

THE PRESENTATION OF LOWELL'S STORIES: ORIGINS, ACCOMPLISHMENTS, AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Peter O'Connell and Gray Fitzsimons, February 14, 2008

As part of the celebration of its 30th anniversary, Lowell National Historical Park (the Park) commissioned two white papers to stimulate reflection about the extent to which the Park has accomplished its mission objectives and about possible future directions and goals. One paper focuses on heritage preservation and community development. This paper is intended to provoke thoughtful discussion about educational and interpretive goals, new partnership and programming structures, new audiences to be served, and the roles the Park should play with respect to other organizations in the city and region. The opinions expressed here are solely those of the authors and not those of the National Park Service or Lowell NHP.

I. PARK PROGRAMMING IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

As Lowell National Historical Park reaches the thirtieth anniversary of its establishment in 1978, the Park staff, its partners, and residents in Lowell and the surrounding region have much to celebrate. From its inception, the National Park status conferred upon Lowell was a testament to the city's important role in shaping the nation's social and economic fabric and to its technologically innovative, industrious, and commercial spirit. Lowell's immigrant communities, like many others in urbanizing America, recast the city's cultural and economic landscape, and ultimately the very identity of what it meant to be an American. The city's civic, educational, and political leaders believed that Lowell and its national park had much to teach to present and future generations about urban life, work, and culture in our nation.

Lowell was envisioned as a "living laboratory" in which residents and visitors would participate in crafts demonstrations and instruction, dance or musical performances and workshops, and costumed interpretation and "living history." The presentation of history and the preservation of multi-ethnic forms of cultural expression were to foster not only a greater appreciation of the diversity of the American experience, but also to highlight linkages between the nation's citizenry and their countries of origin. Some planners even forecasted more than one million visitors each year, resulting in a significant boost to the local economy.

To undertake this ambitious educational and interpretive enterprise, the National Park joined with the Lowell Historic Preservation Commission whose small staff was advised by business, educational, and civic leaders. Between 1979 and 1995, The Commission created the Office of Cultural Affairs and the New England Folklife Center, and restored the Boott Cotton Mills Boardinghouse, which featured permanent exhibits on mill life and the immigrant experience in Lowell, and contained the University of Massachusetts Lowell's Center for Lowell History. The Heritage State Park established in 1974, created and led the first public tours of the canals and downtown, opened and staffed the city's first Visitors Center, and presented an extensive costumed-interpretation program daily during the summer.

In the 1980s, the staff of Lowell National Historical Park grew in size and visibility. Working closely with its partners, the Park opened its Visitor Center in 1982, ran an annual industrial history conference in conjunction with the University, offered walking tours and its popular canal and historic trolley tours, and staffed the Boott Cotton Mills Boardinghouse exhibit, which

opened in 1989. The Park's initial programs for schools culminated in the founding of the Tsongas Industrial History Center, a Park-University partnership that featured "hands-on" education programs in the Boott Mill. The Center began to draw thousands of students and teachers to Lowell each year. By far the most popular annual event, however, was the Lowell Folk Festival which, beginning in 1987, brought to the city a diversity of musical performers representing a range of traditional and contemporary styles, along with crafts demonstrations and a rich array of ethnic foods. Attendance climbed from about 275,000 in 1980 to more than 800,000 by the close of the 1980s.

On the one hand, the decade of the 1990s was marked by the ascendance of the Tsongas Industrial History Center's award-winning educational programs and by the opening of the Boott Cotton Mills Museum, as well as the continued popularity of the Lowell Folk Festival. The opening of the American Textile History Museum (ATHM), the New England Quilt Museum, the Whistler House, the Brush Art Gallery and the Revolving Museum, and the success of the Merrimack Repertory Theater and the Park's Summer Concert Series brought new visitors downtown and created an attractive environment for artists. On the other hand, the Commission ended in 1995 (key staff transferred to the Park), the Heritage State Park closed its museum and the New England Folklife Center was discontinued leaving a sizeable void in local cultural programming. Overall visitation to museums, including the Park, the Tsongas Center, and Lowell museums began to decline.

Lowell National Park entered the new millennium at a crossroads. Federal funding was not keeping up with built-in increases in Park salaries and benefits, requiring the Park to leave some positions vacant as staff took other jobs or retired. New forms of media technology were reshaping audience demands and expectations. Lowell itself was undergoing demographic and economic changes, with a burgeoning student population, new downtown developments, especially in the real estate market, and intensification of arts activity. The city's large Southeast Asian and older ethnic communities were joined by an influx of moderately affluent professionals and "empty nesters" from South Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and South America, and from the suburbs.

