Welcome to Winnipeg: Population One Million

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October 30, 2013

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Welcome to Winnipeg: Population One Million

Welcome to Winnipeg: Population One Million. How did we get here and where are we going?

Join our panels to discuss how Winnipeg will reach a population of one million, when it will happen and what it will mean for economic development, the arts, health, safety and community planning.

September 25, 2013

Robert B. Schultz Theatre
St. John’s College, Fort Garry Campus

Reception in Galleria 6:30 – 7 pm
Panel discussion 7 – 8:30 pm

Featured speakers:
Jim Carr
Rick Linden
Wanda Wuttunee

umanitoba.ca/visionaryconversations

Mary Benbow, associate professor and associate dean (academic) in the Clayton H. Riddell Faculty of Environment, Earth, and Resources. The faculty is celebrating its tenth anniversary this year.

Mary Benbow goes to the zoo to observe humans, not animals.

The U of M geographer’s research has her listening in on visitors’ conversations. She sat for two weeks at the Toronto Zoo recording banter overhead at the polar bear exhibit. She wanted to know: Do people read the signage about climate change? Do they discuss this pressing topic with their kids while looking at polar bears, animals that have come to symbolize the consequences of a warming planet?

“They don’t,” Benbow says. “I waited and waited. There were essentially two conversations in the entire study that vaguely alluded to climate change.”

But people did talk about the hot weather and speculated how that might make the bears feel. Benbow hopes that visitors’ concerns for the welfare of individual animals in the zoo could translate to broader concerns for the well-being of Arctic ecosystems. The goal of her research is to provide zoos with practical information about how their visitors engage with the exhibits so they can do a better job of educating the public.

“It’s really to give zoos another thread of information about how they can interact with their visitors to give people more information and more relevant information to some of those serious decisions that they have to make about things like climate change,” Benbow says. “I think a lot of people are still bewildered about the issue of climate change.”

The need to better understand the environmental challenges we face is put into focus by the recent rise in popularity of urban zoos in cities like Toronto, a familiar place for Benbow’s research – she’s been studying the social, cultural and environmental implications of zoos since the early 1990s – shows how they set the scene for family discussions, places where people feel safe and provide an opportunity to educate. People view zoos as trusted sources of information. “My hope is that (zoo visitors) will get the information they need and they’ll have greater clarity,” she says.

The environment and geography professor is on the interpretative team for the new journey to Churchill exhibit scheduled to open in 2014 at the Assiniboine Park Zoo. Benbow has contributed the insight she gained from her observations at the Toronto Zoo. She and several of her colleagues in the Clayton H. Riddell Faculty of Environment, Earth, and Resources played a key role in the signage for the International Polar Bear Conservation Centre, home to Hudson the polar bear. “We’ve been able to access that very current information and create really carefully honed messages,” she says.

No longer simply collections of animals, zoos are raising standards for care, Benbow says. Assiniboine Park Zoo, for example, continues to use techniques like hiding food to satisfy an animal’s natural desire to forage, or positive reinforcement to get bears like Hudson to cooperate with workers in a less intrusive way. Exhibits are becoming more

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