



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 04/14/2017

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Summers Is a Treasure in the World of Museums

Written by Ashley H Pollock

Southern Utah Museum of Art, Cedar City, Utah: As the Southern Utah Museum of Art reaches its 9th month of operation, Reece Summers says goodbye to Cedar City. At the end of April, Reece Summers will be retiring from Southern Utah University. During his time in Cedar City, he became dear friends with landscape artist Jimmie F. Jones, fostered relationships with multiple government and art entities, and brought Southern Utah Museum of Art to life.

Shauna Mendini, Dean of the College of Performing and Visual Arts, said, “Reece has a wonderful skill in creating relationships and has made relevant partnerships with the National Parks Service, the Paiute Tribal Council, the Bureau of Land Management and others. He initiated the on-going Artist in Residence Program at Zion National Park by administering the jurying process. Additionally, his connection to the art world has benefited student learning and increased community engagement by bringing innovative exhibits that spark imagination.”

With over 30 years of professional experience managing university museums and collections housed within those museums, Summers brought a wealth of knowledge to SUU. He began his career as the curator of the Montana State University Museum of the Rockies. He later moved on to serve as the Managing Curator of the Utah State University American West Heritage Center for seven years. While there, he was the steward over the permanent collection that included art and material culture associated with the intermountain West. His last position prior to coming to SUU was a Fellow and Curator at Great Plains Art Museum, part of the Center for Great Plains Studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Donna Law, Chair of the Utah Museum Services Advisory Board and longtime advocate for the arts, said, “Reece was at SUU at just the right time to bring the idea of a museum to a dynamic educational and architecturally stunning reality. His knowledge and experience combined to create an exciting destination for arts enthusiasts of all ages.”

Jim Aton, Professor of English at SUU, said, “Reece gives students the extraordinary freedom with just the minimum of guidance so that they can take on projects that most university museums would only give to professional staff. He lets them soar. He treats them like professionals, and they consistently rise to the occasion – even surpassing what Reece thought they could do. He treats them with kindness, compassion, and respect. They know that working with him, they are getting an absolutely first-rate education into how to run a gallery or museum.”

Colette Cox, Chair of the Friends of SUMA, said, "Reece Summers has been incredibly supportive of the Friends of the Braithwaite Gallery and now Friends of SUMA over the years. He understood the importance of engaging local, passionate, art lovers who have the energy and resources to raise funds and support the arts. He will be greatly missed."

Joanne Brattain, Chair of the SUMA Advisory Board, said, "Over the last eight years, while SUMA was being designed, built and opened, Reece was always at least one step ahead, quietly keeping everyone on track towards our goal. He is a wonderful mentor to both students and volunteers. I will miss him personally and professionally; for me, SUMA will always be 'the house that Reece built.'"

Completing his 10-year career at SUU, Summers will be presented with the Trustees Award of Excellence - Staff Award at the university's 118th Annual Commencement. This much deserved award honors all that he has done for Southern Utah University. Summers served as a leader in many areas of the University. He collaborated with not only the College of Performing and Visual Arts, but many departments throughout the campus.

SUU and SUMA are honored to have worked with such a cultural giant. We wish him well as he moves on to the next big adventure.

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