The Park continued to play a pivotal role in cultural programming. In partnership with UML, it sustained the Tsongas Industrial History Center as the Center adjusted to changes in schools caused by education reform and attracted national funding for teacher institutes. The Park offered expanded cultural community programs through the Mogan Cultural Center, including support for Southeast Asian groups working to preserve their cultures, to initiate the Southeast Asian Water Festival and to co-sponsor the Cambodian Opera. In partnership with Middlesex Community College developed an award-winning civic engagement and service-learning program. The Park bolstered its volunteer staff and recruited local youth to work seasonal jobs and participate in Park offerings. The Lowell Folk Festival and the Summer Concert Series continued to bring thousands of visitors downtown. And finally, the Park redesigned its Visitors Center exhibits, renovated and updated exhibits in the Boott Cotton Mills, and showcased a new environmental theme at the Suffolk Mill.

Much has been accomplished, but the time is ripe to re-examine the Park's leadership roles in Lowell, the region and nationally, its programming priorities and partnership structures, and its financial strategies to build on past successes and to meet new needs

II. DEFINING A VISION

In its first 30 years, the Park created unusually strong programming partnerships with the Lowell Plan, the City of Lowell, UMass Lowell (UML), Middlesex Community College (MCC) and the Lowell Festival Foundation that, in turn, created enabling frameworks of participation by a host of other community partners. In the past two years, building on this unusually strong foundation, the Park and University proposed a more comprehensive partnership structure encompassing UML, MCC, the Lowell Plan, and the City of Lowell. As the Paul E. Tsongas Center for Research and Public Policy, Civic Engagement and Experiential Learning (the new Tsongas Center), the plan would add layers of research, public policy, and civic engagement programs to the Tsongas Industrial History Center's successful experiential education programs¹. Each of the partners would contribute to the staffing of the new umbrella structure and work together to secure gifts and grants primarily from outside of Lowell.

Concurrently, the Lowell Plan, the City of Lowell, and Lowell educational and cultural organizations adopted the "*City of World Cultures*" cultural master plan, which provides new opportunities for program collaborations among the Park, the City of Lowell, UML, MCC, the Lowell Plan and Lowell cultural partners, including the Lowell Festival Foundation.

These two frameworks set the stage for the Park to (1) strengthen the use of Lowell as a classroom for both K-12 and college students, (2) expand collaborations among educational and cultural organizations in the City, and (3) become one of the "must see" historical sites in the United States because of the national significance of its stories, the quality of its educational and interpretive programs, and its use of historical preservation and partnerships in building a stronger community and region. More specifically, the Park might:

- A. Strengthen itself as a leading regional center in collecting, preserving, interpreting, and presenting the multi-faceted, multi-ethnic cultures of urban, industrial, and post- industrial America,
- B. Become one of the most influential history parks in the National Park Service (NPS) for its lively interpretation of immigration, ethnicity, and urban development and of science, technology and society in the past and present,
- C. Become one of the leading adult and family tourist and school group destinations in Massachusetts and the Northeast because of its storytelling, performance, hands-on activities, and use of interactive technologies, and
- D. Join with partners and the business community to create one of the nation's leading examples of historic preservation, urban ecology, and the new urbanism and developing a leadership and stewardship program for both youth and adults.

¹ The new Paul E. Tsongas Center for Research and Public Policy, Civic Engagement and Experiential Learning would create a need to rename the Tsongas Industrial History Center to avoid confusion. Depending on the programming directions the park and its partners take and on the fundraising strategies they adopt, a variety of new programming structures might be created and named to carry out planned marketing strategies to the target audiences and to honor large donors.

III. OPPORTUNITIES

As demonstrated by the Park’s past history, success is the product of a powerful vision, a high level of partner collaboration, and a well-coordinated, sustained funding strategy. We begin this section with the park’s possible role in developing a funding strategy, not because we believe it to be more important than the other elements, but because of the unique opportunity provided by the *Centennial Challenge Initiative* of the National Park Service. We then explore ideas for achieving the vision that are aligned with *The Future of America’s Parks* (2007), the Secretary of the Interior’s report to the President of the United States, which outlines specific goals as part of the *Centennial Challenge Initiative*.

A. PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE: MAKING THE PARK THE FIRST CHOICE FOR REGIONAL AND NATIONAL PHILANTHROPY

<p>PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make national parks the first choice in philanthropic giving• Model what it means to work in partnership• Develop Park managers’ capacity to lead change and meet leadership opportunities• Use strategic planning to promote management excellence <p><i>The Future of America’s Parks, 2007</i></p>
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For each of the next ten years leading up to the centennial anniversary of the founding of the National Park Service in 2016, the Bush Administration proposed to increase annual funding for the NPS by \$100,000,000 and to appropriate an additional \$100,000,000 each year if partners of the NPS matched that amount. Although it is not clear whether Congress will fund this commitment fully, the *Centennial Challenge* creates a framework for a park-led strategy to attract funding for programming as well as preservation projects from public sources and private donors. The park and its partners are experienced in securing congressional funding. The new challenge is to coordinate efforts to secure large grants and donations from individuals and corporations nationally and regionally.

The *Centennial Challenge Initiative* suggests a more active fundraising role for the NPS and the Park that heretofore has been discouraged by Congress and by local organizations fearful that the Park would divert to itself funding on which the local organizations depended. In this new role, modeled on the Park’s role in securing funding for preservation projects, Park leadership could work actively with community partners to “bundle” heritage program proposals to compete for *Centennial Challenge* grants, Congressional funding, and/or grants from national foundations, corporations and donors. In this new partnership, the Park might find it useful to create a Friends Group or some similar structure to give national, regional, and local donors appropriate recognition as supporters of Park and partners alike.

B. ESTABLISH A RESEARCH AGENDA, CONSOLIDATE COLLECTIONS, AND EXPAND PUBLIC POLICY WORK

STEWARDSHIP: Caring for America's Treasures:

- Rehabilitate high priority historic buildings.
- Assure that no compelling chapter in the American heritage experience remains untold ...
- Set the standard of excellence in urban park landscape design and maintenance
- Encourage children to be future conservationists.

The Future of America's National Parks (2007)

An accessible collection, research on both historical and contemporary topics, and a full menu of public policy programming provides both historical perspective and contemporary relevance to today's audiences. Within the new Tsongas Center partnership, UML might take the lead in coordinating faculty and staff teams from the partner organizations in conceptualizing and carrying out a research and public policy agenda. The Park's role would be to provide leadership for projects related to the Park's themes and to connect research with interpretive and educational programs that examine contemporary issues in historical perspective.

The park organizes all its educational and public programming around three broad themes: *Farm to Factory to Globalization*, *Newcomers and Ethnicity in Urban America*, and *Nature Transformed*. These themes are described more fully in the footnote below². For each theme, the establishment of a Center that focuses on **research**,

² **Farm to Factory to Globalization:** This theme broadly interprets industrialization in America with emphasis on the Lowell experience as seen through lives of mill girls, factories, power canals, boardinghouse developments, emergence of labor organizations and workers' culture, managerial organization, and technological change and innovation. It underscores the importance of the early 19th century market (capitalist) revolution that transformed the nation's fledgling cities and its vast rural communities, and fundamentally shaped the conditions under which the U.S. industrialized. This theme also explores, through Lowell, the growth of factory (wage) labor, the gendered construction of work, family, and community, and the connections between and growing tensions over the Southern slave cotton economy and the Northern free labor factory system.

Newcomers and Ethnic Culture in Urban America: This theme points to the global changes that historically pushed or pulled people to emigrate/immigrate (with Lowell as the "case study"), that reshaped traditional and dominant cultures, and that continue to bring cultures and societies together often creating social and cultural tensions. Linked to this theme are issues of changing work experiences, changing economies and cultures, consumerism and class, and changing notions of family and community. This theme is connected to the changing quality of life in American cities like Lowell where ethnicity remains diverse and where economies are experiencing fundamental shifts similar to the social, economic, and cultural dynamics in developing countries. Finally this theme is informed by issues of cultural and historical preservation in such ethnically diverse and once heavily industrialized cities as Lowell.

Nature Transformed: This theme explores the complex interaction between humans and the natural world over time. With Lowell and the Merrimack Watershed as the central focus, this theme explores the past and present of how the region's people, of various ethno-cultural origins, have viewed and used the river and the surrounding natural world. Woven into this exploration is the notion that human uses of nature in an industrial city such as Lowell brought great material wealth while precipitating an ecological crisis. Finally, this theme explores how residents, young and old, and of diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, understand and use nature, how the ecological crisis remains a challenge as new, intensive uses emerge, and how people are attempting to achieve a balance of uses to sustain a healthy environment.

public policy, and civic engagement and is located in a Park facility could be a useful structure to bring together partner faculty and staff to identify action-research projects, develop education and interpretive programs that use the Park and Lowell as classrooms, conceptualize grant proposals, and propose new public policies. Such action research would create many opportunities for student service-learning and adult civic engagement projects and lead to community exhibits, fairs, lectures and public policy conferences. What might these Centers be?

