

Heritage center's Booth takes Colorado job

By Barb Curtin - November 19, 2012



Peter Booth, executive director of the Willamette Heritage Center at The Mill, will leave next month to take a similar position at the Museum of Western Colorado.

Booth, 49, came to Salem 4 1/2 years ago to head what was then known as Mission Mill Museum. He led that museum's merger with the Marion County Historical Society, creating the Willamette Heritage Center at The Mill.

"It's a great opportunity for me professionally and a neat opportunity for my family," Booth said on Monday. "We will be close to her side of the family and mine ... The one drawback is that we have made a lot of friends in Salem and have come to enjoy this community."

Booth and his wife, Dana, have three boys, ages 10, 8 and 6.

A Texas native, Booth earned his doctorate in American West and Native American history from Purdue University. Before coming to Salem, he worked for the Arizona Historical Society-Tucson and the Desert Caballeros Western Museum in Wickenburg, Ariz.

Booth listed one of his accomplishments as forging a more inclusive mission for the history center, with help from staff and volunteers.

"History is made up of many different voices," he said. "It is important for a museum such as the Willamette Heritage Center to encourage the community to take notice of its history, start a dialog on the history and share it with visitors."

An example is the museum's third Heritage Invitational show, which will open Jan. 18. Seventeen local museums, archives and history organizations will contribute to "When We Were Young," a look at Willamette Valley history through the eyes of children.

Ross Stout, president of the Salem museum's board of directors, credited Booth with coming up with the idea of uniting Mission Mill with the historical society during bus rides with Amy Vandegrift, the historical society's former director.

The result has been improved marketing, greater efficiency and better service to the community, Stout said.

"His development of ongoing relations between the Willamette Heritage Center and the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde has been a significant accomplishment, benefiting the heritage center and the tribes as well," Stout added.

One such show, "The Grand Ronde Canoe Journey" (2011), won a national Award of Merit from the American Association of State and Local History.

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"We hope to be able to attract someone of Peter's experience to continue his work," Stout said.

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