



## **Museum is where town is a place with history and heart**

Posted: Friday, April 13, 2012 5:26 pm

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A museum, by definition of the American Association of Museums, is “a community-centered place for remembering, discovering and learning.” The International Council of Museums’ definition states that museums are entrusted to “... acquire, conserve and exhibit the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment ...”

One definition is a bit more cozy, the other more grandiose; yet, both of them seem to serve the purpose. Both of them call to mind the purpose and place of Yucca Valley’s own Hi-Desert Nature Museum. It is, indeed, a community-centered place for remembering, discovering and learning, and it does acquire, conserve and exhibit the heritage of this small corner of the world’s humanity and environment.

Like all museums, HDNM is structurally a place, with walls and roof and wiring. However, it differs from all other museums in that it is quintessentially Yucca Valley’s own particular place. It is a place where the story of this town and the Basin around it is preserved with care, and where this story is protected from the decay of forgetfulness.

Indigenous people and early settlers contributed to the story. Much of the museum’s collection and archive was given into keeping by those pioneers or their descendents, and those gifts are still active in the valley’s memory because of Hi-Desert Nature Museum’s duty and diligence.

Whereas what we remember is vital, so too is the story of the present vital as well. This story is told by the 30,000-plus visitors per year who enter the museum to remember, discover and learn. They are the children and parents at family fun days; and the audiences for lecture events. They are artists who mount their works in exhibit of this community’s creative talent. They are school groups and club groups, residents and tourists.

Most of the museum’s visitors have questions and curiosity. A few even have answers. Either way, all visitors are contributors to the museum’s living legacy of memory, history and heritage. They keep the story of this little corner of the world alive and moving

forward, and perhaps like most other museums but, also, perhaps more than most other museums, this one is, first and foremost, its people, past and present.

On the surface, Yucca Valley is, like any town, a collection of roads and buildings. There is traffic, commerce, visual evidence of the new, and the old. But, what made this town? What brought people here, and kept them here? What makes this town's heart continue to beat when temperatures hit 100 degrees for days on end, or when the winds blow grit and gravel into every crease and crevice of home-sweet-home?

It is inquiry like this, inquiry that takes us below the surface, that reveals what Yucca Valley truly has to say for itself and the proper place for this inquiry is the Hi-Desert Nature Museum. Here is where the people are who know the story, and who are willing to tell it. Here is where the artifacts of Yucca Valley's past and present hope and promise are kept and displayed. Here is where Yucca Valley is more than just a collection of roads and buildings, where it is a place with history, memory, past and present. Hi-Desert Nature Museum is where this town, its natural setting and its residents will always have a place to be and belong.

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