Farm to Factory to Globalization: A “Center for Regional, Economic and Social Development” or a “Science, Technology and Society Center” might be located in the **Boott Mill**. Faculty could conduct comparative studies of the industrialization and de-industrialization of textiles in Lowell and in other regions of the world, research the impact of science and technology on women, workers and society, and document the factors contributing to the revival of old mill communities, with Lowell as a case study.

Newcomers and Ethnicity in Urban America: Lowell is the logical site for a New England Center of Ethnic Arts, Culture, and History at the **Patrick J. Mogan Cultural Center**. Faculty and staff associated with such a Center could continue ethnography research projects and extend them to include students and community groups, conceptualize frameworks for interpreting ethnicity in American life, explore issues of immigration policy, partner with national and regional folklife centers, and support the City of World Cultures cultural plan.

Nature Transformed: This cluster of faculty and partner organization staff drawn from Lowell’s environmental organizations,³ the City of Lowell, and the UML/MCC environmental sciences and history faculty might conceptualize a *Center for Environmental Research and Education* located in the **Suffolk/Wannalancit Mill**⁴ and connected by canals to the Merrimack and Concord rivers. The New Urbanism movement (which embraces neighborhood diversity, less-polluting forms of transportation, and pedestrian-oriented and accessible designs that reflect local history, ecology, historic preservation, and “green building” could provide a powerful research base for public policy and programming.

Ideally, the research and public policy layer of programming would be anchored in, and help to integrate into a larger whole, existing courses and partner organizational activities, forming the base of a pyramid. Using a combination of institutional incentives (course releases, incentive grants, etc.) and external funding (the Park-UML scholar in the City grants, ethnography research funding, NEH grants, etc.), faculty could receive support for research activities that incorporated service learning and gradually accomplish partner research objectives.

At the top of the research and public policy pyramid, externally funded “**Tsongas Fellows-in-Residence**,” scholars and public policy specialists with national reputations, would work with faculty and community partners to conceptualize a conference on their area of expertise. Historians, policy-makers, and educators would discuss intellectual frameworks for the interpretation of the topic using Park resources and the City as a case study. The conference, in

³ Such an organization might include all the organizations currently participating in the Greater Lowell Regional Environmental Alliance but add to the GLEEA layers of research, public policy and civic engagement .

⁴ An alternate location, one that is currently under discussion by UML and the Park, is the Bellegarde Boathouse. The Boathouse has the advantage of its wonderful views of the river, but has the disadvantages of a small footprint designed primarily to support a boating program, a relatively large expense even to renovate the existing structure, and its relative isolation from other Park facilities.

turn, could lead to publications, interpretive tours and programs, policy initiatives, community exhibits, and funding proposals.

Such an integrated research program would be strengthened by the **consolidation of and digitization of Lowell's unique historical collections, the Fifth Congressional District Archives, and the City of Lowell Archives, made accessible to students, citizens, and Park visitors through digital portals, including a portal at the Center for Lowell History.** As the largest historical organization in the City, the Park would be in a position to lead conversations about such a consolidation. Public programs could include oral history and storytelling projects, family and community history training programs, community writing programs, a community exhibits program or even a new community archivist training program. This ongoing collaboration might lead to the development of more integrated interpretive programs among the Park, the American Textile History Museum, and the Lowell Historical Society.

C. REFASHION THE PARK AS THE CITY'S FULL SERVICE TOURISM GATEWAY TO A SEAMLESS, HIGHLY INTERACTIVE, EDUCATIONAL AND RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCE

Earlier in this paper, we noted the Park and partner programming successes including the Lowell Folk Festival, school and teacher programs at the Tsongas Industrial History Center, the Summer Concert Series, the highly successful Kerouac exhibit and associated programs, Mill and Canal Tours, Civic Engagement/Service learning projects, and Mogan Center programming. The Park has supported the Southeast Asian Water Festival, Winterfest, Doors Open Lowell, the Cambodian Opera, environmental programs, and many other programs as well. The Park has been extremely responsive, providing a variety of services, funding, and spaces, but sometimes finding its resources stretched and its staff overextended.

In this section, we offer strategies for the Park to be proactive in focusing its resources on fewer objectives to implement and market fully, thereby producing larger and lasting effects.

1. Themes and Target Audiences: Give Priority to *Newcomers and Ethnic Culture in Urban America*

In its first 30 years, the Park concentrated its facility and program development primarily on the theme of *Farm to Factory to Globalization*. More recently, it has expanded its cultural, music, and environmental programs. In the next ten years, in partnership with the City of Lowell's *City of World Cultures* cultural master plan, the Park can engage more local residents in Park programming and work with the City to attract tourism by giving priority to the interpretation of *Newcomers and Ethnic Culture in Urban America*.

