

National Museum of the American Latino

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SPEAKERS

Natalia, Announcer, Ashley Biggs

Announcer

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Ashley Biggs

Well, everyone, welcome back to another LBDP Guest hour. I am so excited today because we actually have one of the museum educators from the National Museum of the American Latino here, and I have not been to this museum. I am so excited to hear about the collection, and to learn all about this wonderful thing. And I want to introduce our amazing educator for today, Natalia phoebo. And she is the museum educator and she's a visual artist born and raised in Puerto Rico, and she resides currently in Washington, DC. She's working as the community engagement and volunteer coordinator at the National Museum of the American Latino and as part of the team that developed the first national Latino gallery at the Smithsonian. Natalia has a passion for the visual arts history and cultural programs and has worked in museum education programs for over 10 years. Before joining the Smithsonian, she worked as an arts integration educator at Carlos Rosario International Public Charter School in Washington, DC, she developed and CO taught arts integration programs for adult English learners and Spanish literacy classes. Her experience includes working as a lead faculty at Spark Lab at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History, a maker educator, educator at the kid Museum in Maryland, a tour guide and workshop assistant at the museum of history, anthropology and arts in the University of Puerto Rico. She holds her MA in museum studies from the George Washington University and her BA in advertising and public relations with a minor in Fine Arts from the University of Puerto Rico. My goodness, you have been been in museums for a while, yes, you must really have a passion for museums,

Natalia

I do have a big passion for museums, I've always had a big passion for for arts. That's how it all kind of started. And the reality of things was that I actually want to just to focus in arts but then, you know, many parents are like, No, you need to find something else that is not art. So i That's why I did my my undergrad in advertising, and then the minor in arts. But all that time that I was in the University of

Puerto Rico, I was actually working with the education department part time. And that's how that passion of museums kind of like grew. And then I was like, I don't want nothing to do with advertising. I just one. And then things changed when I moved to the sea. And then I did the Museum Studies program. And then all the focus was just museums.

Ashley Biggs

Tell me what caught your eye as when you were little that made you go. I want to work in a museum because it's always something going back to your youth.

Natalia

Definitely, definitely. And I just I need to like do the shout out to the person that deserves this. And it's my mom. My mom was a first generation college student, she went to the University of Puerto Rico. She studied to be a typist back in the day, but then eventually became a secretary of the university. So I basically grew up going to the university as a little girl. And the museum was just around the corner. So she will take me to the workshop, she will take me to see the galleries and it just grew and grew and grew. And then eventually went, I ended up studying at the university. The museum was there and provided so many resources, then that passion just kept on growing.

Ashley Biggs

So how did you end up at the National Museum of the American Latino?

Natalia

Yeah, that it's like, a very fun way of how I got there. So like I mentioned, and you mentioned, like I did my Master's in museum studies, but I was also an intern at the Smithsonian Latino Center. So the National Museum of the American Latino, or Congress passed a bill in 2020 to create this museum within the Smithsonian. But before that, there was a unit within Smithsonian, that was the Smithsonian Latino Center that existed for like almost 25 years. So water care was that the center turn into the museum like the same tiny team of people turning to the museum, like overnight. We didn't know what was gonna happen. We're like, oh, you know, the center exists. There might be a whole new team that is a museum but it was like no the same team of the Center for Be that museum. That's the first team that starts with the museum. So back in the day back in the day, but not that long ago, I think it was like 2014 13. I always get confused. But I was an intern with the Smithsonian Latino Center. I was an intern with the area of fundraising. That even though wasn't my particular area of interest, because I was doing exhibit design and education. I was like, you never know where you're going to end up, right? You need to learn everything. And then my, one of my mentors, supervisors was the director of education because she oversaw all the interns. So after I finished my internship, she always stay in touch with me. And they invited me to like volunteer like one day volunteer opportunities in family days. And eventually, as her team is growing, they were looking for someone that had experience in museums, but that also had experience working with the community, and also volunteer programs. And guess who had all the skill? Me. That's when I was hired to work under the education team as a community engagement and volunteer coordinator.

Ashley Biggs

Wow, that is awesome.

Natalia

It is and very unexpected. It came like out of nowhere. And it was still super excited when it happened. Yes.

