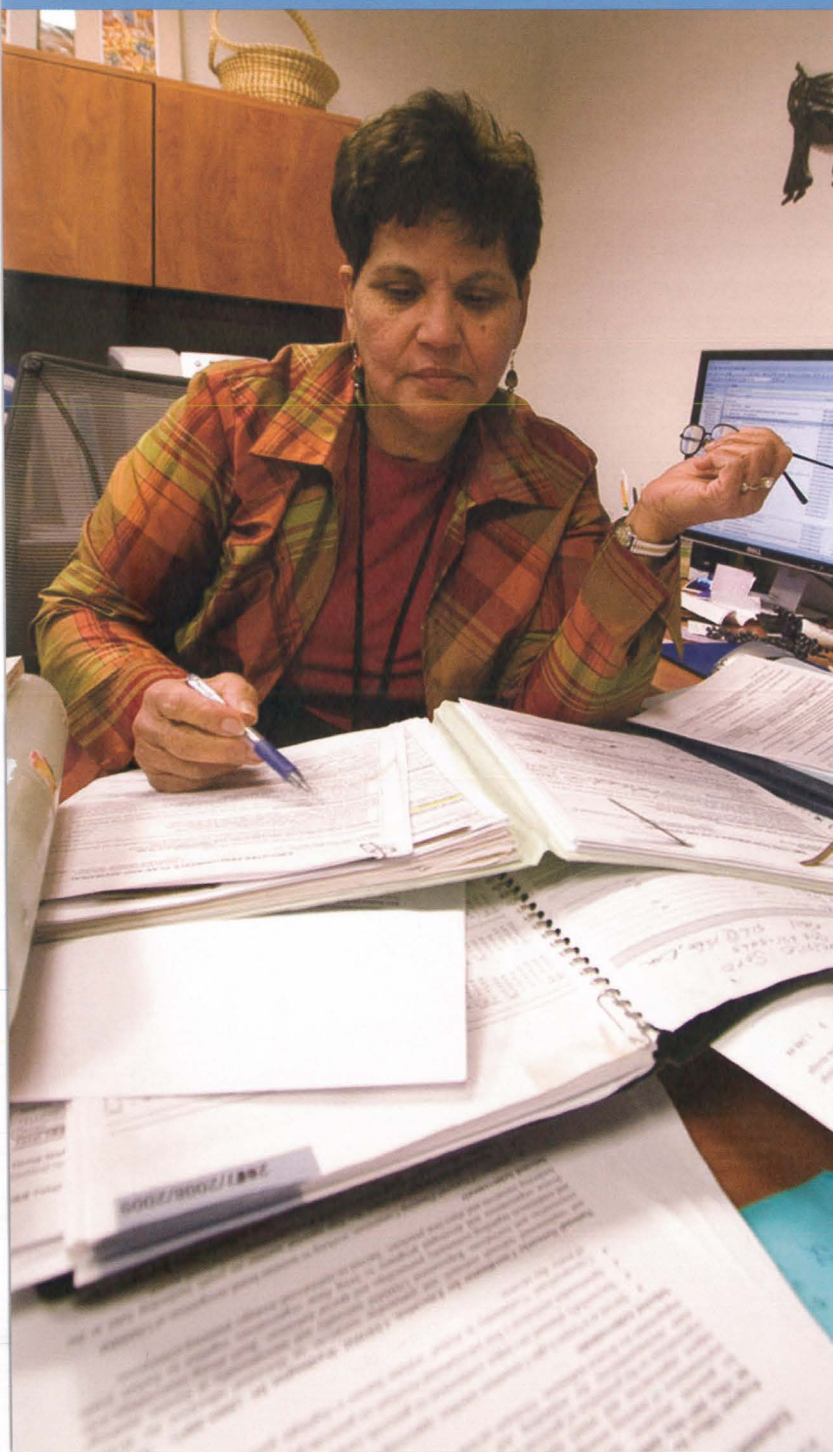
The Webography provided at the end of this article may help the reader negotiate some of the secondary research used in planning the Festival program, but it should also come with a disclaimer: you may find so much fascinating information that you will become hopelessly lost and forget what you were researching in the first place.

RESEARCH AND FOLKLIFE FESTIVAL PROGRAMMING

Research is truly the backbone for a Folklife Festival program. It is essential to so much: the writing of program book articles such as this one, the creation of informational signs placed around the Folklife Festival site, the postings on our CFCH Web site, the assembly of news releases, and finally the presentation of the Festival program on the National Mall.

The research also informs the physical space and scheduling of the Folklife Festival. How best to bring the work of an art historian, an entomologist, or an astrophysicist to represent one of the Grand Challenges

Painting conservator Xiangmei Gu concentrates on a piece at the Freer Gallery of Art in 1999. Originally from China, she has worked at the Smithsonian since 1990. Staffers such as Gu are not only world-class experts in their own fields, but teachers as well. The Freer recently hosted two conservators-in-training from China, who spent three months working with Gu. Of her own work, Gu says, "Until you stop working, you never stop learning," which could serve as a motto for many Smithsonian experts in all fields. Photo by John Tsantes, Smithsonian Institution



in a tent on the National Mall? What props do members of the cleaning staff need to explain how they dust an airplane or polish a priceless marble floor? How often will members of the horticulture staff be able to give hands-on workshops on arranging hanging baskets? How many tables do educators from the National Postal Museum need to engage children in a design-your-own-postage-stamp activity? What strategies of presentation does a Folklife Festival curator employ to demonstrate a scientific illustrator's talents and expertise? These may seem like logistical questions, but they are also research functions. They require Festival staff members to gather practical information that affects everything from building the infrastructure of the Festival space to travel arrangements for program participants.

