



# Inklings

Bulletin of Interpretive Ideas

December 2004 Volume 4, Issue 4

## Current/Recent Project List

- Interpretive Sign Design, River Bluff Trail, Logansport (IN) Memorial Hospital
- Interpretive Sign Design, Oxbow Park, Elkhart County (IN) Parks Department
- Interpretive Sign Design, Indianapolis Zoo
- Interpretive Sign Plan and Design, North Hydro Park, Charter Township of Ypsilanti (MI) *with Landscape Architects & Planners, Inc*
- Interpretive Sign Design, The Nature Conservancy, Indiana Chapter
- Interpretive Sign Design, Latimer Woods, Bloomington Parks and Recreation (IN)
- Interpretive Sign Design, Chilo Lock and Dam, Clermont County Park District (OH)
- Exhibit Planner, Mansfield Mill, Indiana Dept. of Natural Resources, *with Lifespace Design*
- Exhibit Planner, McCormick's Creek State Park, Indiana Dept. of Natural Resources, *with Lifespace Design*
- Interpretive Planner, Lincoln State Park, Indiana Dept. of Natural Resources, *with Lifespace Design*

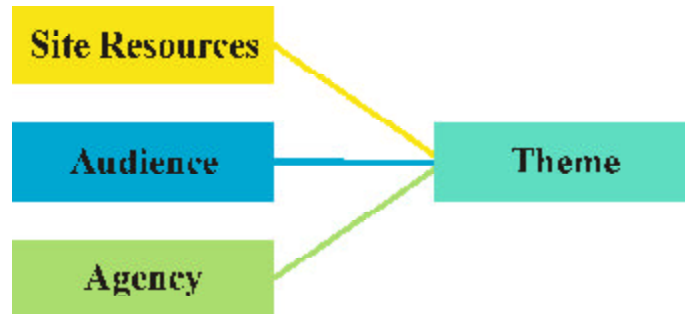
## Interpretive Planning: Why Do It?

### Lise Schools

The idea of interpretive planning can appear nebulous even for interpreters. For the administrative, management and maintenance staff, justifying interpretive planning can seem even more vague. There are, however, some clear benefits.

### A Good Plan Will:

1. *Focus time and fiscal resources.* An interpretive plan identifies an interpretive theme. The theme addresses the site's resources, audience and agency mission. It focuses on the important and unique



*An interpretive plan focuses a site's resources, audiences and agency mission into an interpretive theme.*

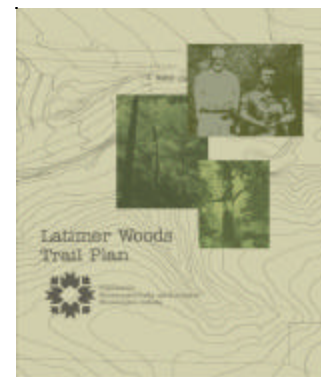
experience. A theme prevents duplication and competition with other venues.

2. *Maximize the effectiveness of site amenities.* Consider these two scenarios: In Scenario One, the interpretive plan has identified significant areas for interpretation. An interpretive trail with signs and kiosks is developed to link those significant areas together within a cohesive theme. In Scenario Two, a trail is installed prior to interpretive planning. Future interpretation must fit the existing trail, excluding relevant and unique areas. Scenario One is obviously more effective in reaching the audience.

3. *Help with fundraising.* In today's world, agencies survive with the help of grants and donations. An interpretive plan with clear goals and objectives demonstrates to a philanthropic organization that you've done your homework. They know that their contribution will be used wisely.

4. *Prevent unwanted donations.* Interpreters regularly face the kind person who wants to donate their South American butterfly collection, coal mine exhibit or stuffed ermine (these are real examples). None of these donations were appropriate, but all were accepted. Such donations require a time and money investment for maintenance and security. The coal mine exhibit required the removal of relevant exhibits to accommodate it. Having a plan with specific goals provides an escape route from a

sometimes sticky situation. The donor (continued)



*The Latimer Woods Trail Plan led to a generous donation for the design and fabrication of interpretive signs.*



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can be diverted to an agency where the donation would be appreciated, or they can be encouraged to make a relevant donation to your site.

The above arguments support interpretive planning. There are some things that an interpretive plan won't do.

**A Good Plan Won't:**

1. *Settle an internal argument.* A plan will probably fail if recommendations become ammunition in an "I told you so" disagreement. Interpretative plans can't replace good communication within an agency.
2. *Change the financial bottom line.* While a plan can bring in grants and donations, it can't change the realities of budget cuts. A good plan will include recommendations that challenge the agency to move forward, but are achievable.
3. *Implement itself.* The big task of any plan is carrying out the recommendations. This must be done by agency staff who are committed to seeing it implemented. "Plans do not make things happen. People make things happen." (Brochu, 2003)

Getting agency support for interpretive planning is important for success. This support comes from a clear understanding of what planning can do to make the agency more effective and efficient.

**Reference**

Brochu, Lisa, "Interpretive Planning: The 5-M Model for Successful Planning Projects" InterpPress, 2003.