

Museums

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Opening music

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WGVU's Jennifer Moss:

You're listening to Tilting the Earth's Praxis, a weekly discussion of important issues that impact civil society. With host Salvatore Alaimo.

Salvatore Alaimo

Hello and welcome to this episode of Tilting the Earth's Praxis. Today's topic is museums. And I'm going to introduce our guests for today's show. We have Sonia Takahashi, who is an independent museum consultant with many years of experience working in the museum arena. She has experience with the Boston Children's Museum, the Seattle Art Museum, the Brooklyn Museum, the National September 11th Memorial Museum, the Newark Museum. And she guides and consults with museums on an ongoing basis. Sonnet, welcome to today's show.

Sonnet Takahisa

Nice to be here.

Salvatore Alaimo

We also have two Grand Valley State University alumni. Kimberly Kelderhouse is the executive director of the Leelanau Historical Society, and she got her bachelor's degree in nonprofit administration at Grand Valley. Welcome, Kimberly.

Kimberly Kelderhouse

Thank you so much.

Salvatore Alaimo

We also have Jennifer Parks-Strack. She's the associate director of development at the Minnetrista? Did I get that right?

Jennifer Parks-Strack

Minn-e-trista.

Salvatore Alaimo

There you go. Minnetrosta Museum and Gardens. And that is in Muncie, Indiana, correct?

Jennifer Parks-Strack

That's right.

Salvatore Alaimo

All right. Jennifer got her MPA with a concentration in nonprofit management at Grand Valley State University. Welcome, Jennifer.

Jennifer Parks-Strack

Thank you.

Salvatore Alaimo

So I thought we would start to try to get just a basic lay of the land as to what's going on in the museum world. And I know that's a lot. But Sonnet, if you can give us the abbreviated but 30,000 foot view of the museum world, if you can pull that off for us, that would be great to help set the context for a discussion.

Sonnet Takahisa

Well, I will try. I think museums have been through a lot, but we are hardy and sturdy domain, so we continue to endeavor. I think the recent the pandemic, the Black Lives Matter, the growing environmental concerns that are around are really causing museums to take a good, hard look at what's going on. And I'm particularly interested in the ways that museums are thinking about their social impact and the way that they have a responsibility, the way that they are accountable to their communities. I think museums have always been in a community, but they haven't always been of the community and I think we are coming to an even more intense moment in time where if museums don't pivot to sort of think about how they better not just serve their community, but really understand and be part of a community. Many of them are finding a challenge for their existence. I think at the same time, we're obviously looking at great concerns about diversity, not just diversity of staff, but diversity of the stories that are told. Diversity of the ways that we care for diversity. Our collections and collection, our collections. And diversity of the way that we think about who gets access to our collections and how we provide access to our collections. And I think we're also at a moment in time, particularly after these last three tough years of thinking about how museum staff are really another part of a museum community, how the staff is treated, how the staff is hired, how the staff is compensated, and how the staff is thought of as importantly as the collections and treated as well. And as. Kindly, to be very frank and carefully, as our collections are.

Salvatore Alaimo

I want to follow up on a point you made. You said they they need to be also of the community. So I'm taking that to mean more engagement and involvement of the local people. Could you give us an expanded sense of that and maybe some advice on what museums can or should do to be more of the community?

Sonnet Takahisa

For one period of my life, I was at the Newark Museum, which is where John Cotton Dana got a lot of his start, and he created an institution that was very much of the

community of Newark. He wanted it to be a place that people used, that people saw themselves, that people felt they belonged. It was not a place where you were walking up lots of steps to come into a temple, but you were really coming into a place that you were part of and that reflected you and that welcomed you, that recognized the contributions you made as a member of the local community. Contributions you make and the and the ideas and the value that you have as part of telling the story of humanity. I think we've continued to try over the centuries that museums have existed to be true to those kinds of ideas. But we as institutions have not always been as welcoming. We've not always been a place where people felt that they could enter and that they would be treated with respect, and that their ideas and their concerns, their needs, their wisdom was included into the stories that were being told. And so, I think of late, where we're not just thinking about how to bring people into the museum as our staff, but we're also thinking about what does it mean to have a participatory session? What does it mean to have the community participate in telling the story and choosing the story and being honest about stories and revealing parts of the story that have not always been part of the institutional narrative?

