

The Mound House Wants You!

Volunteer Training Speaker Series

By Gary Mooney

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The historic Mound House on Fort Myers Beach wants you – as a volunteer! To recruit more people to volunteer at the museum complex and cultural and environmental learning center, the Mound House inaugurates its 2021 “Volunteer Training Speaker Series” on Friday, February 26, with Dr. Victor Thompson virtually presenting “Calusa Sites & The American Battlefield Protection Program” at 2 p.m. The Volunteer Speaker Series continues virtually the last Friday of each month at that time through June 25.

“The Volunteer Speaker Series is open to Mound House members as well as current and perspective volunteers,” said Environmental Education Coordinator Dexter Norris. “These are one-hour events, with the speaker presenting for roughly 45 minutes, then 15 minutes for questions-&-answers. We selected the speakers because they are professional and academic people with great personalities and resumes, who have tremendous expertise in fields that intimately align with the Mound House and its mission, so in large part they represent the environment, nature, history, and archaeology. The Volunteer Speaker Series allows us to reach out to current volunteers as well as to recruit new folks, because we cannot do everything we do without our fantastic volunteers. We currently have roughly 50 volunteers who annually contribute hundreds and hundreds of hours.”

The Volunteer Speaker Series, however, is not actual training, “but a fun and educational outlet,” Dexter continued, “especially now that so many are still hesitant to get out-and-about due to COVID-19. The Volunteer Speaker Series are 100% virtual and free, but you must be a member, volunteer, or perspective volunteer to participate. To volunteer and access the Speaker Series, email me at dexter@fmbgov.com and I will add you to the ZOOM Webinar link that we send out before each program. To be eligible for Dr. Thompson’s February 26 presentation, I need your email by Monday, February 22.”

In addition to the educational component, the Volunteer Speaker Series “makes it possible to socialize with each other again,” Dexter emphasized, “as COVID-19 really put on damper on those activities. This is a safe format that allows our folks to get together again and not feel so left out. Through the magic of video, we can see how everyone is doing, meet their cats and dogs through the cameras, and laugh and learn together, while continuing their volunteer education through a tremendous array of interesting speakers and topics!”

The Volunteer Speaker Series continues on March 26 with Tony Mauriello offering “Landscaping & Florida Native Plants.” Dr. Jose Leal on April 23 discusses “Local Mollusks & Shells,” followed by Dr. Bruce McFadden on May 28 with “Prehistoric Mammals of Florida.” The series closes on June 25 with an as yet unscheduled program.

Best Customer Experience

As for actual Mound House volunteer training, “that all revolves around providing the best-possible customer service experience for our visitors while being an enjoyable outlet for volunteers,” Dexter related. “We offer three general volunteer categories, with the largest being Museum Docents who are our frontline representatives to our visitors. They greet guests, show them around the site, answer questions, and are our community representatives. A second is our kayak tour assistants, who help prepare the program, grab equipment, assist with life preservers, and are the ‘caboose kayak’ on the tour, to keep everyone together. The last are Newton Park Beach Walk leaders, for which you must have at least one Florida Master Naturalist course. We do have a fourth, for people with special skills who can benefit the Mound House on a case-by-case basis and may not even need to be on-site to help us.”

To become a Mound House volunteer, contact Dexter at dexter@fmbgov.com. “Rest assured, we do not throw you to the wolves,” he chuckled! “We will not put you out there until you are thoroughly familiar with the Mound House, comfortable with your knowledge, and completely ready to interact with our guests. Simply fill out the application and complete the background check and you are on your way! Next you spend time with the staff, to learn the basics such as what switches turn on what lights and where each door leads to where. Then you follow staff on programs and we assign you to a veteran volunteer so you have a mentor. Once you and we agree you are completely ready, then you on your own.”

Dexter and the Mound House team “are cognizant that we live now in our COVID-19 world, so volunteers wear masks at all times, as do our visitors. We station you either outside, on the open-air porch, or outside the underground archaeological exhibit, to limit interactions and maximize safety protocols.”

Giving Back to The Community

“I personally volunteer to give back to the Fort Myers Beach community,” said Ellen Vaughan, President of The Friends of The Mound House. “When we retired here about ten years ago, we wanted to make more than acquaintances but true friends, as you want a core group that is bigger together than you are individually, where you experience things as one, and that is exactly who Mound House volunteers are to us! I encourage you to sign up if you have a true passion for history, as understanding the past is the key to the present and future. Not enough of us realize there are different narratives and cultures to history, like those of America’s Native peoples, and places like the Mound House fill in those gaps. For instance, our region’s Native peoples lived in harmony with nature and the Earth and that is a special lesson for us all today in our daily lives – who knew!”

While the iconic Mound House traces its history back over 2,000 years to the ancient Calusa Indians, another Mound House volunteer recently completed the first-ever publication about the museum complex! Noted author Patrick McKeown recently released “The Mound House: The Crown Jewel of Fort Myers Beach!” McKeown is Professor Emeritus in the Management Information Systems (MIS) Department in the

Terry College of Business at The University of Georgia who authored or coauthored over 30 textbooks in management science, computer science, and management information systems, with “Crown Jewel” being his first historical foray.

“While my wife Carolyn and I moved to Fort Myers Beach in 2003,” he recalled, “we had just minimal knowledge about the Mound House. About three years ago, however, we took the Mound Key boat tour, then went through the Mound House underground archeological exhibit, and I found it all so fascinating that I applied to become a volunteer. I grew up in Florida and my Dad was a historian, so we talked all the time about Florida history, and not many places have more Florida history than the Mound House.”

It was his volunteer work that inspired Pat to write “Crown Jewel.” “I was at a Docents meeting two years ago, when Alison Giesen, the Mound House’s outstanding Executive Director, made the offhand comment that she would love a Mound House book to sell at the Museum Store, and because of my extensive publishing experience, I thought, ‘I can do that!’ I mentioned it to her after the meeting and she exclaimed, ‘Oh Yes!’ I am extremely proud of the final product, as it is my first ‘coffee table book.’” Its purchase price is \$24.95 through the Mound House Museum Store. “If you cannot make it to the Mound House,” he stated, “call the Museum Store at 239-765-0865 and they will make shipping arrangements with you. The Mound House is currently updating its website and once that is soon complete, you can buy it online at www.moundhouse.org.”

Pat noted that all “Crown Jewel” proceeds go to the Friends of The Mound House, “who support it with their time, talents, and fundraising efforts. I hope the book inspires people to visit the Mound House for themselves, because even though there are many great Fort Myers Beach attractions, the Mound House is such a unique place – it really is ‘The Crown Jewel of Fort Myers Beach!’”

Something For Everyone!

The Mound House, at 451 Connecticut Street with overflow parking at 216 Connecticut, is the oldest standing structure on Estero Island and operated by the Town of Fort Myers Beach as a museum complex and cultural and environmental learning center. Admission is \$10 for ages 13 & up, \$8 for students with IDs, \$5 ages 6 to 12, and 5 & under free, with Town residents receiving a 50% discount. For additional information and a program schedule, call 239-765-0865 or visit www.moundhouse.org.

“The Mound House is a really great site,” Dexter concluded, “that is full of historical and archaeological experiences and a natural wonder, and as a volunteer here, you can share that marvelous story! The Mound House grounds are terrific for a stroll, with gorgeous gardens and fascinating wildlife, along with fishing and kayaking. There is truly something for everyone here, whether you are a visitor or volunteer, and our volunteers are our biggest fans and community supporters!”