

Tom Lea Institute has new director

Whether a newcomer or longtime resident, most residents in and around the border of El Paso and Ciudad Juarez recognize the name Tom Lea. As a muralist, illustrator, historian, novelist, World War II correspondent, and studio painter, Lea left behind a legacy of works that celebrated his love for friends and family and most especially the light-filled desert region where he was born and raised.

Since his death in January 1991, friends and supporters alike have celebrated Lea's artistic legacy in a variety of ways, ranging from proclamations in the U.S. Congress to a Tom Lea cenotaph (monument) at the Texas State Cemetery. Closer to home, the City of El Paso officially designated October as Tom Lea month.

The most enduring tribute continues through the work of the Tom Lea Institute. Founded in 2009 by longtime family friend and gallery owner Adair Margo, the Tom Lea Institute, (TLI) is a non-profit corporation created to perpetuate the literary and artistic works of Tom Lea. As the TLI's first executive director, Margo was supported by an outstanding board of directors whose membership included former First Lady Laura Bush, James Clement of the legendary King Ranch, and J. P. Bryan, founder and CEO of Torch Energy and owner of the Gage Hotel in Marathon, Texas.

From its inception, the TLI has not only continued to honor Lea's memory in El Paso each October with a full slate of programs featuring prominent guest speakers, movies and tours that highlight Lea's work. It has also expanded to other locations associated with Lea's career, such as the National Museum of the Pacific War in Kerrville, Texas, the Bullock State Museum and the Harry Ransom Humanities Center at UT Austin, and sites outside Texas such as Santa Fe and New Orleans. It has also established educational outreach programs with schools in both the El Paso and Ysleta districts.

Margo came to realize she was no longer able to cover the many details related to the Institute and its expanding mission. She asked the TLI board last year to seek a new executive director. In January of this year, board chairman Pamela Pitzer Willeford (former ambassador to Switzerland and Liechtenstein) announced that the board had chosen Lisa M. Pugh as the new executive director of the Tom Lea Institute.

Pugh, whose maiden name is Martin, is a sixth generation Texan who was born in El Paso, raised in the Upper Valley and graduated from Coronado High School. She earned a bachelors in Latin American Studies at Texas Tech, and a masters in anthropology with a focus on museum studies at NMSU.

Upon completing her Masters in 1996, Pugh accepted a position with the fledgling New Mexico Farm and Ranch Museum where she worked for the next 13 years. "It was exciting putting together a brand new museum," she said, describing her first job as collections manager. "The

Gallery Talk



Myrna Zanetell

founders had been collecting artifacts all over the state so our initial challenge was to bring them all together in one central location.

"At this stage, the building was just an empty space so we were then tasked with planning exhibitions around our collection of artifacts. We also established an oral history section because we wanted to tell stories about ranching and farming from all over the state of New Mexico."

Once all this began to take shape, Pugh became curator of exhibitions.

Her next position was as director of the Las Cruces Museum of Art where she spent the next eight years.

"We had a really strong emphasis on education so my time was divided between creating exhibitions and student programs."

In 2014, she joined the New Mexico Historic Sites Commission where she participated in organizing the collections and home of J. Paul Taylor. Taylor, an educator who was also a member of the New Mexico Senate for 17 years, had acquired a collection of more than 2,000 items. Many of them, such as retablos and bultos, were from the Spanish Colonial period. Taylor will continue to live in the home, Pugh said, which upon his death will pass to the state of New Mexico and then be opened as a museum.

Now in her fourth month as Tom Lea Institute director, Pugh emphasized that she is very pleased to be working in El Paso, a location she still thinks of as home, despite her daily commute from Las Cruces.

In addition to Pugh, the TLI currently employs a staff of four. Sara Prezioso, community outreach coordinator, is in charge of collections and community outreach projects including mural tours. As director of education, Holly Cobb works with both the EPISD and the Ysleta school districts. The 4th grade regional history curriculum is entitled "Awakening the Giants of Our History." Often referred to as "The Twelve Travelers," this program acquaints students with the culturally diverse individuals Tom Lea pictured in his iconic mural, "The Pass of the North."

The 7th grade curriculum use the art of both Tom Lea and Jose Cisneros, and focuses on the Mexican Revolution as seen through the eyes of the children living dur-

Please see Page 30

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