Salvatore Alaimo

Right. That's very helpful. And with that, let's let's move to Kimberly now. Can you glean some ideas from that and kind of blend that with what's going on at Leelanau Historical Society, give us an idea of what that society is all about and about your museum.

Kimberly Kelderhouse

Yeah, absolutely. The Historical Society and Museum is located in northern Michigan and we have a collection and archive space as well as exhibit space. And we our region, speaking of diversity, is not the most diverse in terms of skin color. We are predominantly a white area. And so that's something that is we're grappling with as well. We have a Native American population, though, and we have what we call the traditional initiative arts room, commonly known as the Basket Room, because we display about 200 black ash and work baskets in that space overhead took a hit to our tribe's museum. They have not reopened since closing down during COVID. And so we're kind of grappling with how do we fill in that gap, because that's an important story to tell. And right now, there's not many other places for people visiting our area to see that. Something to share also about our area is we're very tourism based. If you've heard of Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, that is within our boundaries of the county of Leelanau. And so we get a huge influx of visitors in the summer and many of them are starting to appreciate the history and looking for more cultural tourism. So much of sleeping bear dunes is preserved because of its cultural significance. And so those stories are some that we're sharing as well. I love what Sonnet 's said, though, about trying to be had the community more involved with your organization?

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We're absolutely working on that kind of thing as well. In the nineties we had a really robust oral history program where people were coming in to have their stories recorded, and that's something that in the last couple of decades has kind of lapsed. But we're trying to reignite that with using the StoryCorps philosophy. So, a more conversational

style, maybe a little bit like what we're doing here today, rather than the traditional kind of fact based interview that some of the older style oral histories were done as. We're also trying to let our hair down a little bit. In some ways, I think so many times we put on our, you know, educator and professional hat and we're trying to think of like, how is this next program educational? And sometimes we just have to participate in what's going on in our communities and be a presence there and not always try to make it this educational experience. So, we were recently gifted Model A, which certainly can have a Ford model, which can certainly have some educational aspects to it. But we're just looking forward to using it as a vehicle, no pun intended, to get out in our community, participate in some local parades through the summer, take it to other local history organization events, and it's a ready-made display that we can bring and not have to worry about, you know, packing up storyboards or artifacts or anything. We can bring that model and talk about the history of our area in the 1930s because it's a 1931 Ford model and it's something fun. It's not a pristine, a collector's version of a model. So we're going to let people sit in it, let people take do photo ops. And it's just a really easy way to connect with our community that way as well as I think everyone can identify with transportation in some way and has some story and connection to how did people get to the places; how did they end up in northern Michigan of all places? So we're looking forward to debuting that this summer and having some fun with it in a more laid back way.

Salvatore Alaimo

Thank you for that. And I seem to recall at one point, maybe two years ago, Good Morning America, they voted Sleeping Bear Dunes, the most scenic place in America. Did I get that right?

Kimberly Kelderhouse

That is true. Yeah, it's been a blessing and a curse. It's certainly brought a lot of people to our area. Something we grapple with, though, is, you know, how many people is enough? These resources and this national park, you know, the trails can only handle so many people. And especially if, if there are people who don't necessarily always think about the resource, they're picking up plants and, you know, picking a flower. And they might not realize that that's an endangered species flower or that the rocks and the fossils that they might find on the beaches actually have some rules about collecting them. And so that's been something a little gap we've tried to fill as well. So we're not a natural history museum, but so many people have natural history questions that that come up related to collecting stones on the beach or for wildlife in our area. And so that's something that we dabble in a little bit on.

Salvatore Alaimo

You raise a good point and I'm going to circle back in a moment that the consumption piece, you know, the attendance. So, we'll circle back to that. I want to go to Jennifer now and get an idea of what's going on in your museum world and what's happening there and what are some of the things you're facing.

