

Welcome to the Docent Program!

Congratulations on entering the Blanden Art Museum's Docent Program! The purpose of the Blanden Art Museum's Docent Program is to provide members, guests and visitors of the museum with organized, interpretive tours of museum exhibitions with trained volunteers as tour guides. The skillful touring Docent will be knowledgeable, enthusiastic, able to communicate, and must also present a positive image at all times. The program provides ongoing education sessions about the Museum's exhibitions and collections, tour techniques, and how to think like an educator.

So, what is a "docent"? Webster's Dictionary defines a docent as "a knowledgeable guide; one who conducts visitors through a museum. Docents can also be characterized as "museum interpreters" because we go beyond just describing exhibit items and sharing facts. Docents seek to engage their group and conduct the most interactive, inquiry-based tours possible. Each docent develops his or her own interpretation for a tour staying within an exhibit's overall themes and concepts. For these reasons, docents must complete the training program.

This manual covers the Docent Program including its organization, training program and requirements, tour types and responsibilities, resources, checklists and helpful hints on developing and conducting tours.

Docent Organization

Although the majority of tours are given to organized school groups during the school week, an increasing number of public tours are given throughout the museum's summer season.

There are five docent categories: lead, active, trainee, emeritus, and inactive.

- **LEAD DOCENTS:** Have conducted six or more tours each year, have participated in the program for at least two years, direct activities of the Docent Program in conjunction with the Art Educator, and assist in training incoming docents.
- **ACTIVE DOCENTS:** Are expected to meet tour and training requirements, to maintain enthusiasm for the program, and to continue broadening and updating their exhibit knowledge and tour techniques. To maintain active docent status, docents are expected to meet the following tour and training requirements:
 - o Conduct 2 or more scheduled tours within a calendar year, Jan 1 to Dec 31.
 - o Attend training for changing exhibits.
 - o Attend at least 50% of the docent meetings as scheduled by the Art Educator and Lead Docents. After conclusion of the Fall training sessions, docents meet as needed to conduct business, to attend changing exhibit training and to hear additional docent program speakers.
- **TRAINEE:** Once trainees successfully complete the initial docent training program (see more information below), they become active docents.
- **EMERITUS:** Emeritus status is given to previous Blanden Art Museum Art Educators, and occasionally appointed by Lead Docents and the Art Educator to long-time docents that no longer serve on a regular basis.
- **INACTIVE:** If unable to meet tour and training requirements, a docent is placed on inactive status.

Docent Training Programs

Training continues throughout a docent's participation in the Docent Program. Docent training programs include initial training for new docents, continuing education for active docents, changing exhibit training and enrichment opportunities.

Training for New Docents: Prospective docents will meet with one or more Lead Docents who will conduct an initial orientation. The orientation will include a study of the docent manual, brief overview of the museum, and a walk-through of the museum's current exhibits to display common tour techniques. Reading materials are distributed to help new docents begin to develop exhibit foundation knowledge, including a copy of the Blanden's 76th Year Permanent Collection Catalog. After completing the orientation, new docents will shadow experienced docents during a scheduled tour. As soon as possible, new docents should begin observing scheduled tours which is one of the best ways to gain insight into how to conduct and manage a tour. The new docent may elect to shadow multiple times to become more comfortable in establishing their own interpretation for a tour. New docents also need to develop tour techniques such as welcoming/"breaking the ice" with a tour group; meeting tour rotation and timing requirements, keeping group interest and active interaction, and handling distractions and maintaining control of the tour. By observing different docents, you will see a variety of successful tour interpretations, themes, and highlighted concepts for the same exhibit. You will also see different tour techniques you may want to employ during your own tours. Even experienced docents will observe tours to get new ideas about an exhibit, to refresh their tour knowledge after not giving tours for a while, and to develop interpretations of new, changing exhibits. Once comfortable, the new docent will conduct their own tour with the guided assistance of an experienced docent.

