

# Arctic Winter Games exhibit documents history

When George V. Smith began collecting lapel pins from the Arctic Winter Games (AWG) in 1992, he had no idea that this would eventually lead to a museum exhibit. His collection grew with each passing game and in 2001 he began to solicit donations from those who participated in earlier years in an effort to amass a definitive collection for the Alaska State Museum. The collection is nearly complete and totals almost 1,000 pins.

Smith's efforts led to the development of an exhibition on the history and organization of the Arctic Winter Game to coincide with the hosting of the Arctic Winter Games. The exhibition, titled simply *Arctic Winter Games*, was organized by the Alaska State Museum in Juneau, with Smith as guest curator.

The exhibit describes the evolution of the Games, the sports, awards and cultural activities, as well as the Games' organizational structure. In addition to the collection of AWG-related pins, the show features photo panels, jackets, team clothing, sports equipment, emblems, mascots and other paraphernalia. Smith has also written labels to accompany the exhibit describing the Games and their history.

Smith said, "While the pin collection may have been the impetus for building an AWG collection for the Alaska State Museum, it could never have happened without the generous donations of clothing, posters, and other materials by many AWG enthusiasts from Alaska, Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Northern Alberta."

The Arctic Winter Games are staged every two years in either Alaska, Canada, or Greenland. Northern cities compete with each other for the privilege of hosting the Games, much like the Olympic Games host cities. Athletic contingents come from Alaska, Canada's northern provinces and territories, Greenland, Russia and the Sami area of northern Scandinavia. Close to 2,000 athletes, performers and support crews now participate in the Games, with many more spectators traveling to the events.

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The Arctic Winter Games are probably best known for their Inuit and Dene games, those native to Eskimo and Athabascan cultures. However, they also include more widely-known sports, such as skiing, basketball, snowshoeing, volleyball and skating.

Cultural exchange is a major feature of the games. Performing arts groups and musicians play a big role in the festivities. Winning athletes are awarded medals: gold silver and bronze ulus (an Eskimo cutting tool). The major award, however, is the Hodgson trophy, which is given for team sportsmanship. During their leisure time, many of the participants actively engage in pin trading, which is known as the "twenty-first sport" of the Games.

Smith retired from the Institute of Museum and Library Services in Washington, D.C., was previously Deputy Director and Acting Director of the Alaska State Division of Libraries, Archives and Museums and a long-time resident of Juneau. He served on the AWG Team Alaska staff for three Games and then became a board director for Team Alaska. In this latter position he recognized the importance of preserving records of the past Games, which he found piling up in the Team Alaska office.

While organizing the records, Smith came across an increasing number of objects, photos, and memorabilia. He eventually guided these materials into collections at the Alaska State Library Historical Collections and the Alaska State Museum. With the selection of Kenai as the 2006 venue for the games, the idea of an exhibition began to take shape, and he acquired additional materials through donations to fill out the collections.

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