Upper Valley Historical Society: A Museum on the Move

By Marit Muth

The Upper Valley Historical Society (UVHS), which operates the Upper Valley Museum in Leavenworth, continues making progress towards relocating the museum to Leavenworth’s vibrant downtown corridor on Front Street.

On May 1st, UVHS announced plans to renovate its museum into a portion of space currently occupied by The Leavenworth Nutcracker Museum.

The Upper Valley Historical Society is looking for volunteers to help out with small projects that do not require a long commitment of time and effort. The society is also planning to move to a new location.

UVHS plans to engage Erlich to provide various services within her field of expertise. Some of these services will likely include interactive planning, research, storyline writing, exhibit and photo selection, exhibit and graphic design, fabrication, installation, and consulting.

On July 16th, Erlich led a meeting of eight people, including some from UVHS’s board, to discuss various options for the new location. Erlich’s clients include the Quincy Valley Museum, Mount Rainier Scenic Railroad, Tumwater Historical Society, Cowitz County Historical Society, Point Defiance Visitor Center, and Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park, among others.

Joc Cannata, Lyman Boyd, and Rhonda Burton.

Four UVHS board members also attended plus Ann Oostella, the museum’s coordinator for the past fifteen years.

Matt Cade, president of the UVHS board, who attended the meeting, appreciated the time and effort everyone made to participate in a nearly four-hour meeting.

"It was apparent from the very beginning, that this was a serious, focused group," Cade said.

"They did not come to socialize; they came to contribute four hours of their busy day to help support an organization that means a lot to our community."

Cade was encouraged hearing comments and suggestions from those not connected to UVHS, almost all of whom he had not met previously. As Cade explained, "The comments, suggestions, ideas, and observations of others reaffirmed our belief that the UVHS board is going in the right direction for the right reasons."

With regards to plans for possible changes to the exhibit, Erlich explained, "The existing exhibits appear to be in good shape and well thought out."

That said, Erlich feels the new location, with nearly twice the exhibit space as the previous site, presents an excellent opportunity to expand and refresh the older exhibits.

Cade said UVHS’s next step in the planning process is to hold a "refresh" exhibit meeting with UVHS board, staff, or volunteers familiar with existing museum exhibits, along with other community members.

In addition to leading the "refresh" exhibit meeting, Erlich will also conduct a review of materials in the UVHS collection. An example of questions that will likely be explored include: "What has been most important or interesting to visitors? What hasn’t been and why?"

At the same time as the "refresh" exhibit meeting, UVHS will also identify practical needs (e.g., common tourist questions, school tour group needs, etc.) that all exhibits need to accommodate.

Finally, plans are to model with other groups that are stakeholders in the history of the Upper Wenatchee Valley.

This area includes the vast stretch from Stevens Pass to Dryden and from Blewett Pass to Plain and Lake Wenatchee.

Some of these stakeholders include the Wenatchi Band of the Colville Indian Tribe, Autumn Leaf Festival Association, and Projekt Bayern. UVHS believes that visitors to Leavenworth would like to see more information in our museum regarding the "Basawai Transformation."

Not surprisingly, Cade said that "everyone attending our July 16th meeting felt very deeply that it was important to explain in more detail the "Basawaiization" story with visitors and guests."

Near the end of the July 16th meeting, Erlich asked participants a straightforward question which was "What do you want visitors to walk away with (i.e., what will the visitor remember most about their visit?)"

The attendees worked together and put together the following: "Leavenworth's miracle was accomplished by people with vision and grit, who worked together to transform a struggling railroad town into a vibrant community that is a unique destination for many."