Jennifer Parks-Strack

Yeah. So Minnetrista is in a period of transition. We hired a new CEO at the beginning of January of 2023. And so, we are deep in all of these questions ourselves about what role do we play in the community. Traditionally, we started we have when we maintain historic homes that the ball family lived in of Ball Jar Fame, Ball State University, Ball Corp. And so, we are the home of the ball jar and we have a lot of collection of different things related to the Ball Family and Ball Corp and the jars. We also opened the Bob Ross experience in 2020 October of 2020 because Bob Ross painted in one of our historic homes for many of his seasons. And so...

Salvatore Alaimo

The Joy of Painting, right?

Jennifer Parks-Strack

Yes, The Joy of Painting.

Salvatore Alaimo

I watched that show all the time.

Jennifer Parks-Strack

The joy of painting around Muncie, Indiana, that we had such a celebrity selling show. It airs, and that has widened our museum to a much larger audience. We've had visitors from, I believe, most of the 50 states, if not all 50 at this point. Some international visitors, we anticipate seeing that increase as COVID restrictions continue to go away. And so what was mostly a regional museum, sharing our local history, inviting people from, you know, within 90 miles or so, we've seen a large growth, which is very exciting. And it but it also is that constant question of we're not the Bob Ross Museum. So we have a duty to also tell the stories of the local region of things that relate to our mostly rural community. We bring in a lot of traveling exhibits as well, and then we have 40 acres of natural area that our staff maintain as formal gardens, a big lawn and a nature area that's like more like hiking. And so, we have free things and we have paid things and we are also engaging with that question of who are we to the community? How can we make sure that people feel welcome coming to our space? And we know that there are some barriers, whether it's perceived or otherwise. And so, we are engaging in those conversations, figuring out how to make sure that people understand that we are for them. There are, we are for people in our community to come regardless of their identity. We're undergoing a formal process to really look at our own diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility. We're just starting that process with an internal work group to look at our staff, to look at our visitors, to look at what we are offering, the stories that we're telling. And so there's a lot of excitement about that and making sure that we are doing we are playing our role in our community. One of the taglines of our past is the gathering place. And we want to make sure that people feel like they can come and enjoy what we have to offer.

Sonnet Takahisa

Yeah. I just was curious, Jen, because I think the question of what's a barrier? There are lots of different kinds of barriers. And I'm just curious about when you talk about the barriers that you're discovering, what some of those might be.

Jennifer Parks-Strack

Yeah, some of it is, is a perception that. You know, the people who founded the museum, I think were. They were upper class, right? They were white and upper class. And I think there's been a perception for a while that those are the people who come to Minnetrista when in reality we have programs in place to make the price accessible for folks. We have some free days. We have a very affordable membership. We're not directly on a bus line. There's a bus line nearby. And so there's a transportation barrier. For some folks, it is walkable. But, you know, for some folks, if you have a mobility issue, a five or ten minute walk is still too far. And some people just don't feel comfortable coming for whatever reason. So we are still in that process of learning exactly what it is. But. We've taken some measures recently to make sure that we're showing up in the community, at places, to make sure that people understand that we are invested in what they're doing. Juneteenth celebrations, school nights, single mom nights at the college. Like just anywhere that we can go to kind of let wider populations understand that we're a resource for them, their place, that they can bring their family for affordable price, that they can just come and enjoy our gardens, and that there's something to do there.

Salvatore Alaimo

Jennifer, I want to ask you because you specifically work in development.

Jennifer Parks-Strack

Mm hmm.

Salvatore Alaimo

So and that to me, presents this notion that you have to rate successfully raise money. You have to somehow present the value proposition that your museum and gardens brings, right?

Jennifer Parks-Strack

Mm hmm.

Salvatore Alaimo

How, how, how how could you frame that for us? So what is the value proposition that would make someone consider coming to the museum and gardens and or donating to it?