In this scenario, the *Farm to Factory to Globalization* theme would remain the primary focus for K-12 and college programs, but staff would work with partners to give new emphasis to science and technology in a global economy and to hands-on science programming. *Nature Transformed* would remain the primary focus for the Park's civic engagement, service-learning, and youth leadership programs as well as K-12 programs in the Spring and Fall.

This kind of alignment of themes and audiences could allow the Park to organize staff groups to lead Park and partner thematic program development working groups, each of which would propose programs to incorporate into the Park's annual calendar of events.

2. Restructure Park “Destination” Spaces and Programs to Increase the “Experience Quotient” for Students and General Visitors Alike

Early Park planners used the concept of visitor “pathways” that would lead visitors from the Visitor Center to key Park resources including the Boott Mill and Working People Exhibit at the Mogan Cultural Center. Given the dramatic increase in cultural activity in Lowell, the Park and its partners might reconceptualize new pathways using the Visitor Center as an arrival “hub” that connects visitors via staff and volunteer tour guides, technology-assisted walks, trolley, and/or boats to experience-rich “destination sites” throughout the city.

Park “destination sites” would be family-friendly hands-on/discovery/performance and interactive exhibit centers at which visitors also would find refreshments and shopping. Here visitors would be linked to other related sites. Consider, for example, the following (all names are for purposes of illustration only):

- (a) “Immigration Station” at the Mogan Cultural Center: Storytelling, hands-on activities, craft, music, and dance workshops, changing interactive exhibits focusing on ethnic arts, culture and history. Adults and children might record their own immigration, ethnicity, and mobility stories as part of the *New England Center for Ethnicity, Arts and Culture* digital portal (connected with NPR Story Corps).
- (b) History and Science Center at the Boott Mill: Parts of the Tsongas Industrial History Center's hands-on workshops might be re-packaged into an informal history and science center open on weekends and during the summer. Hands-on activities, performances, changing exhibits would focus on issues of science, technology and society in the global economy. Visitors would be linked to Mill and Canal tours, the Wannalancit, Boott Hydro, and the UML nuclear power plant. The many informal science and engineering activities of the University, MCC, the Tsongas Center, and community organizations would be organized under one marketing umbrella.
- (c) “Green It” Energy and Environmental Center at the Suffolk/Wannalancit Mill: The “Water Power and Watershed” exhibit might be surrounded by changing student and community exhibits and demonstrations focusing on threats to air and water quality, green technologies, toxics use reduction, energy, recycling, conservation, etc. Visitors would be linked to canal tours, the Concord River and canal greenways, the UML nuclear plant and Boott Hydro via the Northern Canal. A teacher resource center and offices for cooperating environmental agencies could provide outreach and loan out water quality testing loan equipment.

The park has an opportunity to create a “brand identity” around storytelling, role-playing, drama, and cultural performances by partnering with cultural groups, MCC, UML and Merrimack Repertory Theater. The Lowell Folk Festival and other ethnic festivals with their cultural performances of music, dance, games, and crafts, along with other “*City of World Cultures*” events constitutes a year-round special event calendar. Park interpretive leaders

might explore ways of making role-playing, story-telling, and scheduled cultural performances part of the daily interpretive program during peak season and on school holidays and vacations. If these techniques are made part of school programs, park staff can more easily market return visits to parents whose children are enthusiastic about their park K-12 education experiences.

3. Create a Seamless Visitor Experience Characterized by a High Degree of Personal Services

Teachers say that the success of the Tsongas Industrial History Center K-12 programs is due in part to its curbside service. Every class receives advance materials, is greeted on arrival and led through a full-day experience by a trained ranger or museum teacher, arriving back at the bus at the scheduled departure time. Although some adults or family groups prefer a self-directed learning experience, some visitors may be uncertain about way-finding and safety in an urban area or they may simply prefer greater structure in organizing their learning and recreational experiences.

If the Park and partners provided visitors the option of a guided experience, they would set Lowell apart from any other tourist destination in Massachusetts. An expanded volunteer program, the availability of paid “step-on” guides for tour buses (used in many national parks), and/or the use of roving performers (as in Salem, Massachusetts) all would provide a high degree of personal interaction and support. For self-directed groups, interactive wireless tours using cell phones or other hand-held devices might provide a similar kind of tour structure and access to the wealth of Lowell stories.

