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2021 MPMA Leadership and Innovation Award Announcement

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The Mountain-Plains Museums Association (MPMA) is pleased to announce the recipients of the 2021 MPMA Awards. Established in 1953, MPMA is a regional museum association that provides services to museum professionals in ten states: Colorado, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, and Wyoming. MPMA is one of six regional associations in the United States that work in conjunction with the American Association of Museums.

MPMA Leadership and Innovation Award celebrates the creative spirit of MPMA member institutions honoring leadership and innovation in all areas of museum operation. Innovation can include, but is not limited to, the following areas: audience and community building, collections management, education programs, exhibits, interpretation, management practices, outreach initiatives, public programs, use of technology and visitor experience.

The Western Heritage Center (WHC) is a leader in developing relevant, original exhibits that highlight marginalized and ignored voices in regional history and, as such, has been selected to receive MPMA's 2021 Leadership and Innovation Award.

The mission of Western Heritage Center is to collect, preserve and tell the stories of the people and places of the Yellowstone River Valley and the northern High Plains region. The Center, located in Billings, Montana, manages an innovative and robust exhibits program dependent on original research, thorough oral histories, and active community partnerships. A full-time staff of three develops five to seven new relevant, engaging exhibitions each year highlighting marginalized and ignored historic voices.

The Western Heritage Center believes strongly in the importance of using primary and contemporary sources in each exhibit, and staff recognize the responsibility and necessity of self-representation in every story. To accomplish this, the WHC actively collects oral histories, photographs, and primary documents pertaining to these stories, many of which are simply missing in scholarship and interpretation. Recent exhibits such as *The Southsiders*, *Saints & Sinners: Women Breaking Tradition*, and *Baá Hawassii & Ènomóhtâhéseh: Healthcare on the Crow & Northern Cheyenne Reservations* illustrate these efforts by featuring new stories covering previously under-represented historic themes.

For example, in developing *The Southsiders* in-gallery exhibition in 2017, the WHC partnered with Healthy by Design, a community collaboration to promote and provide healthy choices and community revitalization. Historically, Billings' Southside hosted a rich culture representing a diverse community including immigrants and people of color. However, this neighborhood was grossly under-represented in community discourses and museum collections. Through this partnership, the WHC collected seventeen oral history recordings and numerous photographs and documents, which featured heavily in the exhibition space. This exhibit continues to uplift residents of the neighborhood, who are eager to hear and tell their own stories, and inspires the community with previously hidden accomplishments and excellence. It is also frequently recommended for educational use, since it has free access and expands representation in classroom history. The project has expanded in 2021 as exhibit components have been used to develop historic walking tours, podcasts, and other community-centered events including resident-submitted sidewalk poetry. The exhibit lives on as an interactive online space that blends exhibit panels with photographs, and recordings of these historically marginalized groups. The online exhibit can be viewed at <https://www.ywhc.org/exhibit/the-southsiders/>.

The 2021 exhibit, *Baá Hawassiiio & Ènomóhtâhéseh: Healthcare on the Crow & Northern Cheyenne Reservations* continues this type of work. Leaning on the nearly 280 native oral histories collected as part of the American Indian Tribal Histories Project at the WHC as well as interviews with current tribal leaders in health and community history, the exhibit explores the challenging history of healthcare and healing on the Crow and Northern Cheyenne reservations. Highlights include a discussion of healthcare as assimilation practice, non-consensual sterilization practices, the effects of poor sanitation on reservation health, and the stories of "healthcare heroes" such as Susie Walking Bear Yellowtail, RN. The story continues the narrative of growing self-determination that inspired native peoples to demand better conditions and to blend traditional beliefs with Western medical practices in the face of legal threats and apathetic government workers. The exhibit introduces the concept of generational historic trauma, a relatively new term to our audience and connects how it makes a tangible impact on both history and modern life, especially through public health. *Baá Hawassiiio & Ènomóhtâhéseh: Healthcare on the Crow & Northern Cheyenne Reservations* is the only exhibit of its kind in the region and has drawn the attention of numerous medical organizations, as well as that of educators and social scientists.

The WHC's exhibition efforts continue to draw attention as out-of-town guests express surprise and excitement for the depth and coverage of each space. Local community residents are also impressed with the diversity and relevance of each exhibit as they find unknown stories of neighbors and friends.

MPMA Awards Chair, Hyojung Cho, announced the award during the association's annual conference in Sioux Falls, South Dakota on October 7, 2021.