Ashley Biggs

So you guys are a fairly new museum within the Smithsonian,

Natalia

within the Smithsonian. Yes, fairly new. Right now. So I like to say that we are we are a museum definitely, in terms of physical space, we are a museum within a museum. So because Congress just passed this bill in 2020, it takes time to fundraise and you know, to build a collection. And to actually have a building like, it's probably going to take us a decade or a little bit more to actually, you know, reach out to the moment where we're like, Okay, we have the museum, but we're still a museum. So what we have now is the Molina family Latino gallery, that opened last year, last June. And it's that first physical space that represents us. And this gallery is located inside another museum, which is the American History Museum, but everything at the Molina family, Latino gallery, everything was organized by us was, it's our baby.

Ashley Biggs

So you're within the American History Museum. And for those who are listening, the website is latino.si.edu. And I'm going to say that again, latino.si.edu. It's a very well put together website, I have to say, because I can pretty much find out everything about you guys, which sometimes with Smithsonian websites, it's a little harder to do.

Natalia

There's a lot of information.

Ashley Biggs

So tell us how this gallery came about?

Natalia

Yes. So it all started actually with the Smithsonian Latino Center. So a little bit about the center. It was founded in late 90s. Basically, there was a group of Smithsonian staff that they were like, we need more Latino, US Latino content, within exhibitions, programs, and also the staff. So that's when the Smithsonian Latino Center started. And as a center, so many of the Smithsonian centers will not have a physical space, but they do collaborate with other museums to do programs and exhibitions. And that's what the center did for like, almost 25 years. And it came to a moment where it was like, we need to have a physical space. So a couple of years ago, the director, the former director of the Center, Eduardo vos, he started, you know, fundraising and looking for for funds to actually have this first physical space. And that's when the Molina family which are the children of Dr. C. David Molina, who founded Molina Healthcare Inc, they made that first donation for us to secure a space and that space is now the Molina family Latino gallery. So it took a couple of years and then a couple more years for us

to like, you know, it was basically the space was like a storage. We had to put everything you know, like floor lights, you name it. Oh, wow. So

Ashley Biggs

you really renovated and

Natalia

everything and it all happened. It all like the renovation part started right there when the pandemic started 2020

Ashley Biggs

Do you have to like shut down?

Natalia

We did. So luckily, early 2020 like January and February, we did a lot of on site testing of how we wanted things to be and then when the pandemic happen, you know, like, most of us, we had to just, you know, telework and then eventually when things got a little bit better, the the, the fabricators were wants our going on site to work on, you know, fixing everything. But yeah, it just took us like, oh my god, we were not planning for this like, like everyone in the world. But then on top of that, because that was 2020. On top of that at the end of 2020, that's when Congress passed a bill about the creation of the new museum. So we that's when we were like, Okay, so are we going to be part of the museum? Or do we stay at the center, what happens with the gallery, but then this is when it all changed that sign a Latino Center staff became part of the National Museum of the American Latino. We're now moving forward as a museum. The center doesn't exist anymore, because now we are the museum. But we're still a small team. We're still the same people. We're around like, when he wants staff. I'm growing.

Ashley Biggs

Oh, my goodness. What's really cool is that the there are pieces up on the website about the gallery, I think one of my favorite pieces that I've seen is through the immigration stories, the showcase there, there's a boy riding, it's like the second picture. So it's, it's really cool. There's a boy riding bike and a Superman outfit. It tells us whole story. And you've got video integration with transcripts, yay, accessibility, and just so much so much information. How do you build this collection, because you were basically building it from the ground up?

Natalia

Yes. So in terms of so the center's don't don't have their own collection. So what that means is that you need to reach out to other museums or other institutions or individuals that might have an object or a piece that you're interested in having for your gallery. So this exhibition, our curator, Ronald Waterman, he started first with developing the script. And then as the script went along, then he and a group of scholars and advisors, all kind of like selected, which were potential objects that we could have to showcase that particular story. And in terms of the the themes, the title of the exhibition is presented, which means present, a Latino history of the United States, that theme was selected. Because at the beginning, at the early stages, when we were looking into what should be this exhibition, we went to the museum and asked the visitors that we're going to American history, what do you know about us Latino