4. Significantly Expand the Use of Volunteers, Interns, Work-Study Students and Partner Staff to Expand Park Programming.

To significantly expand Park programming in a financially sustainable way, the Park may opt to expand its volunteer program and to engage volunteers in performing “front-line” roles. Many Parks utilize volunteers to provide visitor services at front desks, bookstores, and discovery centers. Some parks have engaged high school and college students in leading visitor tours. Lowell NHP’s trolley operation is staffed primarily by volunteers and the Park has had good success with high school and college interns and work-study students. The tremendous pool of students in the area, the partners’ emphasis on service-learning, and the wave of retiring baby-boomers all suggest the potential of an expanded volunteer program.

Of course, successful volunteer programs require supervision, in-depth training, and high performance standards with regularly administered performance evaluations. The Park already has on its staff several Rangers recognized by the NPS for their interpretive training expertise. In conjunction with their emphasis on civic engagement, the Park and its partners might create a **Lowell NHP Volunteers in Parks (VIP) Training Academy** to recruit, train, mentor, and supervise an expanded core of volunteers. Volunteers could be trained for visitor services positions, teaching assistants for hands-on workshops and tour leaders.

5. Conceptualize a New Park Visitor Center as Lowell’s Cultural Tourism Gateway

The City of Lowell is outlining development plans for the Hamilton Canal and Gallagher Intermodal Transportation Center that would include a visitor center. What should a visitor center be like to welcome visitors, get them started on their Lowell experience, and send them away at the end of that experience resolved to come back soon? **The Visitor Center** might have:

- **An integrated website and advance reservation system**
- **A distinct and highly visual architectural identity – an icon** – that creates a sense of arrival and helps visitors locate it when walking through the City;
- **Office space** for Park’s operations staff, the City’s cultural offices and Convention and Visitor’s Bureau, and a large Volunteers in Parks staff;
- **Bus arrival, unloading/gathering spaces and a bus parking solution** adequate for an expanded adult group tour business;
- **A theater large enough to seat 100 people** that shows three new orientation CD/DVDs linked with the Park and city themes;
- **Orientation exhibits** that inform visitors about Lowell’s cultural organizations and activities;
- **An activity/discovery/performance** space for children while parents get oriented and/or shop for souvenirs that sets the scene for an experience-filled day; and/or
- **a gift shop/bookstore** combining Park/partner sales items.

D. DIVERSIFY PROGRAMS FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS, EXPAND COLLEGE PROGRAMS, MAKE HANDS-ON LEARNING PART OF THE TOURIST EXPERIENCE, AND DEVELOP NEW PROGRAMS FOR ADULTS IN THE REGION AND NATIONALLY

EDUCATION

- Cooperate with educators to provide curriculum materials, high-quality programs, and Park-based and online learning.
- Introduce young people and their families to national parks by using exciting media and technology.
- Impart to every American a sense of their citizen ownership of their national parks.
- Modernize exhibits and facilities
- Establish **ten learning centers** at parks near population centers.

The Future of America’s Parks(2007)

The K-12 programs of the Tsongas Industrial History Center (TIHC) have exceeded the expectations of its parent partners and now form a strong foundation for new layers of public policy and civic engagement programs. They attract 60,000 students and teachers to the park annually. With more than \$2,000,000 in federal and state funding in the last six years for regional and national history and science institutes, the TIHC has begun to create a national audience of teachers and the beginnings of a market for virtual electronic tours of the Park. However, the task of sustaining current visitation and program quality will not be easy given massive teacher retirements, higher gasoline costs, and changing curriculum trends in schools.

The proposed new Tsongas Center partnership priorities of the Park, MCC and UML invite K-12 educators to apply their skills in creating engaging educational formats for students and teachers to new audiences: tours for college

students, hands-on activities for family visitors, experiential tours for retired adults, conferences for scholars and policy experts, after-school and summer civic engagement programs for middle and high school students, and/or electronic classroom experiences distance learning programs for students.

