

Hannah Rexrode

2017 East TN Scholarship Winner

Last month I had the opportunity to attend the 2017 TAM conference in Pigeon Forge, TN thanks to the regional scholarships offered.

I had never been to a TAM conference before, so I was unsure of what to expect. When I arrived, however, it was easy to see that everything was off to a great start; I was welcomed, handed a badge, checked into my room by hotel staff, and pointed in the right direction for lunch and the first session.

Each session I attended proved extremely useful and was easily translated into information that I was able to put to good use once back at the East Tennessee Historical Society. Wednesday's "Affinity Group" that specifically catered to the attendees from History Museums was a great way to kick things off, as I was introduced to a group that all shared my passion and allowed me to hear about the challenges that other sites were facing as well as their triumphs in the field.

For most of the weekend I attended sessions that dealt predominantly with education and interpretation, especially those that addressed the topics of interpreting difficult subjects and the history of the underrepresented. These proved valuable to me as much my education and work experience revolves around the interpretation of "difficult history". Hearing about how other museum professionals handle the discussion of such loaded topics provided a glimpse into how other sites and organizations were incorporating difficult history into their comprehensive site story. Also, at the time I was scheduled to present two weeks later at the regional Southeast ALHFAM conference a session entitled "Mindful Interpreting Slavery for the Next Generation." Thanks to the TAM sessions, I had a good idea of what to expect and how to better facilitate discussions when I presented for the first time later that month.

Overall, the conference was a font of knowledge, but what really caught my attention was the camaraderie that the environment fostered. Museum staff from across the state greeted each other warmly and welcomed new conference-goers without hesitation. I immediately felt at ease and was excited to be in a place that celebrated Tennessee's "Museums of Many Colors."