

Josh: This is Josh Stone interviewing Dan Truckey on October 5<sup>th</sup>, 2009

**Interviewer: Josh Stone**

Josh: Ah, what's your name?

Dan: January 8<sup>th</sup>, 1967

Josh: Ok, and what year did you graduate from Northern and what did you get your degree in?

Dan: I graduated in 1990 and got my degree in history with my minor in music.

Josh: Ok, and after you got your degree what jobs did you do or what profession did you go into?

**Interviewee: Dan Truckey**

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Bowling Green where I received a master's degree in pop culture and I worked as a grad student

in the pop culture library there. Then I went to Cooperstown, New York to study history,

museum studies at the Cooperstown Museum. When we were there we

weren't even allowed to work, it's a full time student deal, but in the summertime you do

internships, and I interned at the state museum here in Michigan, and I had worked at Fort

Wilkins, and the Father Marquette Museum, which is no longer there, that burnt down years

ago; after that, when I graduated from grad school I worked in museums all over as a curator

and then a director, working in all sorts of different environments. First in upstate New York as

a curator, and then in Connecticut at the Connecticut Historical Society as a curator assistant. I

did a number of consulting jobs in Connecticut as well for different historical societies and

museums. Then I moved to Iowa where I worked as a curator of history at the Sioux City Public

Museum. Then after several years there I went to Travers City, I was curator for a year at the

Grand Travers Heritage Center, then they made me director when the old director left, and

then ah, I came here.

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Josh: Ah, what's your birth date Dan?

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Dan: Well I was a graduate student for a long time after graduating from Northern, I went to Bowling Green where I received a master's degree in pop culture and I worked as a grad student in the pop culture library there. Then I went to Cooperstown, New York to study history, museum studies at the Cooperstown graduate program and ah when we were there we weren't even allowed to work, it's a full time student deal, but in the summertime you do internships, and I interned at the state museum here in Michigan, and I had worked at Fort Wilkins, and the Father Marquette Museum, which is no longer there, that burnt down years ago; after that, when I graduated from grad school I worked in museums all over as a curator and then a director, working in all sorts of different environments. First in upstate New York as a curator, and then in Connecticut at the Connecticut Historical Society as a curator assistant. I did a number of consulting jobs in Connecticut as well for different historical societies and museums. Then I moved to Iowa where I worked as a curator of history at the Sioux City Public Museum. Then after several years there I went to Travers City, I was curator for a year at the Grand Travers Heritage Center, then they made me director when the old director left, and then ah, I came here.

Josh: Ok, well what enticed you to come back to Northern?

Dan: Well it was a number of things, one I loved it up here, I loved Marquette. So I was just really excited about coming back up here, and addition to that the job, was just a great job, I got to work at a university, which I always wanted to do again, and also just the job itself, was starting a new institution, um creating its vision, what its gonna be, what's gonna be inside it, what's it gonna do, activities, exhibits. It's exciting because you've worked at museums that have already had a long history, its hard, sometimes you want to start over again, and here we had the opportunity to do that. Now it had already been created, the people who created it had done a good job in creating the idea of what it was gonna be. Now they just needed me to come in and be its full time staff person and director. It was the subject matter as well, I had worked in museums that had nothing to do with me personally. They were someone else's history. The history of the U.P. is very important to me, its my families history as well. So that was just a great opportunity to do something that had to do with me; something that I could really feel strongly about, rather just say yeah that's interesting, lets do an exhibit or the research.

Josh: Alright, what was the state of the center when you got up here?