Clearly there is a danger of having too many “priorities.” But the planned integration of Park interpretive and Tsongas Center education staff, the possible expansion of a volunteer program, and new partnerships with faculty create an opportunity to create new planning and program structures. In sustaining K-12 programming, Park and partner leadership staff might consider the following priorities:

- 1. Sustain current visitation, but develop closer and perhaps more formal teacher development and curriculum partnerships with schools within 30-40 miles of the Park**⁵ The objective might be to create curriculum-based programs for specific elementary, middle and high school grades, jointly conceptualized grant proposals for teacher and curriculum development, and the ability to assess student learning. Side benefits are the creation of recruitment “pipelines” for MCC and UML, promoting Lowell as a tourist destination for students’ families, and the immediate dissemination of new academic research to K-12 teachers and their students.
- 2. Diversify K-12 educational programs by strengthening science, technology, engineering and environmental programs** for middle and high school students, by **focusing on outreach to high school history teachers** (Park themes are now taught in 9th and 10th grades rather than in 8th grade) and by **strengthening the focus on contemporary issues, citizenship, and civic engagement** (in parallel with the Park/partner priority on public policy). Assuming a long-term park priority related to *Newcomers and Ethnicity in Urban America*, education staff would need to determine the best target grade and develop new programs for students and teachers.
- 3. Place significant emphasis on workshops for new teachers** closely linked with the UML Graduate School of Education’s initial certification and professional licensure masters degree programs.
- 4. Partner with UML and MCC deans and faculty to create course modules that use the Park and Tsongas Center as college classrooms.** Modules would include service-learning components involving action-research, exhibit development, media productions, or other products that could be displayed in Park sites. The closer collegial relationships of Park and faculty, augmented by grant funding and perhaps by institutional support from within UML/MCC, would functionally expand the staff capacities of all the partners and create opportunities for new collaborations.

These strategies make the Tsongas Center’s K-12 programming more integral to the objectives of UML and MCC and create new working relationships between Park and higher education

⁵ Target schools would include schools in all 25 cities and towns of the 5th Congressional District, all cities towns along the Merrimack and Concord Rivers, and all cities and towns considered to be part of the Greater Lowell region - hence, an educational outreach strategy that reflects the larger regional, economic and social development strategy of the partners.

faculty. But how do the Park and its partners decide how best to set priorities with respect to developing stronger relationships with Lowell’s ethnic communities, making the Park a family tourist destination, tapping into the rapidly growing adult retirement audience, or utilizing distance learning technologies to educate a national audience and convince them to visit the Park and the City of Lowell?

Attempting to respond to all of these opportunities all at once is a formula for failure. However, careful sequencing of program development over 10 – 20 years so that later projects build on earlier ones creates a powerful road map. Such a road map might charge the core staff group with sustaining educational visitation using current strategies. Simultaneously, a separate staff planning group would be freed from other responsibilities and charged with researching, conceptualizing a new initiative (or perhaps two initiatives), implementing it using a combination of institutional and external support. In three-five years, when the initiative is fully launched, the partners would create a second initiative. Of course, if the staff is large enough, the partners might identify and provide funding for two major initiatives at the outset and down the line, fund two more. The road map gives planners flexibility to give a project higher priority if a large donor steps forward or other serendipitous events occur.

What might such a road map look like for experiential education? Given the priority of the park and the City of Lowell to focus new program development on the theme of *Newcomers and Ethnic Culture in America* to simultaneously build a stronger community and to attract visitors, and the regional priority given to the teaching of science, technology and engineering, the park and its partners might decide to create two working groups around these programming “nodes.

E. EXPAND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMS

RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCE: Enjoying Nature and Culture

- Focus national, regional, and local tourism efforts to reach diverse audiences and young people...
- Increase volunteers to help achieve natural and cultural resource preservation goals.
- Expand partnerships with schools and boys and girls associations to show how national park experiences can improve children’s lives.

The Future of America’s National Parks (2007)

The legacies of Paul Tsongas include his personal commitment to the recruitment of candidates for public office, the involvement of citizens in community service, and the engagement of institutions of higher education in social, educational, and economic development programs that engaged citizens in finding solutions to make the world a better place.

The 2006 Massachusetts gubernatorial election, the election of Niki Tsongas as the representative of the 5th Congressional District, and the current presidential campaign all reflect increasing levels of civic engagement. Many programs are underway in Lowell in the areas of civic engagement, service-learning, stewardship, and

leadership development. The new Tsongas Center partnership structure provides a vehicle for harnessing the potential of diverse partner projects through more effective coordination, thereby engaging more youth and adults in leadership and stewardship activities. Middlesex Community College is the logical partner to provide coordination of partner activity focusing on civic engagement and service-learning given its curriculum in these areas.

Many of the ideas put forth in this paper can help build a strong foundation for a more extensive civic engagement initiative. The research and public policy layer of programming, including Tsongas Fellows-in-Residence, creates a knowledge base about contemporary issues that would underpin Park and partner public programs and their civic initiatives. Associated exhibits, lectures, K-12 teacher workshops and student programs, and college courses all engage the community in using history to gain perspective as they search for solutions to contemporary issues. This is the content, the substance, of a civic engagement program.