For example, the Smithsonian Office of Facilities Management and Reliability (OFMR) offered to bring to the Festival the huge five-thousand-pound crate that recently transported Happy the Hippo, a former National Zoo resident, to another city's zoo. Displaying the crate would allow OFMR staff to explain how they built it and Zoo staff to explain the safe transport of animals. It would also serve as an engaging point of interest for Festival visitors.

Barbara Strickland, associate director for finance and administration with the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, reconciles grants and contracts for the 2008 Smithsonian Folklife Festival. Hired in 1975 to work on the Festival's Native American program, Strickland is a member of the Lumbee Indian tribe of North Carolina. She and hundreds of administrators around the Smithsonian keep programs on course through their behind-the-scenes work: writing purchase orders, making payments, and balancing budgets. Photo by Charlie Weber, Smithsonian Institution



In order to make this idea a reality, Festival staff needed to research the story of the crate (to determine whether it would justify the possible cost and difficulty in getting it to the Mall and back); obtain the crate's specifications (dimensions, weight, materials used) in order to plan for its transport; and facilitate negotiations between our technical director, Rob Schneider, and the staffs of OFMR and the Zoo. As of the writing of this article, displaying the crate looks likely, thanks to the background research required to make it possible.

Research for the *Smithsonian Inside Out* program was challenging and rewarding—but always compellingly fascinating. As with many Folklife Festival programs, we wished we had years instead of months to do the research, but felt privileged to spend even a brief period of time exploring the skills and discovering the stories of Smithsonian staff. The Institution is a truly remarkable place, and bringing just a sampling of its work to the Folklife Festival has been worth all the hours of research and planning. Meanwhile, Festival fieldworkers have already begun their ethnographic research and exploration of secondary sources for several of the Folklife Festival programs in 2011, 2012, and beyond. We hope that our Smithsonian workers will always be planning future Festivals.

Betty J. Belanus has been curating Smithsonian Folklife Festival programs since 1987. She co-curated the Working at the Smithsonian program in 1996 during the Smithsonian's 150th anniversary. Working at the Smithsonian, and learning about her many fellow workers, never fails to amaze her. She cannot imagine working anywhere else.

(Above) Douglas Owsley (left) and archaeologist Danny Schmidt examine a double burial. Owsley leads a team of forensic anthropologists at the National Museum of Natural History, which developed the 2009 exhibition, *Written in Bone*. By examining skeletal remains from recent discoveries at historic Jamestown, Virginia, the exhibition shed new light on early American history. Owsley and fellow experts at the museum also work with agencies such as the FBI to identify bones found at crime scenes. Photo by Chip Clark, Smithsonian Institution

(Right) Harrison Jones, a member of the objects cleaning crew at the National Museum of Air and Space, dusts the X-15 aircraft hanging in the Milestones of Flight Gallery. Jones and his fellow custodial staff members face many out-of-the-ordinary challenges at the Smithsonian. Recently, crews from the Office of Facilities Management and Reliability have been experimenting with environmentally safe cleaning products in an ongoing effort to make Smithsonian operations more sustainable. Photo by Eric Long, Smithsonian Institution



A WEBOGRAPHY OF SMITHSONIAN RESOURCES

These Web sites will lead you to many more links related to Smithsonian staff, research, and public programs.

Collections at your Fingertips

www.siris.si.edu

www.folkways.si.edu

Smithsonian staff and volunteers have spent countless hours digitizing parts of their vast collections. For example, SIRIS (Smithsonian Institution Research Information System) allows Web visitors to search "over 2.3 million records, with 290,000 images, video and sound files from Smithsonian museums, archives, and libraries." And via Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, you can search for music from around the world, hear samples, and read extensive downloadable liner notes.

Encyclopedia Smithsonian

www.si.edu/Encyclopedia_Si

From Aeronautics to Zoology, this site links visitors to a mind-boggling, alphabetical array of Smithsonian research, collections, and collaborations.

From Print to Digital

affiliations.si.edu

www.smithsonianmag.com

Many Smithsonian print publications can also be found on the Web, such as the Smithsonian Affiliates newsletter. Other publications, such as *Smithsonian Magazine*, maintain lively Web sites with selections from current issues and on-line enhancements including video clips and blogs.

On-line Lectures and Seminars

www.smithsonianeducation.org/educators/professional_development/professional_development.html

Many lectures and symposia attended by Smithsonian scientists, curators, educators, and museums professionals are now fully accessible on the Web. See, for instance, the on-line, interdisciplinary seminars organized by the Smithsonian Center for Education and Museum Studies.

Smithsonian Folklife Festival

www.festival.si.edu

Everything you need to know about the Festival, including tips for visitors, schedule information, and video features. New information is posted each day of the Festival, so be sure to check this Web site frequently.

Paper conservator Perry Choe examines an architectural drawing by Ely Jacques Kahn at the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum in New York City. With more than 250,000 design objects and an extensive library, the Cooper-Hewitt is the only museum in the United States devoted exclusively to historic and contemporary design. Conservators such as Choe work throughout the Smithsonian, specializing in the research and repair of artifacts made from a myriad of materials: paper, plastic, wood, metal, and even chocolate and pollen. Photo by Jill Boomer, Smithsonian Institution



Staff Blogs

www.si.edu/blogs/default.htm

Many Smithsonian staff members find blogs an engaging way to share their research, current activities, and thoughts. This is like picking the brain of a Smithsonian expert and peeking behind the scenes in a very intimate way.

Videos Featuring Smithsonian Staff

www.youtube.com/user/smithsonian

Nearly two hundred videos produced by the Smithsonian are posted on YouTube, featuring everything from feeding zoo animals to conserving works of art made from chocolate and pollen.