



Celebrating
100 Years
of Telling
Pennsylvania's
Stories

The State Museum Opens Exhibit on Oral Histories of Immigrants to Pennsylvania

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Harrisburg: The State Museum of Pennsylvania presents *Our Voices: Refugee and Immigrant Women Tell Their Stories*, an exhibit based on the oral history narratives about the traditions and lives of refugee and immigrant women who have made Pennsylvania their home. The women participated in the Pennsylvania Immigrant and Refugee Women's Network (PAIRWN) Institute for Cultural Partnerships (ICP) story project. This exhibit opens on September 11, 2005, during Harrisburg's Gallery Walk, and continues through December 31, 2005.

The exhibit, featuring stories and portraits of extraordinary individuals, gives a face and a voice to our new neighbors: people with dreams of safety, freedom and prosperity that we all share. Visitors to The State Museum are invited to listen to them through excerpts drawn from interviews conducted over the past three years and to look into their faces of courage and hope. The women who are featured come from the Bahamas, Bosnia, Cambodia, China, Colombia, Ecuador, Finland, Guinea, India, Moldova, Niger, Pakistan, Philippines, Sudan, Trinidad, Turkey, Uganda and Vietnam.

An important feature of the exhibit is the "story circle", comprising a circle of chairs painted by the women. The chairs represent their cultures. Some have pictures of places they remember while others feature designs traditional to their culture. Some have photographs of the women in their native country, juxtaposed with images of them in the United States. Since many of the women brought family members to the painting session to help, some chairs are group projects. For example, the chair representing Moldova was painted by three generations of one family; grandmother, mother, and three daughters. The chairs will be used for "story circles" held throughout the run of the exhibit. The story circle is a place where the women come together and tell their "stories" about their travels to the United States, finding food they know how to prepare, learning their way around, becoming independent and raising "American" children. They also have stories about being victims of prejudice and discrimination.

MORE

THE STATE MUSEUM OF PENNSYLVANIA

300 North Street • Harrisburg, PA 17120-0024 • (717)787-4980 • Fax: (717)783-4558 • www.statemuseumpa.org

Administered by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission

Since its founding, Pennsylvania has been home to people seeking economic betterment, political asylum or religious freedom. According to statistics from the Pennsylvania Refugee Resettlement Program, between 1992 and 2002, more than 30,000 refugees and immigrants have made Pennsylvanian their home. Just as those who have come before, these groups bring a rich cultural heritage, which has shaped the face of the state and contributed to Pennsylvania's growth and development.

The Institute for Cultural Partnerships (ICP) is a non-profit organization whose mission is to help individuals and communities successfully live, learn and work in our increasingly diverse society. The Institute focuses on helping people understand their own culture, understand others, develop positive inter-group relations and build strong communities. Pennsylvania Immigrant and Refugee Women's Network (PAIRWN) was created to honor and enhance the lives of immigrant women in Pennsylvania. PAIRWN provides help and support for immigrant and refugee women and children, promotes understanding, respect and friendship among the many diverse ethnic and cultural groups in our neighborhoods and provides leadership training and mentoring for immigrant and refugee women.

The ICP and PAIRWN have been working in collaboration with the Center for Women's Creative Expression and have received grants in support of the exhibit from the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, the PA Humanities Council, the PA Council on the Arts/Jump Street and the Harrisburg School District.

The State Museum of Pennsylvania, located at 300 North Street, Harrisburg, is one of 25 historic sites and museums on the Pennsylvania Trail of History® administered by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. Museum hours are Tuesday through Saturday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Sunday, 12 noon to 5 p.m. General admission to The State Museum is FREE. Individuals who need special assistance should call (717) 787-6778 or the Pennsylvania TDD relay service at (800) 654-5984. For more information on other exhibitions, events and programs at The State Museum, visit www.statemuseumpa.org.

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