Providing Tools to Sustain Community Organizations

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Providing Tools to Sustain Community Organizations

by: Jeffrey Graf, Jen Jones Murray, Jennifer L. Murray and Karissa Moffett

Communities are filled with valuable collections in need of being preserved, sustained, and discovered. Through conversations in the community, partnerships can form and bring together diverse people to enhance the discovery of materials in our own backyards. This is precisely what happened with the Jacksonville, Florida based Jacksonville Historical Society (JHS) when they were working on an initiative to survey local history organizations regarding the scope and nature of their historical collections. Through a partnership with the Riverside Avondale Preservation (RAP) and conversation with the University of North Florida Thomas G. Carpenter Library (UNF Library), a powerful, community collaboration formed. Jennifer Murray and Jen Jones Murray from the UNF Library along with Karissa Moffett from the Health Planning Council of Northeast Florida, came together as a team to explore possibilities proposed by Jeff Graf, Immediate Past President of the Jacksonville Historical Society. Each team member brought different and complementary skills to a wide-ranging and open discussion, and partnership among this team resulted in the next level of functionality for the Jacksonville Historical Society’s Jacksonville History Consortium (JHC) concept.

Background

In 2003, the Jacksonville History Consortium resulted from an assessment of Jacksonville’s many diverse and geographically dispersed historical organizations. Harry Reagan and Emily Lisska, then Board President and Executive Director, respectively, of the Jacksonville Historical Society, recognized local history institutions would benefit from stronger connections among themselves and with the larger Jacksonville community. Fast forward to 2016, when the JHS commissioned its first-ever strategic plan. One of the focus groups interviewed consisted of members of the Consortium. Three of the themes which emerged from this discussion were:

1. JHS can and should be the portal to Jacksonville’s historic information and electronic routing to consortium organizations.
2. JHS should provide leadership to building the consortium for stronger advocacy in Jacksonville and the State of Florida.
3. Expanded use of internet-based communication and access to information is required.

Acting on those recommendations, in 2017 JHS worked in conjunction with Jacksonville’s Museum of Science and History (MOSH) to survey local history organizations as to the content and themes of their archives. Thirty-one organizations responded.

Simultaneously with that initiative, the JHS approached the UNF Library dean at the time, Dr. Elizabeth Curry, about participating in the Consortium. Her keen interest helped cement the partnership with the UNF Library. First, the library placed a PDF version of the local survey results in a consortium partition on the Library’s website. This move allowed for the introduction of Jennifer Murray, Director of Technical Services and Library Systems, and Jen Jones Murray, Marketing & Community Services Coordinator, to the JHC project.

Also at the same time, the JHS was working with the Riverside Avondale Preservation (RAP) to identify resources to help map consortium members physical locations and provide links to their individual websites. This work was performed by Karissa Moffett, an urban planner, who works with the Health Planning Council of Northeast Florida to plan Safe...
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**Sharing History Online and Beyond**

When the UNF Library learned of the Jacksonville History Consortium community-based initiative, they saw it as an opportunity to join in and provide leadership in preserving, sustaining, and bringing greater awareness to the history collections in the entire Jacksonville region.

Academic libraries have many valuable tools at their disposal which can benefit others outside their organization such as institutional repositories, content management systems, and visualization tools. To assist in preserving information and making collections more accessible, the UNF Library first created a space in their institutional repository, Digital Commons, to publish the survey responses on data about the historical collections pertaining to the greater Jacksonville area. The UNF Library then searched for a way to improve access to information about the archive survey material. To do that, the Library acquired a data visualization tool called Tableau allowing Jennifer Murray to create a robust, interactive report of the survey results and allowing users to explore and find information about the collections pertaining to Jacksonville’s history.

This led to Jennifer Murray and Karissa Moffett partnering to create interactive maps using Tableau and ESRI Story Mapping. Using Tableau, an interactive map of Duval County indicating where each consortium member is located was created. The map helps locate the organizations and provides additional information and a link to each organization’s website. The use of Tableau with this project visually communicates information, rather than just data, to help tell the story of the Consortium.

