

**Positioning Corps Visitor Centers for the Future  
National Natural Resources Mgmt. Conference  
Nashville, TN  
Thursday, March 18, 2010**

Each panel member will have **10 minutes** to present one “best practice” of visitor center planning, management and programming that supports the Issues and Recommendations of the HQ VCI Initiative Study on Corps Visitor Center.

**Moderator: Nancy Rogers-** Introduce panel and outline purpose of the presentations. Each represents one best practice of what a Corps visitor center should be doing. In 2003, the VCI committee developed 28 recommendations from their study to improve the VC program in the Corps. With ARRA funding and enlightened leadership- we are beginning to realize those improvements. This is not a comprehensive list of best practices, but we hope that efforts of the panel members will inspire you to go back to your project and regard your visitor center with renewed sense of opportunity.

Topics are outlined below with the assigned panel member.

**1. Community Involvement in Planning and Use- Mary Anne Heitmeyer, Mark Twain Lake, Boudreaux Visitor Center**

- Management culture is geared toward partnering and community involvement.
- Community involvement has informed design to emphasize **multi-purpose and community use**.
- Will be open year-round,
- Green building a priority

**2. Customer Service Informs Design – Dawn Koravik, St. Louis District**

- New office and VC will be one-stop shop for visitors. Rangers, admin and maint and VC all in one building, whereas before is was separated in different buildings.
- VC will be open all year vs. part year in the past.
- Visitors expect a certain level of service and they will respond
- Green building a priority

**3. Plan With Your Partners – Titus Hardiman, Little Rock District**

- Located near Branson, MO- a heavily visited tourist destination
- Involving local partners, Branson community in design created a multi-purpose community center everyone can support
- Focusing on partnering because new building will be a stand alone VC
- Staffing entirely by volunteers and/or non-profit partners- no new costs

- Families and tour groups are predominant visitors, but they are discovering untapped audiences
- Planning for future growth and use

#### **4. Training and Evaluation Are Key to Success of a Visitor Center- Pat Barry, Supv. Park Ranger, Bonneville Lock and Dam.**

- A trained staff and volunteers improves customer service. Staffing and volunteers work together to represent the agency.
- The basic Interpretive Services course much improved and uses existing National Assoc. for Interpretation Certified Interpretive Guide as basis for training.
- Shifting to encourage more managers to embrace interpretation as a communication tool to do your job. Developed new Advanced Interpretive Services for Managers course-debuting June 2010.
- Embracing technology to reach audiences.
- More international visitors...brochures in 7 languages.
- Incorporate interpretive concepts in all program themes. Relate via universal concepts.

#### **5. Planning Ahead Positions Projects for Funding – Pam Doty,**

- Planning prior to building is critical. If planning hadn't been done beforehand, it would have been very difficult to get the funding to build.
- Design narrative and exhibit plans are critical - you never know when the money is dropped In your lap.
- Plan for return visitors- interchange exhibits, traveling and temporary exhibit space
- Stressing ADA in design and working with partners who can advise on accessibility..

##### **Overall Messages**

Green technology for all VC buildings.

Visitor centers are a reflection of the agency-

Partnering to develop national exhibits

**Wrap-Up-** Encourage everyone to go to the Gateway – Visitor Center page and read the VCI report. The committee will be reforming and require new members to move forward on updating the Visitor Center ER, complete VC definitions and work to position VCs better in the budget process.

You heard some common themes here...community and regional considerations are critical to relevancy of your VC and ultimately your success. Gone are the days we make decisions in a vacuum. Plan for the future and give your visitors what they are looking for- if you don't know- ask them!