

Transcript of Interview with Noah Stubbs by Tory Schendel Cox

Interviewee: Noah Stubbs

Interviewer: Tory Schendel Cox

Date: 04/13/2020

Location (Interviewee): Evansville, Indiana

Location (Interviewer): Evansville, Indiana

Abstract: In response to COVID-19, the Evansville Museum of Arts, History and Science launched the mini-series, "Cultural Insights: Interviews in the Creative Sector," to highlight colleagues and professionals working in the same or similar field of museum professionals.

Noah Stubbs, Director of Communications, Office of Mayor Lloyd Winnecke, City of Evansville

Tory Schendel Cox 00:00

Hi, my name is Tory Schendel Cox. I'm the Virginia G. Schroeder Curator of Art at the Evansville Museum. And today in our telecast we have Noah. Thank you so much for your time. I'm going to pass it on to you.

Noah Stubbs 00:11

My pleasure. Yeah. I'm Noah Stubbs, and I'm the director of communication for Evansville mayor, Lloyd Winnecke in the city of Evansville. And primarily, my job- what I've been, you know, if you, I guess, if you want to talk to me- if we would have talked about two months ago, I would have had some quippy answer that would- I would say something like- like you I'm a bit of a curator myself, curating and sharing the vibrancy and progress that our city is going currently- or has- had been currently going through right now. Since the COVID-19 crisis, our office has quickly transitioned into just a source, a source of information, the latest and accurate information of our local response for the pandemic. Yeah.

Tory Schendel Cox 01:03

That's really interesting. So can you tell me a little bit more about what type of local response are you seeing in the Evansville community?

Noah Stubbs 01:10

Well, last month, we were very- our office was very proactive and partnering with the two major local hospital systems Ascension St. Vincent and Deaconess, our local Vanderburgh County Commissioners, which is the other major executive office, elected office, of which there are three elected officials. Our Vanderburgh county health departments, our local school systems, universities and public school systems and the parochial school systems, as well as nonprofits and coming up with an initial response. It kind of kicked off with a press event, which we actually held in this room. I'm in the mayor's conference room right now, as I am an essential worker. I do work from home, but I usually spend about half of my week at the office, but we kicked off a press event just as soon as we knew and talked to our local health officials and knowing that this crisis would come to our community. And we had our local hospital and health officials explain to the public very clearly and plainly what their expectations are and what their initial plans were. And that was very informative. Since then, they've- they've taken their own torch and- and doing daily- I know that Deaconess does daily updates. The Vanderburgh County Health Department has up to the hour reports on positive cases and a lot of other resources and information. We then

reached out to our local nonprofits, knowing that this would heavily and greatly impact not only their organizations, but especially those- those social service organizations that really- really do one on one work with- with community residents and community members, providing food assistance and- and home and shelter assistance, reaching out to them and finding out the best solution and providing as much help as we could and- and anticipating gaps within our community through those nonprofits. And we created a- a response- or a COVID-19 Relief Fund, initial partners and other private donors, initially committed, I think, it was \$1.2 million. And all of that money, they're- they're looking to raise about \$6 million, all of that money will go to those- those organizations, nonprofit organizations and charities that will directly help folks during and after this crisis is over with. Yeah, from there, here in the office and with city government operations, we- we closed down the Civic Center administration building, so most of our workers here are working from home. We have encouraged our residents who need to do business with the city and all of the departments that- that that we have to- most of what you can do here in the in the building now, thanks to the power of the internet, you can do that online. So we're encouraging our residents to- to utilize those services. We have them all listed on our website and that's Evansvillegov.org/onlineservices and we'll continue as- as governor Holcomb has and potentially could extend the stay-at-home order. We'll have those services available and- and we are- yeah, just rolling along best we can here in providing, you know, essential services like trash pickup and water, sewer utility work and- and yeah, all the other things that we- we provide to the city.

Tory Schendel Cox 05:15

That's amazing. I don't know if you caught the telecast where governor- governor Holcomb specifically said thank you Evansville and talked about the crisis relief fund and the good work you guys were doing but that was amazing.

