

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

by Kris Morrissey

What do gardens and sunshine have to do with the Visitor Studies Association? On this particularly sunny afternoon, I will admit that my thoughts turn more naturally to gardening than to sitting in front of my computer screen. Summer is sunshine, beaches, vacations, garage sales, and working in gardens. It's a time of energy, growth, renewal, and the unavoidable and well-intentioned "to do lists." As I look at this issue of *Visitor Studies Today!*, I am struck by the energy and growth in our organization, as well as the deep roots we have developed in the museum community.

For example, on the cover is an update on our annual conference in Washington, D.C. This is the second cycle

of meeting in Washington, D.C. and as evidence of our strong roots and growth, VSA returns to the city more mature and organized, stronger, more complex and vital. Also on the cover is George Hein's introduction to a series of articles by Paulette McManus in the United Kingdom, Bill Trampusch and Christine Fitzgerald in New Zealand, and C. Dufresne-Tassé in Canada. These articles about the international status illustrate the substantial growth the field of visitor studies is experiencing. An article by Jason Drebitko and Gillian Nelson reports on a special effort of the New England Aquarium to expand the cultural diversity of its audience. Jason was the recipient of the April Award at last year's conference, a travel award given to a "newcomer" to the field—evidence of VSA's commitment to encouraging new voices and developing scholarship.

This issue also introduces two new columns, "Voices" and a Software Review column. "Voices" provides a forum for individuals to share thoughts and experiences with the processes or products of evaluation. Janet Kamien, vice president of Franklin Institute Science Museum, speaks as a non-evaluator about her evolving sense of visitors and the role of visitor studies. The Software Review column, suggested by Randi Korn, speaks to the need for technical knowledge. The column will range from technical information to personal reactions, but always directed toward providing useful and practical information. Beverly Serrell logs in her first column with a review of PowerPoint by Microsoft.

Ross Loomis, our President, often speaks about VSA as an "information broker." I find it intriguing that this issue promotes the website, while the website hosts this publication and both promote the conference. All three of these activities—the publication, the website, and the conference—speak to our mission of encouraging research and disseminating knowledge about visitors. The use of the different information channels shows our organization is growing and maturing, thanks to the energy and expertise of our members and supporters.

Join us in D.C. for our 11th annual conference, and if you miss the conference, check out the website for abstracts and summaries from the conference sessions. Now I'm off to the weeds in the garden. Enjoy!

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