

# VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

SUE GESHWENDER

## A YEAR LIKE NO OTHER . . .

We started off in the summer of 2019 by completing another successful docent training. By fall all the 2019 docent trainees had been certified and were busily giving tours. The summer and fall were a time of immense pride for the OI community as we celebrated the milestone of our one-hundred-year anniversary. The museum Gallery Enhancements Project was completed, and there was a tremendous amount of publicity for the OI's centennial. Volunteers reported that many of their friends were contacting them to comment on an article they read or something they saw on the news, asking, "Isn't that where you are involved?" The Education Department bulletin boards were filled with newspaper and magazine clippings of the OI in the news. There was a new logo, and we all got new nametags proudly identifying us as part of the OI community.

March started on a high note. Professor Fred Donner spoke at the Volunteer Day. By the following week there was growing alarm about the spread of the coronavirus. A few tour groups cancelled their upcoming visits, a few volunteers asked to be removed from the schedule . . . Then CPS schools closed, the stay-at-home order was issued, and the OI Museum closed.

Figure 1. Docent Class of 2019.  
Jonathan Teram, William Lewis,  
Blandine Nothhelfer, Geneieve Costello,  
Le Trieu Phung, Kay Holz, Rachel  
Mustafa, Jim Houston, Jennifer Fiedler,  
Barbara Jillson, Erica Granchalek,  
Diane Gottlieb, Jennifer Castellanos,  
Beverley Walter, Phillip Dittman.  
Photo by Broken Chains Photography.





Every single tour and group visit was cancelled and removed from the schedule for the remainder of the academic year.

By May we were back, but only online. Volunteers quickly learned how to Zoom, and our first post-pandemic volunteer event was a Zoom book club discussing the book *Gilgamesh: The Life of a Poem* with OI faculty member Susanne Paulus. Our first Zoom Volunteer Day was held in June with Brett McClain giving an update on Chicago House. We ended the academic year on a high note with a book club discussion of the book *Digging Up Armageddon: The Search for the Lost City of Solomon*. For the first time ever, we were joined by the book's author, Eric H. Cline, who joined us in the book discussion. Eric Cline holds a special place in the OI Volunteers' hearts, as his book *1177 B.C.: The Year Civilization Collapsed* is the reason we started the OI book club back in 2015!

Finally, we suffered the devastating loss of two of our most dedicated and loved volunteers:

- Gabriella Cohen, a volunteer of the OI for fourteen years since 2005. Gaby was recruited as an OI docent by the late great Mari Terman. She started as a museum docent and later she became an active volunteer in the Research Archives, assisting with transcribing museum registration cards. Gaby especially loved giving tours to very young children. Gaby cared deeply for others and made many good friends across all ages at the OI.
- Carole Yoshida, a dedicated volunteer of the OI for thirty-seven years since 1983. First, as a museum docent, maintaining the tour program's excellence and enriching the educational experience for visitors. Second, as an active volunteer in collections registration and museum archives, assisting with preparing over ten thousand glass slides to be scanned and

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**FIRST ROW:**  
 Figure 2. Education Department Reunion at the Gala. Carol Ng-He, Sue Geshwender, Moriah Grooms-Garcia, Terry Friedman, Carole Krucoff.

Figure 3. Foy Scalf brings objects to look at for his Volunteer Day presentation.

Figure 4. Holiday Potluck Luncheon enjoyed by Rachel Mustafa, Philip Dittman, George Thomson, Geneieve Costello, William Lewis, and Merle Cherney. (Photo by Craig Tews.)

The OI book club continued to discuss a wide-ranging set of topics, including the book *Archaeology From Space: How the Future Shapes Our Past*, which we discussed with DePaul faculty member Morag Kersel, and *Who We Are and How We Got Here: Ancient DNA and the New Science of the Human Past*, discussed with our own faculty members David Schloen and James Osborne.



**SECOND ROW:**  
 Figure 5 Cheers to the OI! Semra Prescott, Gabriele DaSilva, Dee Spiech. Monthly Volunteer Days resumed in October and continued through March, with speakers Foy Scalf, Gil Stein, Robert Ritner, James Osborne and Fred Donner. The December Holiday Party Potluck Luncheon set a record with over one hundred volunteers, OI faculty, and staff attending and bringing their favorite dishes to share in a massive feast!

Figure 6. OI Bookclub liked by author Sarah Parcak on Twitter.

Figure 7. January book club discussing Ancient DNA.

**THIRD ROW:**  
 Figure 8. OI book club via Zoom with author Eric H. Cline.



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TOP LEFT: Figure 9. Roberta Buchanan, Erica Granchalek, Joe Barabe.

TOP RIGHT: Figure 10. Philip Dittman, Marilyn Murray, Erica Granchalek, Diane Gottlieb, Jim Houston.

BOTTOM LEFT: Figure 11. Sue Geswender, Barbara Jillson, Jean Nye.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Figure 12. Fred Eskra & Steve Scott.

packed for archival storage. Carole was such an institution at the OI as she was a part of many things for so many years. She also had the most beautiful melodious voice, and people loved hearing her give a tour of the OI.

Gaby Cohen and Carole Yoshida have left gaping holes in the fabric of our volunteer community. We are so lucky to have had the time we did with them; however, it was not long enough.

The Volunteer Program continues to adapt and evolve, as we continue to find ways to support the mission of the OI, share our love of the OI with the public, and provide intellectual stimulation and engagement with members of our community as we embark on the next hundred years with the OI.