Noah Stubbs 05:26

Yeah. Yeah. And thanks to United Way and Welborn Baptist Foundation, were two of the key, and I'm not going to mention all- everybody, all the initial partners, but they were the two initial partners that really, really got things off the ground. And United Way will be the- the supervisor of the relief fund and taking donations and then eventually, they're- well, I think they're actually currently in the application process and accepting applications from nonprofits and deciding, you know, which- which of these local organizations need those benefits the most? Yeah, and, yeah, Governor Holcomb has been, I think, along with- with our local officials, we're- I think we're really lucky here, locally, you know, our community so far. While it has been impacted greatly, we haven't had very- I mean, the number of reported cases are relatively low. And I personally, can- I think we can attribute that, just as a community, to- to just the, the proactive measures that we've taken so far. and I've had a front row seat to seeing my boss, Mayor Winnecke, you know, other local elected officials, the health officials and local school officials, all collectively coming together to- to just to just come up with that that initial response and that continuing response that we've had. I think, is really, really- it's really it's- it's- it says something about just- just our community, and just how we can just collaborate and come together in times of need.

Tory Schendel Cox 07:15

Absolutely. And that's definitely makes us proud to- to be resident of Evansville. So definitely, for you guys and your services. Because like you said, being able to contain and be proactive is how we stopped this sooner than later, so we're grateful. [laughs] Now, out of curiosity, when it comes to the nonprofits, I'm not sure if you can comment on this. When you're deciding who gets this money, the relief, has there been any push for nonprofits? Or maybe they- what are they doing, though nonprofits that work with homeless populations of Evansville?

Noah Stubbs 07:49

That's a good question. Yeah. So certainly, I think some of that that relief fund will go to those agencies and homeless shelters, and- and I would assume that probably some of that that funding will go to- to some of those services here locally and to push- I'll come back to the funding, but one thing I forgot to mention is that our Evansville Vanderburgh County home- Commission on homelessness, actually, within a week's time of us knowing that there could be a potential major outbreak, we're looking at a lot of other communities that just across the country where low income and people experiencing homelessness and communities, outbreaks happen and in- and in a homeless shelter or within that population and then will quickly spread just given the nature of their close- their closeness. And- and- and just how they- they you know, just their current situations. So um our Commission on- on home- homelessness and partnering with- with- with the local homeless shelters, United Caring and the rescue mission. And then Deaconess helped us out, Echo Community Health helped us out, but we all collectively came together. And probably the most important mention is the Catholic Diocese provided a their [inaudible] retreat center, and this is a 55 room dorm style facility where people who- who need isolation, who otherwise wouldn't have it, specifically people who are currently experiencing homelessness. If they're awaiting test results or if they're, you know, fighting the symptoms of this virus, they can self-isolate, get a- get a meal, just- just have- have some isolation and some quiet and- and in recovery during this time. But that- that all came together within a week's time, and it has been utilized. Fortunately, up until this point, to my knowledge, we actually have not had a positive test within the- the homeless community- the homeless population here locally, but those are- so that's- that's one major thing that- that- that's- that's a major win for our community. And it's the- that facility is- is to my knowledge is the first in the state. We kind of put it all together just as quick as we saw what was happening in other communities. But going back to funding, yeah, the relief fund will, I would assume, go to some of those agencies specifically. And then one thing to note is that we're starting to get a better idea of what the federal government is doing. And in terms of the response, and locally, I think a lot of- you'll see a lot of those, you know, homeless shelters and other agencies support us, you know, support agencies receiving federal funding as well.

Tory Schendel Cox 11:00

Yeah. Which is massive. I'm just- I'm sorry, just still thinking on that- the Catholic Diocese. That is absolutely kind of- this is the first time I've been hearing about that. So yeah, I'm interested to find more information. Would that resource be on your website as well?

Noah Stubbs 11:13

Yeah, yeah. We- we put it out on- on our- on our website. And- and yeah, we're certainly grateful for- for- for the diocese, and- and in partnering with us, you know, they- they did not have to do that. But, you know, I think they saw, you know, a need to give themselves, you know, or their facility and service, and- and we're grateful for that.

Tory Schendel Cox 11:39

Now, is there any issues right now with food banks or any type of those food industries that try to give to people in need because of COVID-19 and that direct contact and possibly lack of PPE?

