

2012 Medal Winner Bootheel Youth Museum

Speakers: Host, Patsy Reublin & Lauren Collins

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>> HOST: The National Medal for Museum and Library Service is the nation's highest honor for libraries and museums that are serving their communities in exceptional ways.

Bootheel Youth Museum Director Patsy Reublin and community member Lauren Collins traveled to Washington from Malden Missouri to receive the National Medal and spoke to IMLS about how the museum impacts the community.

>> PATSY REUBLIN: The city of Malden is about 4,700 people. The museum opened its doors in 1996. We have about 30,000 guests a year, which is pretty remarkable for a community our size. We have guests that travel from all over the region including northeast Arkansas and Illinois and Tennessee.

We're a hands-on science center so all of our exhibits are science or math based. Even if you go into our Lewis and Clarke exhibit what we're trying to do is teach the kids about botany or naturalism and that kind of thing.

>> LAUREN COLLINS: The AmeriCorps Program is a national program. It's a volunteer service program. It offers a small living stipend based on the number of hours that you complete and a scholarship for college.

My role is that I'm a full-time member and we do hands-on science and math education in the schools and inside the museum. We do workshops, after school programs, festivals, that sort of thing.

>> PATSY REUBLIN: The way that the program works is I get to go find all of these great, wonderful young people who have a passion for education or working with children or for science or for some other reason and they get to come and be a part of what we do.

There's two great things about this. One is that we serve these little kids and we allow them to actually do science so they're getting dirty. They're making slime. They're shooting catapults and doing all those kinds of things. But then we also have these great young people that get a chance to kind of figure out what they want to do with their life.

>> LAUREN COLLINS: When I started the program I had super short bubble-gum pink hair and I was extremely loud and extremely colorful. I'm still pretty colorful but I did it more as humor and to be attention grabbing. I really didn't have that much confidence though. I put all the confidence into the acting silly.

And then as I got a leadership role, it taught me so much about myself and I know now that I'm fantastic with children and I love serving and I love working with the kids hands-on and teaching them and seeing how excited they get about the science and what they're learning.

>> PATSY REUBLIN: We do have a lot of exhibits in the museum but we do a lot of activities that you wouldn't normally find in a big museum. Our AmeriCorps members are actually actors. We do a play called the Three Little Pigs and Their Cousin Shakin Bacon, which is an earthquake science activity. It's very fun, very interactive and it's also educational.

Lauren is also our lead mad scientist so she does different science demonstrations for big and small groups, as many as I think she's done a presentation in front of 230 people before, or just a group of ten people that come in.

We're in one of the worst areas of the country and there aren't a lot of jobs. It's not like Lauren can go out and find a job in a factory or even working in a convenient store. I mean we have two traffic lights in town. There aren't enough jobs for the people that live there.

But technology and science and math are areas where people are always needed and it's the foundation of the universe. If we can teach kids how this little thing works in a simple fun way it's going to create a passion for science and math in them and it's going to be a way to either make Malden a better place or to get them out of town and into a place where they're going to be able to raise a family and have a great life.

>> LAUREN COLLINS: Every day we are part of the after school program at our elementary school there in town and we do science with them. Then on the weekends our AmeriCorps members who serve at the museum do science activities for the kids or they'll put on an astronaut suit and they'll walk around and talk to the children.

But I found that what the kids get most out of it is more of like a mentor because most of us are at this perfect age where the kids still really look up to us. We're not an adult yet but we're not one of them and so it's like they want to be like us.

For us to give them strong role models who are teaching them you want to learn, you want to continue your education and this can be fun and they're starting to think hey maybe science can be fun. Hey maybe I do want to do this.

And so for us to be such a small community and to have so many youth volunteers it's an amazing thing and it's going to help us when we're growing up to understand giving back and then it helps the community by the service that we provide.