



# Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service

Dec. 21, 2016

**Media only:** Jennifer Schommer (202) 633-3121; [schommerj@si.edu](mailto:schommerj@si.edu)

**Media website:** <http://newsdesk.si.edu>

## **Smithsonian Partners With MuseWeb Foundation To Invite People To Share Their Diverse Stories of Local Culture**

The Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (SITES) is partnering with the non-profit MuseWeb Foundation on Be Here: Main Street, an initiative to include more diverse voices in telling the cultural stories of small towns across America. Everyone has a story that is worth sharing—whether that story is about a local landmark or business, a local food tradition, a little-known cultural site or a beloved natural resource. These often-unheard stories capture a history of small-town America based on experience, knowledge and memory rather than textbook dates and facts. The published stories offer people a rare and authentic glimpse into the history, traditions and culture of a community.

Be Here: Main Street stories can be about any place or cultural detail, from local art and architecture to recipes and holiday traditions. Without advanced technical skills, storytellers can easily upload their stories to the new Museum on Main Street community-sourced website—[museumonmainstreet.org/stories](http://museumonmainstreet.org/stories)—where they will be archived and shared. The project also encourages storytellers and creators to share their work on free and open platforms like SoundCloud, YouTube and the [izi.Travel app](#), tagged with “Be Here: Main Street” or #bHereMainSt on social media. Be Here: Main Street is made possible by izi.Travel. A story about [festive holiday traditions is available now on the izi.Travel app](#).

To coincide with the current Smithsonian’s Museum on Main Street traveling exhibition “Water/Ways,” which is now on view in Minnesota, Wyoming, Florida, Idaho and Illinois, the first story-collecting focus is about water and its relationship to people, the land, communities and businesses.

“So far, people have been sharing rich personal stories about camping on their favorite rivers, conservation efforts in their communities, childhood memories on the water, sailing, fishing and picnicking,” said Robbie Davis, Smithsonian project director for “Water/Ways.” “There is so much more to these amazing places than a name on the map or a footnote in a history or geology book. We hope to

SI-638-2016

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION MRC 941 PO Box 37012 Washington DC 20013-7012 Telephone 202.633.3120 Fax 202.633.5345

record stories about America’s waterways by the people who care for them, who rely on them, who’ve grown up with them.”

People can share cultural stories and listen to them at the locations they describe and around the world through the new location-based story app izi.Travel, where the stories are free and easily accessible via mobile devices.

“It’s amazing to think you could open the izi.Travel app on your phone, and instantly get stories about sites that are close to where you are at that moment,” said MuseWeb project director, Selwyn Ramp. “That’s the beauty of new location-based tools.”

Part of the MuseWeb Foundation’s larger Be Here initiative, which began in Baltimore in 2016, the project’s ultimate goals are not only to collect rich stories about America’s towns and waterways but also to foster stronger connections among people, businesses, communities and institutions through collaborative storytelling and shared culture.

“This is particularly relevant since towns and cities are looking for innovative ways to attract tourists and locals alike to historic sites or to other points of interest,” said MuseWeb Foundation Director Nancy Proctor. “We’ve seen time and time again that a community’s economic success is tied to its natural resources and a thriving cultural sector. Be Here: Main Street strives to create guided pathways among places in the community that stimulate participation in culture and tourism as well as economic activity that directly benefits the creators of culture in each community.

SITES has been sharing the wealth of Smithsonian collections and research programs with millions of people outside Washington, D.C., for 65 years. SITES connects Americans to their shared cultural heritage through a wide range of exhibitions about art, science and history, which are shown wherever people live, work and play. A partnership between SITES and state humanities councils, Museum on Main Street was created to serve museums, libraries and historical societies in rural areas as a creative response to the challenge faced by these rural organizations to enhance their own cultural legacies.

The MuseWeb Foundation’s mission is to transform the business of culture by supporting innovative projects that increase the inclusivity, accessibility and sustainability of the arts and heritage. MuseWeb’s flagship initiative, Be Here: Baltimore, helps more and more diverse voices tell the cultural stories of their communities, and uses free and open platforms to bring global visibility to what makes each town and city unique.

Izi.Travel enables people to use their smartphones as personal guides through new places and cultures around the world. Travelers discover the world with multilingual tours that combine art and culture with local stories.

###