Noah Stubbs 11:50

Sure. Yeah. I think that. I think that there- there- well, there's- there's always a need. But- but you know, in terms of what what's being done with- with you know, providing that gap in food assistance, there are several things that

are going on. Our local school corporation has been providing grab and go lunches. This is a service that, through the USDA, that they usually do during the summer months to provide meals to kids who- who you know, sort of rely on that that school lunch or breakfast. And- and you know, maybe mom and dad or grandma and grandpa, you know are tight for cash. This is- this is a program that normally happens during the summertime since the schools have closed. They have opened this- this program back up and at select EVSC schools. I'm still- I still think it's going on, but every day, they provide a lunch for anyone under 18. You don't have to be a EVSC student. You can go and get- get a lunch if you're if you are physically present. Mayor Winnecke and I, a couple of weeks ago, went to Cedar Hall Community School of which I serve on the site council. And during our lunch break, we- we actually assembled over 300 breakfasts and lunches. In addition to that, the Junior League has been very- they've- they've stepped up. They provide a similar grab and go lunch services through, I believe it's like a food truck set up, and they go to targeted neighborhoods periodically and provide that similar service. The big one though, and this is a collaboration between Junior League and our city council president, Alex Burton, and a few others. These- these community organizers created Feed Evansville. They're providing grab and go lunches to anybody during the lunch hours. They've been at CK Newsome Center and a couple other churches around town, just providing- and I- during one of my lunch breaks, I helped pass out lunches in front of the CK Newsome Center with Feed Evansville. They're providing those- those lunches for anybody in need. There's no restriction. You can just go and grab what you need. But that's been huge, and they've relied heavily on nonprofits and businesses to donate food and supplies. I know that a lot of local restaurants who have excess in, I think, there was one that had an excess in to go containers, needed to go- to go containers for those- those grab and go lunches. In addition, they also, through their Facebook page, have curated a list of pantries and other places where you can- where you can get a free meal, if you need it during this time.

Tory Schendel Cox 15:07

That's unbelievably kind. It's great to be doing all these partnership opportunities, in spite of this pandemic, so it's just- it's heartwarming to know that our community is giving- doing the best they can to give back. And out of curiosity, what type of programs are you working on right now?

Noah Stubbs 15:25

Um, so we're still- we're still through Facebook, through our local media, community media partners, the TV stations, the newspapers and radio, on an almost daily basis, we have something to share community, something that's going on. We're going to continue to bring, you know, our country is a republic. and, you know, even here locally, it's- it's imperative that we, you know, we continue to provide accurate and- and up to date information for our residents. I mean, that's- that's the best way to make this all work. So, we're gonna continue to do that. We're going to continue to practice calm and- and- and- and what positivity we can, in spite of, you know, the fact that this is a crisis. Yeah, and then we're going to start focusing, eventually, we're within, probably within the week, we're going to start focusing on- on just, just the aftermath of all this. And- and, you know, what, you know, in terms of our budgets, in terms of our current city, as, you know, operations, what we can, you know, our goal is to- to make this seamless and still providing the same services that we provide to our residents and then facilitates for, you know, further facilitate a plan for- for to get our city and to get our community moving again, get people back to work, give people, you know, back in restaurant seats, get people back in into- into movie theaters. You know, I drive- every day, I drive by my favorite movie theater that I've gotten from- from Evansville, I haven't left. And I live in the same part of town that I- that I grew up in, currently, and every day, I drive by my childhood movie theater, and I see that it's closed. And, you know, just thinking about that that's a- that's a house, that's a facility that that created so much inspiration and provided so much inspiration and ideas and thoughts and, you

know, just creative direction. And I'm excited to even go back to- to- to the to the movies. But yeah, just- just getting everybody back on track as best we can. You know, I think that we, you know, as a community, and as a country will probably walk away from this. It- things are not going to be the same. There are things that are going to be different. But- but just- just getting back to- to what normal we can, and that's- that's- that's- that's our overall big picture item moving forward.

Tory Schendel Cox 18:16

Absolutely. Was there anything else you'd like to share with our viewers today?

Noah Stubbs 18:21

Yeah, just- just continue to stay at home. I know that, that can be difficult for- for, it's difficult for me. I spent my weekend at home and almost lost my mind, but I'm still here.

Tory Schendel Cox 18:39

Yay.

Noah Stubbs 18:40

Stay home. Don't go out unless you need to. Continue to follow trusted sources for the latest information on all of this. And you too, for those of you who are- I'm seeing a lot of people actually exercise their artistic side. And- and, you know, I'm seeing people paint and draw and make music on social media. I'd say continue to do that. That's- I love seeing stories- and, and- and- and people exercising their- their creativity. I would encourage our entire community to keep doing that. And yeah, we're gonna get through this.

Tory Schendel Cox 19:25

Absolutely. Well, Noah, I definitely appreciate your time. This is very insightful, and I can ask you questions all day, but... [laughs] So definitely, we'll look forward to some follow up conversation, but-

Noah Stubbs 19:37

Cool.

Tory Schendel Cox 19:38

For our viewers, this is an Evansville Museum recording, and Noah, thank you again for your time.

Noah Stubbs 19:41

Thank you.