

# Research and Reflection

Dear Friends,

Our last issue of *Expedition* was a grand celebration of our new Eastern Mediterranean Gallery: an immersive, innovative look at an ancient cultural crossroads that gave rise to developments that still shape our contemporary world, from three of the world's widespread monotheistic religions to the alphabet. I was pleased to speak with many of you during the gallery's opening weekend, which reminded me that our Museum members really are a community; you support our work, and we gather together to enjoy the fruits of our labor in celebrations like this one.

Of course, these celebrations (and the galleries they celebrate) would be impossible without the cutting-edge research of Museum curators and affiliated scholars. Looking over the articles collected here, I'm impressed as always by the depth of research on display, and the deep reflection our scholar-curators demonstrate around their discoveries. This issue of *Expedition* is full of fresh insights from the field, including a fascinating article on recent excavations in Lagash, where researchers have uncovered a 5,000-year-old tavern that may revolutionize our understanding of the social order in Ancient Mesopotamia. This project has received attention in both the national and international press, demonstrating that our Museum, building on its long and robust tradition of fieldwork, remains at the forefront of the discipline.

This is true not only in the world of field archaeology, but in the larger realm of cultural heritage preservation. As the world grows more interconnected and complex, efforts to preserve global heritage have moved beyond the care and upkeep of monuments and other massive sites and towards a more nuanced, locally oriented approach—and our Museum-affiliated scholars are in the vanguard of this movement, as well. This issue features an interview with our own Lynn Meskell about the way cultural heritage preservation fits into geopolitical clashes and international conflict, and how heritage preservation is a part of mediating the effects of war, terrorism, and other forms of political violence (p. 38). Today's heritage preservation projects also have a community focus. As Robert J. Vigar explains in this issue, collaborating with local communities is crucial to the long-term success of



Christopher Woods (third from left) at the Mexican Cultural Center's first awards lunch with (left to right) Chief Diversity Officer Tia Jackson-Truitt; Family and Camp Coordinator Marilee Oldstone-Moore; Associate Director of Public Programs Tena Thomason; MCC Board President Araceli Guenther; Merle-Smith Director of Learning & Community Engagement Jennifer Brehm; and Ivette Compean and Virginia Rivera Hernández of the Mexican Cultural Center.

any project seeking to preserve cultural heritage (p. 14).

The Museum's community focus is evident closer to home, as well, in our recent success with community partnerships. Tia Jackson-Truitt, our Chief Diversity Officer, and Jennifer Brehm, our Merle-Smith Director of Learning and Community Engagement, recently secured a prestigious program grant from the Sachs Program for Arts Innovation for *Your Food Story*, a program in which Sayre High School students will make connections between their local food culture and the ancient culinary customs on display in our new exhibition *Ancient Food & Flavor*. In addition, the Museum was recently selected for the first Culture and Arts Access award from the Mexican Cultural Center, in honor of our community-focused programming, like our annual *CultureFest! Día de los Muertos* program (p. 51).

Both globally and in the city we call home, the Penn Museum continues to involve communities in the excavation, preservation, and celebration of our common heritage. Thank you for being part of this ongoing investigation into our shared human story.

Warm regards,

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WILLIAMS DIRECTOR