Dan: Well it was very new at the time. They had created a gallery in the Superior Dome because it was the only place Northern would give them. It was originally the Cahoda's Room, which was originally right here. And when they renovated this space to be financial services they moved everything over to the dome, and when they created the heritage center they needed the space, originally it was going right here, and at the last minute they told Dr. Menyaghi and Diane Cortas, who was driving the displays, no. So they were moved to the Cahoda's room at

the dome so they created it there and Diane did a great creating it with what she had available. But the issue was that it was in the Superior Dome, which is just not good, its kind of in a dark hallway, it was kind of hidden, and nobody went there. Unless you were there for a football game or some big event or people walked around, we had very few people come there. It was frustrating because were trying to build something and get support from the community and campus, and it just wasn't gonna work. So I lobbied very hard to get this space and the provost Dr. Cook was very supportive and especially since it had been boarded up, I mean there was nothing in here, it had been empty for 4 or 5 years. The lobby was dark and this is the face of the university, its embarrassing. So we lobbied hard for it and they said ok you can have it until we find a more permanent place for you with the Lee Hall project, which lord knows when that's actually gonna happen. So we will probably be here for a long time, as long as they continue to like what we are doing. But beyond that, the thing is that the center, when I took over as the director, there had been a long history of Northern trying to create this, it wasn't something that just happened, there had been talk of it the late '60s that they wanted to do something like this, and Dr. Magnaghi had always kept it in the back of his mind if there was ever money to do it, and in the 1990s, Dr. Vandament, the President, when they opened the dome commissioned several of the display cases at the dome and Diane Cortiach designed all those and they were based off things they had here in the collection at Northern. Some of the things she just created, just had the vision to do it, she did a great job putting those together, and that was kind of the start of it, she also put together the Seaborg display over at the Seaborg Center. So she kind of kicked it off, her and Russ really drove, doing all that and got the center going, if it hadn't been for them it just wouldn't have been created period.

Josh: So I know the center here was opened in the fall of '08, were you involved in the design of the space at all?

Dan: Well yeah, the actual space itself didn't need a lot of work, there were some countertops that needed to be taken out, they needed to re-carpet it. At least in the gallery space, we haven't re-carpeted back here yet (office space), but were the gallery space is that all had to be re-carpeted, repainted, things like that. So there really wasn't much design work, the one thing we needed to do was put in the track lighting for the exhibits, so I designed kind of how I wanted that set-up and um, as for the displays that was a combination of students who helped design layouts for the displays; the original displays that we've since taken down. Diane Cortiach has reinstalled the immigration display over here in one of our rooms with a student. And I was very involved in how things were laid out and where they were gonna go. I am generally very involved in the displays but the students help me, dependent on what's needed at any given time.

Josh: Were there any difficulties in moving the center from the Superior Dome to over here?

Dan: Yeah there were some difficulties, one we had to pack everything that was in the dome to come over here, so that took a lot of time. The students did a really good job, I think only one thing got damaged and I believe it was already damaged, it just got further damaged cuz it was already pretty fragile, it wasn't very valuable. But it took time to pack everything and bring it over here. The most difficult thing was we had to hire a moving company to move everything over here, and they were a little less than sensitive to some of the stuff that came over here, I was a little disappointed in how they handled things. Especially the walls, see originally we were going to put our student life display were these walls were in the Superior Dome, and then

what happened, an offer was made by the hospital to Northern to use that space for a sports medicine lab. So they just told us we need you guys to get out of there. That was actually what drove this. It was kind of dead in the water, we weren't making much progress getting in here so when the hospital came in they said ok they want this space so were gonna give you that space. I was like yay great we won. So they said you need to get everything out of their by May and bring it over here. Well then another month went by and the deal with the hospital fell through but they decided well we might as well move into here. So the student life display we were gonna put up we delayed till the fall and moved it over here and put it up and the walls had to be moved by a moving company, they actually damaged a couple of them, they weren't particularly careful; I was somewhat disappointed, that was probably the most difficult thing, the contractors don't have a sensitivity of what your doing and why your doing it. You can get on them about don't do that or handle that better but sometimes they don't care. That was the only difficulty, negotiating to get in here was difficult. In the end we had good ally's on our side and good ideas of how we wanted to use the space, and also sold that it would be a great front for the university.

Josh: Obviously the center is better suited for the museum instead of the Cahoda's room, but what are some specific differences?