But to be an effective citizen or leader of citizens requires knowledge and practice of civic processes. These civic skills are learned best through a combination of classroom instruction, issue-oriented, real-world action research, the opportunity to observe decision-making and to have input into it, the understanding of principle and compromise, the assessment of success or failure of a policy, and the commitment to democratic participation.

What might be a long-term strategy that systematically promotes civic engagement and trains new leaders, particularly leaders who value cultural and environmental stewardship as a cornerstone of a vibrant, creative community? Perhaps a useful concept is to create “ladders” of civic engagement in which younger students “graduate” into progressively more sophisticated action-research projects in high school, college and in careers on real-world issues and receive leadership training in areas of interest; older students and adults apply their leadership training by serving as camp counselors and leadership academy mentors.

Current service-learning programs are excellent examples of this approach. The park and its partners might facilitate this process by creating leadership or citizenship academies for different ages (middle and high school students, college students and adults) or by targeting certain audiences – ethnic groups, women, senior citizens, environmentalists, citizens interested in running for office, etc. In recent meetings, the Park and its partners identified the need to create a certificate and/or degree program for municipal leaders, town administrators, and city planners.

The Park is committed to working more collaboratively with representatives of people of diverse cultural backgrounds and increasing their participation in Park programs, creating opportunities for more people to acquire leadership skills focusing on stewardship of cultural and natural resources, and creating a more diverse workforce. Within the park’s thematic priorities, it might consider some or all of the following:

- 1. Create a National Park Community Development Academy.** Thirty individuals who are thirty-something, who have been identified as active in the neighborhoods, and who come from diverse backgrounds might be invited to participate in this Academy.⁶ Through a series of monthly lunches and informal walking tours of the City, they would get to know one another and investigate issues of historic preservation, urban design, and Lowell as a Classroom. Upon “graduating,” based on the experience of a similar Blackstone National Heritage Corridor academy, participants become more involved in park and partner projects.
- 2. Work With Partners to Broaden the Mission of the Greater Lowell Environmental Education Alliance** as a membership and service organization to conceptualize, market

⁶ Credit goes to Paul Marion for suggesting this idea.

and seek funding to offer a menu of environmental lectures, issue forums, volunteer opportunities, research and demonstration projects, and membership programs. Members could coordinate and publicize programs that have lacking in overall coherence in relation to each other including Earth Day, Youth Watershed Congress, Canal Clean-Up, the Spindle City Corps, the “Urban Farm Program” of the United Teen Equality Center, Keep Lowell Beautiful’s Community Gardening Project and a host of other activities.

3. **Formally Sequence the Curricula of the Park’s Environmental Camps so Younger Students graduate into Youth Environmental Stewardship Academies** that introduce students to national parks and provide training in mentoring and leadership (such as the Merrimack River Watershed Congress, River Ambassador participation in recycling efforts, etc). In turn older students can then serve as counselors and mentors in programs for younger students (as in the Tsongas Center summer camp counselors, Park-CTI Spindle City Corps, UML River Ambassadors, etc).
4. **Conceptualize Summer Camps for Middle and High School Students Focusing on Ethnic and Family Ethnography, Exhibits, Media Products, and Performance.**
5. **Create an *Ethnicity in American Life* Youth Leadership Academy** focusing especially on low income and minority youth. Include Junior Ranger apprenticeship experiences (camp counselors, project assistants, etc.) as a step on the leadership ladder.
6. **Create and Seek Funding for a *Newcomers and Ethnicity in Urban America* Community Exhibits Training Program** related to Park thematic priorities and seek grants or partner funds to pay for guest curators, fabrication, mounting costs and associated youth and community programming. Park staff would engage students in service learning projects to collect immigration and ethnicity stories, host performances and presentations or assist with student-developed exhibits.

IV. CONCLUSION

In the 1980s, led by Paul Tsongas, Patrick Mogan, William Hogan, the Lowell Plan, Park Superintendents, members of the state and federal delegation, and many others, Lowell developed a “can-do” attitude. Leadership, vision, a strategic plan, and persistent effort turned Lowell around. Today, the work of these leaders has created a history of successful partnership, an infrastructure of preserved spaces and a positive attitude about the importance of preservation in community development and identity, successful experiential programs and community-wide special events celebrating Lowell’s diverse peoples, and generous philanthropists.

The stage is set and new leadership is in place to move the Park and the City of Lowell to a new level of excellence in cultural programming, in preservation education and community planning, in environmental stewardship, in experiential education, and in civic engagement through more sophisticated partnership activity. Now, as before, leadership, vision, a strategic plan, and persistent effort will enable Lowell to succeed.