

Willamette Heritage Center hires new director

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Sam Wegner

Bio

Who: Samuel J. "Sam" Wegner, newly hired as executive director for the Willamette Heritage Center at The Mill. **Education:** Bachelor of arts in U.S. Western history, minor in anthropology and museum studies, University of Arizona; master of arts in U.S. Western history/museum studies, University of Idaho. **Job history:** Executive director, North Carolina Transportation Museum, March-November 2012; museum consultant to The National World War II Museum, 2011-12; vice president of education and strategic planning, The National World War II Museum, 2001-2011; society superintendent and state historic preservation officer, State Historical Society of North Dakota, 1998-2001; deputy executive director, The Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, 1996-98; executive director, Southern Oregon Historical Society, 1986-96; earlier

jobs in Jacksonville; Missouri; Wisconsin; West Virginia. **Family:** Wife, Linda, a tour guide, singer and voice teacher; her mother, who will moved to a care facility in Salem; grown daughter in North Carolina and grown son in Louisiana.

Sam Wegner brings nearly 40 years of museum experience to his new job as executive director of the Willamette Heritage Center at The Mill.

Wegner ("Only my mother calls me Samuel") most recently headed the state-funded North Carolina Transportation Museum in Spencer, N.C. Much of his experience traces to his decade-plus tenure as vice president of education and strategic planning at The National World War II Museum in New Orleans.

The heritage center's board announced Wegner's hiring Tuesday, more than seven months after the departure of former museum director Peter Booth. Booth left to take charge of a museum in Grand Junction, Colo. John Hawkins, a history writer and former community college executive, has held the job on an interim basis.

The heritage center board was attracted by the breadth and depth of Wegner's experience in a variety of locations, Hawkins said. Both qualities will be needed to help the heritage center move forward.

"Beginning with the recession, it's been tough on most nonprofits," Hawkins said. "We have to find ways to operate more economically and provide services this community wants and deserves. That may mean some changes."

Wegner, reached Tuesday in North Carolina, said that the board wants him to develop programs that will draw people to the heritage center and engage them with their own history.

“People learn best when it’s a personal experience for them,” he said.

“The other critical issue is resource development. Everyone is scrambling to get the money to get things done.”

Wegner said that he and his wife, Linda, are eager to return to Oregon. He was executive director of the Southern Oregon Historical Society in Medford from 1986 to 1996.

“We have lived all over the country and have considered Oregon the best place we have lived,” he said. “Now we have the opportunity to come back home again.”

Tuesday’s announcement was a long time coming. Forty-three applicants sought the job. A search committee narrowed the field to three finalists, all women, by late May. When these candidates either dropped out or were ruled out, the board chose three additional finalists, one of whom was Wegner.

He will start work Sept. 3.

The Willamette Heritage Center resulted from the unification of the Mission Mill Museum Association and Marion County Historical Society. It operates a five-acre campus at 1313 Mill St. SE. The site includes the 1841 Jason Lee house, 1841 Willamette Mission Parsonage, 1847 John Boon home, 1858 Pleasant Grove Church and the 1896 Thomas Kay Woolen Mill, named an American Treasure by the National Park Service. The center’s yearly budget is nearly \$700,000.

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