Jennifer Parks-Strack

Yeah. That's something that I'm still learning about coming from Human Services, where the value proposition is very easy. You know, you have your \$10 can serve 100 people. But I think, you know, having a museum and a community is so important, even if you don't go there because it there are opportunities for people to learn about things

outside of themselves. Beyond that, museums often provide programming for the community that is valuable. And it's enjoyable. You can come and you can just. It's important in the day to day to have a place where you can go, to have fun with your family, to build memories to. Learn more. To have that kind of free play opportunity, we talk a lot about the free choice learning with kids and how they're able to explore and learn outside of school. And there's an economic development piece, especially for, you know, the tourist places where every summer you have a lot of people coming and they're spending the night in your town. They're spending money at your restaurants. They're coming to your museum. Maybe they're going to hit up another museum or a symphony or whatever. And so, there's a lot of value.

Kimberly Kelderhouse

Jennifer, I love what you said about like, every museum or every community needs a museum, whether or not people attend or not. I think museums are like a litmus test in some ways for some communities. We have another region really close by that had a museum for a long time and that museum closed. And so many people ask us, you know, why isn't there a museum in that town? What's what's wrong? That they don't have a history museum? They have a lovely art museum. But I think people you know, the people that are visiting the area that, oh, there's an art museum I can go to, you know, there's a symphony I can attend. But where's the history museum? I think in some ways that's really an important point to make.

Salvatore Alaimo

And, you know, sometimes how I try to get my students to think of the value of something is I ask them to close their eyes and imagine that whatever that thing is is not there. It's gone away. And reflecting on my own life. And here's my transparent bias. I'm a museum junkie. Okay? So when I was a boy, I used to plan, help plan our family vacations. I'm an only child. It was just mom, dad and me. I'd get out a triple A book and I would look at the cities and look at what museums and factory tours were in those cities and plan around that. So, Sonnet, I want you to build off of what's been said by Jennifer and Kimberly. What is the value proposition for this ideal? Because we connect everything to civil society on this show, right? That ideal that I shared with all three of you that we're always striving for and we'll never stop striving for, hopefully. How do museums play a role in impacting civil society in that way?

Sonnet Takahisa

So, I just want to push back a teeny bit because I do think while the idea of museum in a community and a city in a place certainly has power for economic development, certainly has power for the reputation of a place. Certainly can attract people. It's like one of those things that's only alive when people do come. And so, using the museum is a very, you know, and making sure that people use the museum is part of the job. I think that we as museum staff, no matter what department you're in, it's not just education, it's not just public programming. It's everybody. It's development as well. Our job is to make sure that the museums get used. That being said, you know, I do think one of the values that museums provide is sort of a model of the way to engage with the world. I think we are places where, you know, when done right, we have a complex, layered, mixed

collection that has many, many different stories, many conflicting stories. And again, when done right, there's not just one narrative, whether it's a science museum, a history museum or an art museum. So I think, you know, to go back to what's important about museums in general, in society, museums are places where I think we allow for that kind of deeper learning, where we take the time to sort of think about and rethink and revisit. You know, one of the greatest things about museums, not just for staff, but for the users, for the people who come, is that every time you come, you see something different or you're you see the same thing, but you are different. And so, you see it differently. So, I think we provide a model of a way to engage with the world and think about the world. That's the sort of 200,000 foot value of museums. I think on a more practical level, certainly there are the programs that we do with schools again, where we're offering students again when it's done right. And not all museums have that kind of diversity to their approach. But we're offering students ways to think about what it means to learn about something. I just went to the African American History and Culture Museum in D.C. and to see the in-depth research that's been done to uncover names of people who were enslaved, the contributions that they made all over the country information that year. A few years ago wasn't available to all of us. So that notion that we are places where we take the time to learn, to revisit, to look, not just to teach, but really to do that kind of research and that kind of thinking about what the world means. And then we do do that engagement with community and we do invite people to push back again when it's done right. And I'm not saying all museums are have the capacity to do this and to do this well now. But we we invite people to come in and have a conversation to provide different points of view. To argue, to question, to wonder if something is missing. You know, I'm struck by, as you're talking, Kim, about the tribal museum that closed. You know, what kinds of partnerships they must have all kinds of collections, information and story and the number of institutions, large institutions. And I'm not saying you're a large institution, but more established institutions, how they can begin to partner with places like a tribal museum to begin to broaden and deepen the story that gets told.