ESRI Story Mapping is a creative approach to an age-old craft of storytelling. ESRI, better known for their geographic information software, ArcGIS, has created a platform called Story Maps as a complementary approach to combining maps, text, photos, and multimedia content. This communication outlet is a clear, concise, and exciting way to share the history of the Jacksonville region. As a result, a call was put out to all the members of the JHC to share updated information about their historical organization.

Enthusiastic responses from consortium members flowed-in. And, what we ended-up with is a comprehensive database of coordinates, contact information, biographies, logos, and images. This database ultimately created the Story Map of all the JHC members, which is featured in the online Story Map as well as at the Jacksonville International Airport on a touch screen where visitors can get a taste of Jacksonville before heading out to explore it.
in-person. In addition, people can now pick-up an up-to-date, more timeless brochure at the front desk of any of the JHC member locations.

This set the stage for what would occur next as discussions about a website for the consortium began to take shape. To make information about the Consortium easily accessible from one resource, the UNF Library created a website (https://libguides.unf.edu/jhc) for the Consortium using LibGuides, a content management system, used by libraries to share information. This allows users an easy and accessible way to gather and search for information about the organizations in the Consortium, bringing more recognition to them and the collections they house.

Sharing the history of Jacksonville doesn’t stop there. The team is looking for opportunities to partner with walking and biking tour groups to connect folks with the physical features of history. After all, sharing history is a bucket-brigade, it requires us to teach the next generation, and the next generation to teach the generations after them. It allows us to make connections, pass along knowledge vital to the community, and inspire civic pride through shared knowledge.

Marketing in the Community

In addition to sharing information virtually, it’s important to share tangible materials with visitors to the organizations and in other community locations. The JHC developed a tri-fold brochure as part of its original marketing efforts. Though this print collateral gave a nice snapshot regarding each member organizations’ offerings and theme, it was not popular among the public. People were not noticing it among the trove of other community-oriented and attraction brochures offered at the physical spaces of the organizations. Furthermore, it was discovered the piece was outdated and lacked no promotion of an online presence. This discovery opened the door for the UNF Library to provide marketing assets to both establish a dynamic and exciting website and bring the Consortium’s print piece up to the current day standards of marketing excellence.

UNF’s Library Marketing & Community Services Coordinator, Jen Jones Murray, was eager to support the Consortium’s efforts to widen their audience by strengthening the aesthetics of its brochure. The piece transitioned from a trifold piece to a booklet style brochure featuring a crisp and modern-day logo inspired by an old-time, postmark rubber stamp imprint as well as a call to action, bold colors, larger, color saturated images, and a focus on sending readers to the new Consortium website. The creation of a “brand” identity for the JHC was another significant accomplishment that helped mark the JHC as the gateway to Consortium members, large and small. The brochure carrying that brand and related graphics is available for consortium members to share with their visitors, and is also distributed at Jacksonville International Airport and at Visit Jacksonville, which features a consortium link on their website. This effort resulted in a timeless piece and the development of brand standards for the consortium. The brand’s fonts and logos are repeated throughout the new website.

Bringing in the UNF Library’s Marketing & Community Services Coordinator also resulted in the expansion of the membership of the JHC. Through this library asset, new members such as the Jacksonville Aviation Authority and Visit Jax joined with others to follow. Those include important area institutions such as the JAX Chamber and Edward Waters College, Jacksonville’s private, historically black college founded in 1866 and the oldest private institution of higher education in the state of Florida, as well as other archive holders in our community.
Final Thoughts

There are valuable organizations and resources in communities that often go undiscovered. With this project and its resulting partnerships, greater awareness and visibility was brought to the Jacksonville History Consortium. As of June 2018, the identity of the JHC is established in the local and regional history community. Its online resources reach and serve a growing public. Thanks to the University of North Florida Thomas G. Carpenter Library, the Consortium website serves as the repository of dynamic and robust information about the Consortium members, while a redesigned brochure serves as both an information flyer to draw interested parties to the website and drive them to patronize the organizations in person. By printing the brochure in limited quantities, it can be readily updated to conform to changing information on the Consortium website. This is just the beginning. The UNF Library, JHC, JHS, and others in the community will continue to collaborate to preserve and sustain the vast history of the greater Jacksonville region.

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