

Mound House Adds New Staff

Feldman Curator of Education

By Gary Mooney

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The iconic Mound House on Fort Myers Beach welcomes thousands of visitors annually, but it services that multitude with a surprisingly small fulltime staff. New to its ranks is Curator of Education Bobby Feldman!

“I am originally from Lakenheath, England, but my Dad was in the Air Force so we literally moved all over the place. Dad eventually retired to Southwest Florida so I followed him here to attend Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) where I earned my Bachelor degree in History and my Master’s in Educational Technology.”

When it came time to begin his professional career, Bobby stayed local. “I was the Program Manager at the Edison & Ford Winter Estates for the previous 13 years, primarily in charge of the historians and volunteers. Edison & Ford is a wonderful place and I really enjoyed my time there, but after 13 years, I was ready for a change. When I learned of the Mound House Curator of Education opportunity, I saw it as a chance to help out a smaller museum; when the Mound House offered me the position, I accepted and started on August 10.”

Bobby is instructing and assisting with the Mound House’s nature and educational events, “but my main emphasis is to expand on what we already offer as well as growing the volunteer program. Even though I have been here just a short time, I know the Mound House has a terrific volunteer core who do a great job in enhancing our visitor experience, but the more volunteers you have, the greater the energy level and areas of expertise to make that visitor experience even better. One outlet we want to avail ourselves of is FGCU students, to take advantage of their service hours requirement for graduation, as that is an outstanding resource.”

More volunteers, Bobby explained, “allows for more hands-on opportunities and that is important now as society is getting a better grip on COVID-19, making volunteer-to-visitor interactions common again. The beauty of the Mound House is we host many programs and events outside, to take advantage of our gorgeous and historic property on the Estero Bay, meaning visitors feel safe and comfortable when they arrive, so it is a Win-Win for everybody. We have so much history at the Mound House, from the ancient Calusa through modern times.”

In addition to his extensive professional background, Bobby earned his five-year State of Florida teaching certification. “It helps not only me but the Mound House and our volunteers and guests to know the industry standards. There are so many levels to our society today that this provides me with new and varied ways to engage all visitors.”

While Bobby already knows the Mound House is a first-class historical site, “I want us to continue to grow our visitation. One thing that will automatically help is we recently increased our days we are open to the general public, from three to five days a week, to

coincide with tourism season on Fort Myers Beach. It is terrific to witness the reaction of first-time visitors and our big hope is they will return time and again! With season now underway, many of our volunteers are returning to Southwest Florida from their northern homes, so it is wonderful to meet many of them for the first time.”

This Place Is A Bargain!

The historic Mound House, at 451 Connecticut Street with overflow parking at 216 Connecticut, traces its roots to the ancient Calusa of over 2,000 years ago. It is the oldest standing structure on Estero Island and features the one-of-a-kind underground Shell Mound exhibit. The Town of Fort Myers Beach operates the Mound House as a museum complex and cultural and environmental learning center that offers numerous monthly nature and education programs, including for children. It is open Tuesdays through Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., though it closes December 23 through 25 and December 30 to January 1 for the Holidays. Admission is \$10 ages 13 & up, \$8 students with IDs, \$5 ages 6 to 12, and 5 & under free; Fort Myers Beach residents receive a 50% discount on museum admissions. For details and a monthly programs schedule, call 239-765-0865 or see www.moundhouse.org.

“Now that the Mound House expanded its days of operation, we cannot wait to welcome more visitors and volunteers,” Bobby concluded. “If you want to become a Mound House volunteer, please contact me directly at 239-322-9597 or at Robert.feldman@fmbgov.com. The Mound House history, going all the way back to the Calusa, is completely unique and our underground Shell Mound interactive exhibit is something everyone must experience for themselves and is worth the price of admission alone! With everything the Mound House offers, this place is a bargain!”