Salvatore Alaimo

You um, you talked about the importance of the museum experience. So I wanted to circle back, as Kimberly had mentioned some earlier, and it reminded me of a not so pleasant experience at a major art museum in a major city that I used to live in. They had a Norman Rockwell traveling exhibit there, and I went to it, and the closest I could get to the artwork was probably about 25 to 30 feet, and I almost had to take out my glasses to be able to see it because they basically and I'm starting to wonder if maybe they violated the the marshal the fire marshal code that night because there was so many people. I understand butts in seats, dollars in the turnstile are important for museums to survive. I get it. But how do we strike a balance with this tension between attendance and revenue and allowing for what Sonnet described as a deep, meaningful experience at the museum? What do you think Kimberly is and how do we balance that?

Kimberly Kelderhouse

Yeah. I will say it's not something that we struggle with being a county based museum. We don't have people breaking down our doors. But generally speaking, like I mentioned with the National Park, you know, our collection and a lot of the things that we talk about is related to the history that happened within those boundaries. And that's certainly something that the the national park, if you you know, it's an outdoor museum in some ways. We have overall a historic district that I have personal connections to. That's where my family history goes back in our region. And you know that the national park is one where we certainly are. There's a lot of people and. I don't have the answer. Especially after COVID, there's so much pent up demand to to get out and about. And our national park has also seen a huge influx. You know, some of the biggest attendance numbers in in the last decade have been in these post-COVID years. I will say from the perspective of balancing. The collection and preserving the collection, you know, having it accessible to the community and not 25 feet away is it's more important to me and to our organization than making sure, you know, we're taking every step to protect it. There's always going to be a little wear and tear on some collection items. And I think it's more important that the community appreciate it than have this perception that we are you know, we don't let them near things and they can't touch anything. And we are the experts who wear the white gloves. Some of those things, you know, our perceptions that we're trying to break down. Even at a small county museum, so many small county museums are like volunteer run where mostly staff run. And so we do have that perception a little bit that we're trying to break down so that people people know they can come in, they can volunteer, they can engage with the collection and, you know, not be told, oh, don't touch that. Don't get close.

Salvatore Alaimo

Jennifer, how about you? How is that? How is this tension between revenue and the meaningful experience? Balanced.

Jennifer Parks-Strack

Yeah, I will. I will say we're similar in that we are only recently seeing a flood of new people with the creation of the Bob Ross experience. But because Bob Ross' experience opened during COVID in 2020, we had time ticketing that has not gone away. It's a small space because it's a it's a home and we can't expand it. And so there's basically two small rooms and it's very interactive. You can touch everything that's in there, you can sit on the couch, you can do all these things. And we have increased the capacity of the time ticketing by a little bit, but we still have limited because there is that understanding that people will not get a meaningful experience if they cannot get to the things that they are meant to engage with. And so there have been some weekends where it's completely sold out and we encourage people, you really should call ahead and make sure you get a ticket or, you know, buy one online. And and that's just the reality, because it's important to us that people have a good experience because people will spread the word, right. So, you know, if you go to a museum exhibit and you can't enjoy it while you're going to tell your friends, oh, don't bother, it's too busy or you didn't really it was underrated. And so then people aren't going to come into it.

Salvatore Alaimo

So this idea of filling gaps has been mentioned by some of you today, and it's reminding me of when I left Atlanta over ten years ago, I spoke to the directors and CEOs of the museums in metro Atlanta. And at the time, the Georgia public school system was in a get back to basics mode. So, a lot of STEM dominated instruction and a lot of the arts and recreation programs were diminishing in K through 12, if not being removed entirely. And the directors of the museums were telling me they were getting calls **daily** (emphasized) from public schools around the state that wanted to bus the students in or asked the arts organizations or the museums to come to them to make up for this loss in programming. So I'm going to go to you Sonnet. Are you seeing this trend continuing? Are museums playing this supplementary role for what is diminishing in K through 12?

