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SPECIAL FEATURE

West Virginia Folklife Center

**Grants Make Special Opportunities Possible for the
Frank & Jane Gabor West Virginia Folklife Center**

With so many activities, programs, and projects on campus, it's

sometimes easy to miss events or overlook some of the work being done here at Fairmont State. OSP decided this month to feature the efforts of Lydia Warren, Ph.D., Director of the Frank & Jane Gabor Folklife Center, who has enhanced the work of the Center by actively securing external funding.

The Folklife Center is home to various archives and collections related to Appalachian history and culture. The Folklife Center aims to connect students, faculty, and the community with their living traditions and regional culture through scholarship, publications, workshops, exhibitions, and outreach events.

Since joining Fairmont State in 2022 as the Director of the Folklife Center, Warren has received seven grants. One of her recent awards is through the West Virginia Humanities Council Mini-Grant program and is providing \$2,000 for the curation, promotion, and actualization of *Sand and Fire: 200 Years of West Virginia Glass*. This exhibit will highlight how the glass industry led to significant economic development in West Virginia during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This exhibit is scheduled for February 15 to May 15, 2025.

Warren shared that progress on the exhibition is going well: "Museum Studies professor Marian Hollinger, Ph.D., and curator Joseph Valencic spent part of the summer traveling to museums to research and are now narrowing down what objects will be borrowed and displayed. The next step is writing interpretive signage and doing the graphic design work."

Hollinger and Valencic have also spoken with Fairmont residents who had connections to the glass industry as well as present day West Virginia glass artists. The Folklife Center staff will work over the winter with these contacts to turn their research, objects, and stories into a cohesive exhibit.

Warren has also successfully secured state and private funding for professional development-related expenses. Warren has been able to attend various events and conferences through the WV Department of Arts, Culture, and History (WVDACH) Arts Conference Expense Grant, including the Arts in Our Communities Conference, Arts Day at the Legislature, and the WVDACH Arts Conference. Similarly, Warren has attended the Italian Diasporic Archives Research Meeting and presented a paper at the Appalachian Studies Association Conference, both of which were enabled through grant funding.

"Attending events has helped me see what I can do to modernize and professionalize the Folklife Center's archives. I recently attended the Italian Diasporic Archives Research Meeting, which was a National Endowment for the Humanities-funded gathering for institutions with collections related to the Italian diaspora. Attending the meeting made me realize that we have items in our collection that are connected to the Italian diaspora, but none are identified as such in our archive because Italian American history and culture is so

ubiquitous in Fairmont," said Warren. "As we upgrade our software and archive organization over the next two years, we now know to use more search terms related to the Italian diaspora to make our archival holdings more accessible."

The West Virginia Museums Association Conference also connected Warren with a professional organization that offers free archive assessments for small West Virginia archives. The Folklife Center has been approved for this assessment, which will help the Center prioritize the upgrade process.

Grant awards have also allowed Warren to further develop collections within the Folklife Center. The Gerald E. and Corrine L. Parsons Fund Award from the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress recently helped Warren conduct research to write a Finding Aid for the Patty Looman Collection of hammered dulcimer recordings. Warren's research helped her realize that the Library of Congress doesn't have much related to Patty Looman in their collection; however, what she did find was quite interesting.

"The information the Library of Congress does have revealed the ways researchers in the 1970s and 1980s conceptualized WV traditional music and musicians. With this info, we are able to provide rich context about the world in which Looman performed and taught," Warren, an avid researcher, pointed out. "Because our Looman collection is so big, we have many items that still need to be processed. In the meantime, Folklife Center worker Hayley Harvey and I were able to make a Looman zine to showcase some of the items in our archive."

Whether she's pursuing grants for travel to attend a conference and bring her knowledge back to Fairmont State or for sponsored research or projects, Warren is focused on maintaining the Folklife Center's role as a hub of Appalachia's rich cultural heritage. Academic studies, educational programs, festivals, performances, and publications are often held at the Folklife Center.

A current grant application Warren has submitted is to support the creation and publication of *Traditions: The Ghost of Ruth Ann and Other Local West Virginia Lore*, an illustrated zine. The publication will have paranormal and scary stories from West Virginians in the style of Ruth Ann Musick, Fairmont State professor, author of *The Telltale Lilac Bush* and other works, and namesake of the Fairmont State University library. This project, which includes a planned collaboration with *Mothboys*, a podcast hosted by Appalachian natives Matt and Mike Schlang and Jake Haskin, seeks to cultivate an inclusive space where people feel comfortable sharing stories of the weird, unexplained, or misunderstood aspects of Appalachian culture.

"We hope the upcoming zine is a fun way for folks to connect with Ruth Ann Musick's legacy of collecting WV lore. Melody Keeling, a student employee, actually saw the ghost of Musick at the Folklife Center, which inspired us to create a zine with her story and new lore

from around the state," said Warren. "We hope the zine, and the collaboration with local podcast *Mothboys*, will make folklore more accessible to a wider audience around the state."

For anyone who would like to get involved with the Folklife Center, or any of these projects in general, the best way to do so is by attending Folklife Center events and workshops and using their library and archive. The Folklife Center is also open to collaboration with students, researchers, professors, traditional artists and musicians, storytellers, and any folklife-related people and groups. For anyone who would like to visit, the Frank & Jane Gabor WV Folklife Center is open from Monday-Thursday 10am to 3pm and occasionally on the weekends for special events.

To stay up to date with the Folklife Center and to share ideas for events and community outreach, you can reach the Center via *email*, *Facebook*, or phone at (304) 367-4403.

SPECIAL NOTE:

Any grant application, proposal, or request for external funding must be reviewed and approved **prior to submission** through an internal process managed by the Office of Sponsored Programs. Please *visit our website* for more information and to access the required forms which facilitate the internal review and approval process.



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