

HB 3210 Task Force on Heritage Vitality

Executive Summary Report

September 27, 2012

Every day, in countless ways, Oregonians experience their cultural heritage. They drive roads following routes first created by pioneers or Native Americans. They buy food from century-old farms. They shop at businesses in historic commercial areas. They visit parks created years ago by Oregonians with visions of healthy communities.

Oregonians attend schools and work in buildings built by and named for historic people, whose fortitude and dreams created the businesses and communities they live in. An Oregonian's engineering or medical discovery decades ago may have been the breakthrough that enabled today's medical treatment.

An Oregonian's dress, food, language, material goods and music are the tangible remnants of heritages transmitted to them from previous generations of Oregonians and from those new to Oregon. This means heritage is found in the closet, the workplace, the auditorium, the historic barn and elsewhere. **In short, Oregon heritage is 24/7. Everywhere.**

Our diverse Oregon cultural heritage attracts visitors to Oregon, who in turn help our economy. Eighty-three percent of the leisure tourists responding to a Mandala Research study this month said they are cultural and heritage tourists for whom heritage activities and places were important to their decision to vacation in Oregon. Cultural and heritage activities are especially popular with "well-rounded, active" tourists. These active tourists are the most common variety of tourist in Oregon and they spend on average 39 percent more on their visits than the average tourist.

There are more than 1,000 non-profit organizations in the state that gather our heritage and/or make it available to the public. These heritage organizations include nearly three dozen county historical societies, the vast majority of which operate without regular public funding, and the Oregon Historical Society, which has experienced inconsistent public funding over the past decade. When some of those organizations showed severe financial stress in 2009, the Oregon Heritage Commission immediately became concerned.

The Oregon Heritage Commission, which serves as a catalyst for hundreds of organizations and thousands of Oregonians devoted to preserving and interpreting Oregon's heritage resources, initiated a study that confirmed Oregon is blessed with many vibrant heritage organizations. The study also identified eight major challenges facing these organizations:

- ◆ Unstable and inadequate government and private funding.
- ◆ Little meaningful coordination and collaboration among heritage organizations and their communities.
- ◆ The inability to measure and articulate the economic value of Oregon heritage.
- ◆ Changing educational requirements that have reduced history instruction at all grade levels.
- ◆ A shortage of people with the skills and knowledge to address issues of preservation, fund raising, leadership and technology.
- ◆ Changing demographics and expectations, including developing new leadership.
- ◆ Limited use of 21st century communications and advocacy strategies.
- ◆ Uneven development and use of technology.

At the request of the Heritage Commission, the 76th Legislative Assembly created a Task Force on Heritage Vitality to review the information and to propose recommendations that would strengthen Oregon's heritage organizations. Its recommendations for the 2013 session of the Oregon State Legislature include:

- 1. Re-authorize the Cultural Trust tax credit.** The grants provided to heritage organizations by the Cultural Trust have been instrumental in funding important work of heritage organizations.
- 2. Honor the words and intent of ORS 358.015 and recognize the important work of the Oregon Historical Society by appropriating biennially at least \$2.5 million to the Oregon Historical Society.** Through its collection, exhibits, publications, educational programs and research library, the Oregon Historical Society provides an invaluable service to the citizens of Oregon. Stable funding is essential for the OHS to maintain its operations and services to the state and the public.
- 3. Adopt legislation directing the Department of Revenue to establish a permanent Oregon heritage fund check off listing on the state income tax return.** These funds would be used by the Oregon Heritage Commission to increase grants to community heritage organizations.
- 4. Adopt legislation designating an Oregon Heritage Week or Month, with the Oregon Heritage Commission and Oregon Historical Society taking lead roles in creating a structure for it.**
- 5. Direct the appropriate committee to convene a hearing on the state of history instruction in Oregon public schools.** With a national focus on math and science education, the amount of time spent on Oregon history instruction has declined. Public schools graduating students who are historically ignorant about their own state and nation should be an issue of concern to the Legislature.
- 6. Adopt legislation initiating a nominal surcharge to documents recorded by county clerks to use within their county for records management activities and to create a dedicated fund managed by the Oregon State Archives for local government records programs.** County clerks and city recorders are responsible for the preservation of important historical records. Increased costs and reduced financial resources are threatening this preservation.
- 7. Direct the Oregon Heritage Commission to continue discussion with Oregon Tourism Commission dba Travel Oregon as to how best to market Oregon's cultural and heritage assets based on results of the 2012 Heritage Tourism Survey.** A strong, focused heritage tourism marketing effort will benefit Oregon's economy.
- 8. Request that the Oregon Law Commission conduct a more thorough study on the need to make revisions to ORS section 358, dealing with city museums and county historical funds.** While the Task Force reviewed ORS section 358 and conducted research related to it, the Task Force determined it did not have the resources or staff required to make a thorough analysis of the statute, and believes it is a task better suited for the Oregon Law Commission.

The Task Force also made a number of recommendations for state agencies, city, county and tribal governments; and heritage organizations. A copy of the complete report is available at <http://www.oregon.gov/OPRD/HCD/OHC/pages/vitalitytaskforce.aspx> or by contacting Heritage Commission coordinator Kyle Jansson at 503-986-0673 or kyle.jansson@state.or.us