Sonnet Takahisa

And I think it's not only arts education, the gap that museums are filling and humanities education or diversity of historical perspective. But we've also talked a lot most recently about social and emotional learning. And the reality is that particularly post pandemic, post, the Black Lives Matter post, the increasing fears of, you know, human and natural disasters that that many people need the kind of respite need, the kind of opportunity to show out, to have a wonderful experience. So a crowded, crammed into a room is not, you know, to see one fabulous masterpiece is not a relaxing restorative experience. So again, I think, you know, when Jen talks about the time ticketing or when we talk about, you know, encouraging people to see the gardens or we think about all kinds of, you know, different alternatives to sort of broaden the use of your, your space and your resources to think differently about how people engage with, you know, works of art. I think the technology that we've all learned to live with has provided not just ways to sort of geographically broaden our audiences, but also to encourage people to look at things more closely, perhaps on an iPad or to focus their attention on particular details in ways that we might not have done before or to notice different symbols or, you know, particular indicators. So I think we're being much more thoughtful and creative about, you know, listening to our visitors and thinking about what their experiences like and making sure that they have a wonderful, restorative, healthy, helpful if that's what they want. I mean, some people are coming up with other things. I want to just circle back a moment because I think the relationship with schools is really, you know, one that is very important, both for the bottom line of attendance and for financials for so many museum institutions. And I will stand on my sword to say that oftentimes we don't give you know, when you describe the unpleasant experience you have, oftentimes that's what we do for the kids, too. So we've got to think better about the kinds of ways that we. Off our field trips. We're not necessarily giving the students the best opportunity to be with a work of art, to study a dinosaur bone, to recognize, you know, a Native American artifact that's in our collection and understand the meaning of it and understand the implications of the institution having that work of art or that artifact. So I think, you know, I didn't realize I was going to go here. But, you know, while I do think that's important that we bring school groups in. You know, there's a reason why many museum people try to get into a museum before the school groups arrive because it's a

little bit of chaos and not necessarily the best experience. So I do think, again, we at museums have to think differently about the ways that we serve our school groups and the ways that we serve children and students. So I think we're being a little more creative about thinking about, you know, the garden experience and I've not been too Minnetrista, alas, but the garden experience is part of the institution. So how do you make sure that it's not just that someone who's coming to see Bob Ross is also understanding that being out in nature, you know, is part of what helps you to be a good artist and what helps them to learn how to, you know, paint or draw from nature. You know, you talked about the sorry, the great bear dunes. This shows you my East Coast bias. You know, how does that outdoor national park richness connect to something particular in the museum when they come to the museum? So I think we're being more thoughtful. We don't have all the answers, but I think it's broadening the walls of the museum. You know, it's it's it's it's letting the outside into the museum and making sure that the museum is part of the outside.

Salvatore Alaimo

So I want to build off of that. Back to Kimberly and Jennifer for a moment. I went to museums often with my parents, so we went as a family. So, building off of some its theme of what this museum experience is all about. Have you observed families coming to your locations and seeing them interact with each other? So, tell us about that. How does a family coming together at a museum not only enrich learning, but maybe enrich the relationships between the family members?