Dan: Well I think the major difference is traffic pattern, you know when we were talking of moving into this space there was some people who didn't think it was a good idea; and they had good reasons, I think the biggest reason was the public outside of the NMU community to whether this would be a draw to them to come to the Cohoda's building since it is not particularly inviting. There are people who simply don't know where it is or that it even is the

Cohoda's building and its not the most inviting space. And a lot of people don't even think it is a building the public can go into. I told them its more a matter of PR and telling people we are here. The traffic with the university community...its not as good as if it were in the library or the Hedgecock building, which I wish we were more centralized but a lot of people come through this building. Lots of students, faculty, and even more important, Board of Trustee's and the alumni, this is a main building for those folks to come through. Alumni especially since the alumni and President's office are here. So just getting the visibility to those folks has been very important, that they know we exist now. If we had stayed in the dome they would have no idea that we even existed unless we dragged them there. So here we just have a much higher profile and in that respect its much better. As for display space we have more space for displays, more space to store stuff, we can have everything together now, we used to have storage in other places and now its all here in one spot. So from a museum facility standpoint its much better, its better in every single way in comparing it to the Superior Dome. You know there were times when football games were going on or graduation that we would get a lot of people coming into that space. But it wasn't quality visitation, it was more just looking around and leaving. Here we find we get more people coming to specifically see it which is a good thing.

Josh: How do you promote the center?

Dan: Well a number of things, one is programming, the U.P. Folk Life Festival. That's our main event that we do every year, we've done smaller events as well. But also using the media to promote it through appropriate ways. Whenever we put up new exhibits which is 2-3 times a year and that always generate a lot of interest television and radio give us a lot of PR, newspapers too we do some advertising but not a lot and we certainly do the free PR, the press

releases and all that and work the free PR and long as we can because that can go a long way and that's pretty much how we promote it.

Josh: Ok um comparing the students to the community, you obviously want to get both those groups in here, is it a little one sided, I mean its here on campus so I suppose students are a little easier?

Dan: Were having more and more success with getting the community in here, especially when we have a new exhibit opening. We had a really good boom with the Anatomy of a Murder exhibit, that got a lot of attention since it was the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Anatomy of a Murder and that allowed us to tie into a community wide event and so that got a lot of the community and people visiting into here so we had a lot of visitors during the summer. But it brought a lot of people in here who remembered Anatomy of a Murder and got people in here who normally wouldn't have so that was important to us. I think with each exhibit we are hoping we are getting more interest from the community. Student wise we don't get just a lot of students who just come in on their own occasionally we do. I think its more students coming in with classes, working with classes saying we have an exhibit open you should bring your students over, that's improved a lot in the past year. Also with the UNITED Conference, we were involved with that so students were coming over as a part of that, we helped publicize that. So I think that that's improved, it's a challenged, you know students are busy. For students to go see anything it's a challenged, getting them to come in here and see a display, most of them come into this building but they don't have time to see a display. There here to see a Professor or take a test then they want to get out of here. So that's a challenge.

Josh: How is it determined what exhibits you'll put up throughout the year?



Dan: Some of it has been my decision some of it like when we first, when we were going to open the center I asked my students who were working for me at the time, I was going to leave it up to them, I wanted them to come up with the exhibit, to basically create an exhibit. And so they did it, they decided they wanted to do something on student life at Northern, in part because we had the artifacts and we had the resources to do it. There's a lot of things we would normally have to go out and get or do a lot more research and legwork. So I think this was a simpler one for them to do and it was a good one too. So that one was decided by them, others have been decided by me I just thought you know this would be a good display lets work on this. Like the story telling exhibit that was pretty much my idea. Anatomy of a Murder came out of meetings I was with other people in the community who wished to do an exhibit on Anatomy of a Murder for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. But actually this week I have an advisory board and we've created an exhibit committee and were getting together for the first time. And a museum usually has an exhibit committee that usually gets together bimonthly and discussing new exhibits for the museum and plans out a schedule a couple years in advance and also what's going on with current exhibits and what needs to be done with those, what assistance they can give or where we should look for stuff. So were gonna start meeting this week for the first time, we just hadn't had the time to do it. Were still a fairly new institution so were still creating our committees, getting out schedule together and our planning, were behind in that respect you know we need to plan better for the future as to what's going on because more and more were having to go out and raise the money to do what we do so you need to have some idea of what's going on in the next year because you have to ask for money now for next year, its too late to ask for money for this year.

