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Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian Cultural Resources Center Fact Sheet

The Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian Cultural Resources Center is located approximately eight miles from Washington, D.C., on the Smithsonian's 110-acre campus in Suitland, Md. As a state-of-the-art research facility, the Center is home to the museum's archives, library and its acclaimed collection of more than 800,000 works of aesthetic, cultural, historical and spiritual significance. The collection represents the Native peoples of the Western Hemisphere from the Arctic Circle to the tip of Tierra del Fuego and spans more than 10,000 years of Native heritage.

The Cultural Resources Center opened to the public in January 1999. It was the second major construction project and museum facility mandated by an Act of Congress in 1989 that established the National Museum of the American Indian. Public Law 101-185 called for establishing the George Gustav Heye Center in the former U.S. Customs House in lower Manhattan, N.Y. The Heye Center, a permanent exhibition and education facility, opened in 1994. The museum's third facility, the National Museum of the American Indian on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., opened on September 21, 2004.

The Cultural Resources Center was designed by Polshek and Partners of New York City in a joint venture with Tobey + Davis of Reston, Va., and in association with the Native American Design Collaborative, a consortium of more than 40 Native American architects, engineers, historians, interior designers and cultural consultants. Construction of the facility, which began in 1996 following a traditional blessing of the site, was completed by The Clark Construction Group, LLC, and managed by the Smithsonian's Office of Physical Plant.

"The Cultural Resources Center strikes a unique balance between museum curatorial practices and traditional Native care," said W. Richard West Jr., the museum's founding director. "I

hope that this approach will serve as the blueprint for other museums to follow regarding the care of Native objects. After years of meticulous planning and fruitful collaborations with Native peoples, the National Museum of the American Indian strives to provide a nurturing environment that properly honors the wishes of Native peoples for the care and protection of the collection.”

Like the design of the National Museum of the American Indian on the National Mall, the architecture of the museum’s Cultural Resources Center is inspired by Native cultures and is the result of direct consultation with Native peoples from throughout the hemisphere. The consultation process was managed by the architectural firm of Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates Inc. of Philadelphia. The most dominant feature of the Cultural Resources Center is the radial steel and copper roof. According to Lou Weller (Caddo/Cherokee) of the Native American Design Collaborative, the shape of the roof is derived abstractly from culturally significant organic forms, such as pine cones, shells and spider webs.

“We believe that the design of this truly unique facility successfully integrates the interior and exterior of the building with nature, offers a welcoming environment for Native and non-Native peoples and most important, provides a safe, comfortable home to protect the objects and their spirits,” Weller said.

The Cultural Resources Center’s space, which totals approximately 13,500 gross square meters (145,000 square feet), is distributed over two floors and a mezzanine. Included in the facility are a circular lobby and welcoming area; conservation laboratories and spaces for photography, film, video and collections management; private indoor and outdoor ceremonial spaces for the traditional care and cultural use of the collection by appropriate individuals and tribal groups; a computer and information resource center; a library with study rooms and offices and workrooms for curatorial, cultural resources, repatriation, community services and administrative staff.

Background

Established in 1989, through an Act of Congress, the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian is an institution of living cultures dedicated to the life, languages, literature, history and arts of the Native peoples of the Western Hemisphere. The museum includes the recently opened National Museum of the American Indian on the National Mall; the George Gustav Heye Center, a permanent museum in lower Manhattan; and the Cultural Resources Center, a research and

collections facility in Suitland, Md. With the opening of the National Museum of the American Indian, the Smithsonian comprises 18 museums and galleries and the National Zoo.

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