

Community Engagement and Cultural Heritage in Fort Apache



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Karl Hoerig is director of *Nohwike' Bágowa* (House of Our Footprints), the White Mountain Apache Cultural Center and Museum, in Fort Apache, Arizona. I interviewed him over the phone at his home in Tucson on March 6, 2008. We started the discussion by agreeing emphatically that despite his job title, this is not a "museum job" in any stereotypical sense.

Working with the Cultural Center

Karl was hired by the White Mountain Apache Tribe (WMAT) in 2001. The tribe already had a museum (established in 1969), a facility to house the museum (1997) and a temporary exhibit. What they wanted Karl to do was to move beyond their initial planning to complete the first phase of interpretive development. Karl secured funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities for installation of the first round of exhibits.

His first two and a half years with the WMAT were geared towards getting the project, titled "Transitions in the Apache World: the Fort Apache Legacy," underway. As Karl describes, "the most important component of that project is the long-term exhibit ... *Ndee Bike'* (Footprints of the Apache). It is the first in-depth, first-person look at White Mountain Apache culture and [worldview] ... the first time that the tribal community was able to come forward and say 'This is who we are. This is what our ancestors experienced and this is how all of that impacts our experiences today.'"

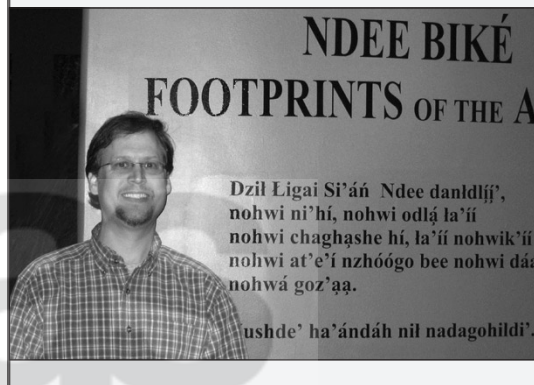
Job Responsibilities

As cultural center director, Karl spends half of his time writing grants and managing projects,

Karl Hoerig

Title: Director of *Nohwike' Bágowa* (House of Our Footprints), the White Mountain Apache Cultural Center and Museum

Salary: Working for a tribal heritage program means a starting salary around \$40,000, with advanced professionals earning up to \$80,000 with some larger organizations.



including reporting to granting agencies and keeping track of grant finances. Although his academic training in museum work was limited, Karl's volunteer work for the Texas Memorial Museum (Austin) and directing a seasonal interpretive museum for a few years gave him important skills for his current job. Graduate school gave him experience with grant writing.

What does the other half of the job entail? "Staff management ... then there's cleaning bathrooms and changing light bulbs ... my museum job is so different from many others. There are things that have to be done, things that a curator or director of a larger institution wouldn't be doing. Then you add the fact that my job isn't just for the museum—my work includes contributing to all the tribe's heritage programs—so there's a lot we do that's beyond museum work." The position requires multifaceted involvement in the

job like this." As Karl describes, anthropological training not only provides a sense of cultural relativism, but an awareness of power relationships, which helps him understand everyday operations within bureaucracies and increases his efficacy in helping tribes to enhance their own sovereignty, from gaining authority over cultural representation to protecting archaeological sites, to engaging in economic development. What probably got him the nod for the WMAT job originally, however, was the hope that his grant writing credentials would produce rain.

Major satisfactions

Karl tells a story that illustrates the success of the museum's interpretive installations. "About six months after we opened the long-term exhibits in 2004, there was a young man who

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community, a mix of museum tasks, heritage promotion, cultural heritage resource protection and management, capacity building, economic development and enhancing sovereignty. "In a lot of ways it's facilitating the heritage interests and efforts of the tribal community—helping with language perpetuation, providing support for health programs—by using accumulated cultural knowledge that exists in the community that we're able to tap into."

Educational and Professional Transitions

Karl's PhD in anthropology is from the University of Arizona. His dissertation work was with a group of Native American artists who participated in a program supported by the Museum of New Mexico. He was teaching part-time at the University of Arizona and the local community college when the WMAT advertised the museum director position. He took the job because he saw an opportunity to contribute to an indigenous community's growth. "There are a lot of great things that anthropology can do to help communities that are historically our subject communities. Unfortunately, the model of an anthropologist spending 12 or 18 months 'in the field' and then writing about it doesn't respond to that opportunity. For me it wasn't satisfactory." Karl reflects, "Certainly there's been a lot of progress in the development of anthropological research, in taking community interests to heart, but I think it needs to go further. I think we can make anthropology something more useful, responsive and interesting to tribal communities."

What Anthropology Can Contribute

"I think of myself as an anthropologist—I see everything through an anthropological lens and I see great value in that.... Also, the toolkit that you get from anthropology helps in doing a

was a member of the tribe and an employee as well, and he'd come in during lunch break; and this is probably the fourth time he'd come through the exhibit. As he was walking out, I was standing out in front with the other members of the staff and he said to them in Western Apache, 'I learned something new again this time.'" Karl reflects, "It's stuff like that, that really tells you that you're doing something that has meaning, something that meets a need. There are rewards for working for a tribal community that you don't get anywhere else. It's a validation of what we do. Prior to opening Footprints of the Apache, very few tribal members returned to walk through the exhibits, and afterwards that changed."

Engaging Practitioners, Re-Entering Academia

Because of the AAA's size, Karl notes, "it's easy for members to become alienated." As a young scholar, he found more opportunities for professional interaction and support through smaller organizations. Karl also suggests, "There needs to be more outreach and more response to what's meaningful and useful, professionally and personally, for practicing anthropologists. I would also like to see more exchange in the future between people working academically and people practicing outside of academia. Part of the reason I took my current job when I did was that I think we would be doing a greater service to anthropology students if more teachers had the experience outside the academy that I've had the opportunity to gain." After more than six years with the White Mountain Apache Tribe, Karl is considering re-entering academia full-time to share with students the knowledge he's gained as a practitioner. ■