

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

SUE GESHWENDER

The volunteer program was completely virtual for the entire academic year. Although the Museum reopened, occupancy and visitor restrictions were such that no guided tours occurred, nor did any other in-person volunteering. That said, we did a lot in terms of Volunteer Days and Book Clubs and maintained higher attendance than prepandemic levels.

In addition to stellar lectures for Volunteer Days from Theo van den Hout, Robert Ritner, Susanne Paulus, Brian Muhs, Tasha Vorderstrasse, and Petra Goedegebuure, we covered two unique topics. In November Morag Kersel, associate professor at DePaul University, presented “Are Museums Neutral?” Joining this discussion were OI director Chris Woods and deputy director Jean Evans, who talked about how recent social issues require us to reflect on what happens in museums in terms of relating to wide and diverse audiences. For something completely different, in February Maanasa Raghavan, assistant professor of human genetics here at the University of Chicago, spoke to us about ancient DNA. This topic was a spin-off of interest generated from Book Club selections that covered ancient DNA and even Neanderthals.

A virtual going-away party for Chris Woods honored his contributions as OI director and wished him the best. Virtual memorial services for Carlotta Maher and Margret Foorman were moving and provided ways to reminisce and honor two people who meant so much to the OI’s Volunteer Program.

The OI’s Book Club is bigger than ever! Attendance has tripled from prepandemic levels, and new members have grown by 20 percent! That virtual discussions have enabled

Figure 1. Virtual Field Trips. Boy, the teachers have their hands full! Here is a slide we present to show where items in our collection were excavated.



VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

people from all over the country to join in has added fun and different perspectives to our discussions. The books we discussed ranged from a title originally published in 1949 (*Gods, Graves and Scholars*) to a few that were hot-off-the-press published this year.

My dear friend and colleague Calgary Haines-Troutman left in January, but not before developing several virtual field trips (figs. 1–2), which were well received and much appreciated by teachers. The OI's student facilitators gave more than forty of these virtual field trips for school groups that would normally have come in person, plus several groups from schools new to our program and nowhere near the OI.

Finally, we suffered especially devastating losses with the passing of volunteers Roberto Cepeda, Margaret Foorman, Carlotta Maher, and George Thomson. We are so thankful for all the time these vibrant individuals devoted to the OI.

Figure 2. This after-school group was getting a little rowdy and having fun. Take a look at the discussion . . . !