Josh: How long does a typical exhibit go up for?

Dan: Oh, 6 months. We tend to keep them up a little longer. The art museum switches theirs a lot, 8, 9, 10 times a year, but it's a little different with art, the display is largely already created by the artist, it's just a matter of changing the artwork. It's not that it's simple, it's that there's not as much work to do research wise and legwork wise in creating the display. It can take a lot of time to put up but with our exhibits, just with the nature of them it takes a lot of work to do the research. You spend a lot of time collecting photographs, artifacts, and writing; and it can take a lot of time. Our story tale exhibit took a year to create, it takes a lot of time to come up with the information to create an exhibit, some can take up to a year or more to create depending on how involved it is. But on the other hand next summer we're going to be remounting an exhibit that was on display at Northern 20 years ago, there were photographic prints by a famous photographer from Marquette, George Shirres; and ah Devous has them all in frames and they're not really using them, haven't displayed them for 20 years so we asked them if we could have them to display next summer since we don't have anything to display and they said yeah sure, so that one won't take very long to put together, depending on how involved it is.

Josh: All the display cases around campus, do you control them at all?

Dan: Yeah, like the ones in the Peter White Lounge, Superior Dome, we control the Seaborg Center displays. There's some in the Jacobetti Center but there really isn't much to do there, theoretically we're in charge of those, but beyond that there's a lot of displays on campus controlled by individual departments. We don't have any control over those, which is fine by me.

Josh: What are your short term/long term goals for the center?

Dan: Well short term goals are to develop better planning for our exhibits and programs so we can raise money and really our short term goal is just to have more active fundraising, because our endowment, generally our operating budget is driven by the interest on our endowment, unfortunately with the economy our endowment, all endowments took a huge drive. So there not making any interest right now, well there making interest but its being used to pay the principle on the original amount of the endowment. So until the principle is returned to its original state and that's creating interest above that, we won't get any profit, so everything we are doing we have to go out and raise the money; foundations, grants, individual donations and our short term goals are just to be more active in that next year. The Folk Life Festival will be in September next year, we have exhibits we want to do next year. Long term goals, you know for a long time the goal was to get into Lee Hall, to be a part of that whole project and I think that is still on the table, but truthfully that project has stalled because of the economy and the states inability to give any money to university's. There's not going to be any capital going to universities anytime soon. The university's capital campaign, they've raised a lot of money and have quite a long ways to go but that is part of the project and until that campaign is done which could take another 3, 4,5 years, nothing is going to happen over there. My long term goal is to still be a part of that but and I can say this because a lot of people share this sentiment is that we are going to bring the historical entities together, we have the archives, the center for U.P. studies, and the center. Long term goal is these 3 being to mesh together and become more one entity. In one space and that they work together as one department instead of separate. And to create a larger institution as a part of that, but that is just getting started

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talking about. But I think that is one of the long term goals to see how these 3 can work together, be more financially viable, and also just serve a great public and have a bigger mission. I think were just developing what we do here, yeah we do displays but the center isn't just a museum, I think originally that's all some people thought it would be is a gallery; since I've been there I've really pushed the idea we should be more than a museum gallery, a programming entity and a advocate for historical preservation for the U.P. and kind of assisting other institutions. And also serving the university, being a much bigger part of that. And originally I didn't want to do a lot of research here because, museums generally don't do a ton of research. I mean a history museum might do research but its generally based on someone else's research, history museums don't normally go out and do the hardcore research on an exhibit. What they do oftentimes is something new comes out and the museum sys wow we should do an exhibit on that. The whole goal of a museum is to take some intellectual and make in understood by the general public. So we tend to not go out and do a ton of strong academic research because that is not what we do. We create exhibits, do programming for the public. But more and more I'm seeing there's a real lack of research being done in certain areas, especially folk lore, the U.P., that we need to get more involved with that to an extent. So that's something I think we might be doing more of is just hardcore research or at least facilitate, encouraged people to do it for exhibits or projects.

Josh: Alright, well thanks for letting me interview you.

Dan: Yeah, no problem.