When you assist with a tour, you will actually conduct part of a scheduled school group tour with an experienced docent and use the following procedures:

- Look at the Docent Calendar and identify the tour and experienced docent listed for the tour who you want to assist. Contact the docent and ask if you can assist with the tour. Next, decide with the experienced docent what portion of the tour you will give. You need to have this discussion ahead of time so you can adequately prepare your part of the tour and the experienced docent can decide how best to smoothly transition the tour group to you.
- Arrive **15-20 minutes prior** to the tour to help distribute teaching materials within the exhibit and participate in tour discussions with the lead docent.
- At the end of the tour, help pick up and store any teaching materials brought out for the tour.
- This is also a good time to talk with the experienced docent and get some feedback on how the tour went and to ask questions about conducting tours.

Giving your first "solo" school tour can be both scary and exciting. No one feels they are truly ready to give their first tour. You may want to walk through a tour with an experienced docent first, or try giving a tour to a friend or family member. When you are ready to give your first tour, contact the Art Educator to register for a tour, and GO FOR IT!! :)

Continuation Training for Active Docents: Active Docents are expected to attend at least 50% of the docent meetings as scheduled by the Art Educator and Lead Docents. These meetings are a primary way for active docents to keep current on exhibit information, concepts and interpretation techniques. Docents are also expected to continue broadening their foundation knowledge through self-study, additional reading, enrichment program participation and changing exhibit training attendance.

Docent Resources

- Blanden's Art Library by the classroom downstairs. Books must remain on the property, but docents can make copies.
- 76th Permanent Collection Catalog
- Past Perfect. The Art Educator can look up any work in the collection to give you additional information.
- Additional handouts.

Blanden Membership

Docents are encouraged to purchase a \$25 Individual Membership to the Blanden. This helps to cover printings costs, and also goes towards expanding Docent education opportunities.

Guidelines for Observing a Docent Tour

Information Needed First:

Make-up of the group: Age, grade, size, special interest, special needs. All boys? All girls?

Did the teacher identify areas of interest for the tour or what class preparation occurred before the museum visit?

The Plan:

Theme: Was there a theme to the tour? Was it interesting and pertinent? Did it follow a logical order?

Material: Were the docent's facts correct? Did it include most of the important points in the exhibit? Did the docent introduce himself or herself to the group?

Time: Was there enough time allowed to cover the exhibit?

Presentation:

Manner: Was the docent courteous, pleasant, excited, and involved with the group? Was the tour relaxed and easy? Did the docent welcome interruptions in the form of questions or comments? Did the docent seem to share knowledge, rather than expound? Did the docent speak down to the audience, or use language over their heads?

Voice: Did the docent speak distinctly? Did the docent speak too rapidly? Was the docent concerned that everyone could hear and understand?

Rapport: Could everyone see? Was the audience looking at the docent or at the objects in the exhibit most of the time? Was there a method for changing pace if the group got restless? Was the docent aware when the group got restless?

Docent techniques: Did the docent move the group from one place to another in a well-defined way? Did the docent face the group? Did the docent keep them in one area too long? Did they move too fast? After the tour, did the docent escort the group to their next stop (lobby, East Gallery, etc) before leaving them?

Preparation:

Does the docent seem well prepared? Was there enough information to make the tour interesting and informative? Does the docent rely too much on notes or teaching materials?

Does the docent know the physical set-up of the museum and the galleries? Is the docent familiar with the exhibits? Does the docent follow the rotation pattern determined beforehand, when there are more than two touring groups in the exhibit at the same time?

Did the docent add his or her own discoveries? Did the docent have a unique or special approach? Was it right for this group? Did you learn something new about the exhibit from this docent's tour?

Questions to Ask Yourself:

What techniques or information would you add to your own tour that were inspired by this docent's tour?

Do you see some of your own mistakes or weaknesses reflected in this tour?

What were the greatest strengths in this tour? The greatest weaknesses?

How would you assess the tour in terms of its success or failure in relation to the group to whom it was addressed?

Communication

Primary communication on upcoming tours, meetings, etc are via email. Please provide the Art Educator an email address to communicate with you.

For any questions, comments, or assistance please contact the Art Educator, Hope Thier, at hthier@fortdodgeiowa.org or by calling 515-573-2316 Ext. 8102.

*Thank you for becoming a Docent!
You are a valued member of the Blanden Art
Museum community!*