

# **Meridian Village residents enjoy non-traditional museum experience thanks to SIUE/Community collaboration**

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EDWARDSVILLE - A carved ivory chess set, circa 1960 from Vietnam; an early 20th century Mahjong set of carved and painted bone and bamboo tiles in a hand carved box

from China; and clay marbles from the Mississippian period were among the Southern Illinois University Edwardsville [University Museum's](#) artifacts displayed at Meridian Village in Glen Carbon on Tuesday, April 24.

Residents had the opportunity to experience a portion of the museum's impressive collection as part of a collaborative community outreach event, involving SIUE's museum studies program, the University Museum and Meridian Village.

"In the broadest sense, a museum's role is public service," said Erin Vigneau-Dimick, University Museum collections manager. "Our constituents are not only SIUE students, faculty and staff, but also the people of Illinois for whom the museum holds its collections – an essential part of our collective cultural fabric – in trust."

The outreach initiative included a presentation and display of artifacts, entitled "It's only a Game: Historic Games from the University Museum Collections." After a lecture, attendees moved to a social space where students and residents engaged in contemporary tabletop games related to the historical artifacts.

Coordinators and presenters included six graduate students and one undergraduate, along with SIUE faculty and staff and Meridian Village Director of Community Wellness Dawn Determan. SIUE alumna and owner of Happy Up, Inc. in Edwardsville Shawntá Ray helped teach the games.

"Not only are the displays and exhibits of amazing quality, but also the fascinating stories behind each piece were told in passionate detail by consummate professionals," Determan said. "Our residents thoroughly enjoyed the program and appreciated being able to see the pieces up close and ask questions. This will not be our final 'game night.' Residents are already buzzing about what SIUE's next presentation might be!"

The collaboration positively benefited both students and residents. Students gained hands-on experience in program creation and the opportunity to present their research in a live setting with interested and willing participants, both of which are essential as they move into the professional sphere, according to Vigneau-Dimick.

"Students and seniors are often generationally isolated," Vigneau-Dimick explained. "Creating opportunities for them to connect and engage expands their cultural awareness and enhances their sensitivity to others' needs."

"I hope this collaboration brings the University Museum's collections to a wider audience," said Laura Fowler, PhD, associate professor and director of SIUE's museum studies program. "Our students were able to work directly with a population that is

experiencing a museum in a non-traditional way. It exposed them to different learning styles and accessibility issues that are essential for ‘regular’ museums and special programs.”

SIUE graduate student Lesley Thomson-Sasso helped in the generation of museum labels and the exhibit design. She is pursuing a doctorate in historical studies with a museum studies certificate.

“Outreach is essential to connect with all generations of people who enjoy learning,” said Thomson-Sasso, a native of Asbury Park, New Jersey. “This experience further prepared me for a career that combines education and public outreach.”

In preparation for the outreach initiative, Vigneau-Dimick and Fowler attended a workshop and lectures focused on museum programming for seniors at the 2017 Association of Midwest Museum’s annual conference in Des Moines, Iowa.

Inspired by Chancellor Randy Pembroke’s emphasis on high-impact community engagement practices, they plan to continue looking for ways to apply the talents and resources of the University Museum through specialized community programs.

The University Museum’s artifacts will remain on display at Meridian Village in a glass museum case for residents to enjoy for the next three months.

Central to SIUE’s exceptional and comprehensive education, the [College of Arts and Sciences](#) has 20 departments and 85 areas of study. More than 300 full-time faculty /instructors deliver classes to more than 8,000 undergraduate and graduate students. Faculty help students explore diverse ideas and experiences, while learning to think and live as fulfilled, productive members of the global community. Study abroad, service-learning, internships, and other experiential learning opportunities better prepare SIUE students not only to succeed in our region's workplaces, but also to become valuable leaders who make important contributions to our communities.