Kimberly Kelderhouse

Yeah. I'll say we're fortunate to be attached to a public library. And so, a lot of times people will visit the public library as a family and then come over to the museum as well. And our office space is there. It's not the walls aren't full to the ceiling. So, we are fortunate to to hear some of those initial comments when people come in. And so I just love hearing that, especially when families with young kids have come in for like the children's program at the library and then have come next door. The initial exhibit that they experience is our shipwreck exhibit. And this one little boy, one of my favorite things is he saw the diving photos and he's like, When I am bigger, I'm going to dive on that shipwreck. And those are the kinds of things where, you know, he's not reading the panels, he's looking at the pictures. He's that age, but he's seeing a possible career option. He's, you know, learning a little bit about science. You know, diving is a scientific thing. We have some lovely lighthouse models as well, and the kids love seeing those as well. And so the other thing I really appreciate is listening to the parents and the grandparents interpret some of the text for the kids, you know, wake because they can't read yet. They're kind of skimming the text and bringing it down to their level. I'll say our overall our museum has been really geared towards, you know, the adult visitor. And it's just now that we're we're we're thinking more like how do we how do we make this family friendly? We're not ready to say, you know, we're a children's museum and we're going to have a kids, you know, a strong kids exhibit. But how can we make this more family friendly, you know, have more things that they can touch, things that engage all five senses for that younger audience. So we just did some strategic planning and that was a big conversation is, is let's take the step towards being more family friendly. But

I'll say that experience of just hearing them, it informs us, too, of how they're using the museum. And those are things that we're taking back to those strategic planning meetings and saying, you know, hey, this is, you know, something we observed this week at the museum on a family visit. And but, you know, it's, it's really positive when we see those kinds of things. And, and those are the kinds of experiences that stick in your head. You know, I've heard many, many comments of people being walking through our museum doors, but that particular one really stuck with me.

Jennifer Parks-Strack

Yeah. We also love seeing the families interact with each other, especially, you know, the facilitator parents who are helping their kids understand what they're seeing around them or engaging with them. We have a free space called Betty's Cabin, and it is meant for some of our younger visitors, but it's all free play inside. And every time I've gone in, whether it's with my own child or with for work, the parents are on the floor with their kids playing. And in this day and age, you know, it's so easy to just get out your device and either the parent is on their phone while the kid is running around or the kid is also on their device. And so to watch families engage with physical things, whether it's nature, toys, an exhibit, an artifact, and to have conversations and to be present with one another. I think that's so meaningful because that is hard work. It is easy to sit on your phone or on your computer or in front of the TV. It is harder to engage with your kid or your grandkid. I think the relationship between grandkids and their grandparents that we see too is so special. And so I love seeing it. It challenges me as a parent to be engaged with my kid and to make sure that she's learning things and engaging with things in the right way or in a meaningful way. And I love that we have a place in our town where we can encourage those types of relationships.

Salvatore Alaimo

Sonnet. I'm going to let you have the final word. What message do you want to convey to our listeners in terms of the importance of museums, suggestions, recommendations, how we can make our experience more meaningful? What do you want to say to them about all that?

Sonnet Takahisa

So I'm going to talk to two different audiences. One is the museum professionals audience, the people who work in museums, which is really and to really say that they need to be thinking about just as both Kim and Jim just spoke about, the kind of listening to your audiences, seeing what happens and paying attention to that is really, really important. And the second thing is to model for those museum professionals, to model the kind of interactions that we want people to engage with, whether it's learning about another culture, whether it's learning about a career opportunity, whether it's learning about what your grandparents know about a particular item that's unfamiliar to you, whether it's a parent learning about what a grandparent knows that that and it's also modeling the kinds of ways that those interactions are powerful and meaningful. The second part is obviously, you know, a more general message to the world writ large, to politicians, to city leaders, to marketing people, you know, to families, just to say that museums are places that if you come in, there is a place for you. There's

something for you to learn. There's a way of you learning about something that may be unfamiliar. And there's a way about to learn more about something that is familiar to you, that the more times you come to a museum, the more you're going to see and the different things you're going to see, and the more you're going to learn about yourself, your family, your community, and the world at large.

Salvatore Alaimo

Sonnet Takahisa, independent museum consultant, Kimberley Kilderhouse Executive Director Leelanau Historical Society, Jennifer Parks-Strack, Associate Director of Development at the Military Store, Museum and Gardens. I thank you all for a wonderful discussion about the importance of museums. And please join us next week for another topic impacting civil society on Tilting the Earth's Praxis.

Closing music

WGVU's Jennifer Moss

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Closing music fades.