history, right, just to get a sense of like, what people know, what might be their interest. And we had a response that some people thought that US Latinos is a new community, that maybe everyone is on a big grand, or a lot of people said that they didn't know much about us Latino history. So that's when the decision was made, that this first exhibition should actually focus on how the US Latino community came to be. And it's divided in four sections. The first one is related to colonial legacies. And basically, yes, going over, you know, colonization, but also emphasizing that, in the Americas, in what is today, the southwest of the United States, there were so many indigenous communities that today, for many Latinos, these are our ancestors. So we emphasize that on that section, then we go on to the second section, title, wars of expansions. And we go over, you know, because of wars, suddenly, we have this new communities that are part of the United States. And that is the war between the United States and Mexico, and the war between United States and Spain. So we explore those two wars and what happened, and you know, who were the people living in those lands, and while cure afterwards, we move on to our third section, which is immigration stories. And we explained that each immigration story is so different, nothing like everything is so unique, so we cannot group everyone together. And we have a variety of objects that go over and explore that. And then we finish with Latinos shaping the nation, because we have work not just for our community, but for the US. So that last section is a little bit more uplifting. And you know, there's a little bit more of like entertainment and things like that, because we do know that the first three sections are a little heavy when we're talking about wars and all those kinds of things.

Ashley Biggs

So Latino history of the United States goes back. I mean, let 1000 years.

Natalia

Yeah, like, it depends on how you you approach it, right. Um, our, our beginnings could You could say that, you definitely, and this is one of the things that we get asked like, we do have indigenous objects in the galleries, and people are like saying, oh, so that indigenous object is Latino. And it's like, not necessarily but it's part of our ancestry We just want to, you know, emphasize that this was already here in the US. So it is part of our heritage, but the term like Latino or Hispanic or foreigner, it's a more the more contemporary term not dating not long ago. And that's why throughout the gallery, you are going to see that, you know, when we talking in colonial legacies and wars of expansions, the labels that we use are more related to the people and the term use at that moment, like the hanos, California, we were not talking about Latinos, but then eventually we do start talking about the actual term. But yeah, for example, I'm from Puerto Rico. In the case for Puerto Rico, we have the Taino there were the indigenous groups of the Caribbean and part of my heritage, like food music instrument that is part of my heritage today. And it just goes back to Yeah, hundreds and hundreds of years ago.

Ashley Biggs

Oh, that's awesome. So I clicked on to the website, and I'm looking at the I'm going to make sure I say this right. presented. Yeah. Okay. All right. It's colorful, and it's bright. And it offers towards the gallery, you know, shaping the nation. Now, if I were to go and see these beautiful photographs and paintings and 3d objects, and listen to the oral histories, are they going to be bilingual, so that they are meant for individuals who are English native speakers, or people who are speaking Spanish natively?

Natalia

Yeah, so the whole exhibition is bilingual in English and Spanish. So in the gallery, all the labels are English and Spanish, the verbal descriptions that we provide all the objects, we provide them through through QR codes. And that information is also English and Spanish, even the website, if you go on the top of the website, it can, you can actually just click on es Espanol. And it will just translate everything to Spanish, like automatically. So we knew that it was very important for us to provide the content in both languages. And we've actually heard so many people say that they're very thankful that the content is also in Spanish, because we do have many members of our community that may not speak English, and they're able to calm and, you know, explore the content. And, you know, they feel seen and represented, like I've had people cry, talking to me just about the importance of language. And it's, it's important, and it's, you know, we want to make sure that we have that

Ashley Biggs

language seems to be something that goes through your entire collection. There's a visual language, there's an auditory language, there's auditory, there's of course, the written. And so that's, that's really important. Languages. I'm going to ask because I'm just that curious. What is your favorite part of this gallery?

Natalia

Yeah, well, I will say, it's hard to pick one. Okay, I'm gonna pick three, is that okay? Okay. Okay, because they're all very different. So, I'm various is this film titled somos, which means who we are. And it's a 60 minute film. And it's just amazing. On our website, we have a short three video version of it. It's just so moving, because it just goes over of how complex the Latino identity is, right? Like, we have people that maybe they were born in Latin America, but raised in the US, maybe we have second third generation, we have people that, you know, they were told you, you can't speak Spanish only English, because you're gonna succeed like that, or the other way around, just only speak Spanish. So it's so complex, and that film, just give me chills to just listen to people just share their personal stories, as you as Latinos. So that's one in terms of objects, and it's also on the website. We have this sculpture, titled Arbor de la vida or tree of life. And if you're on the website, and you go under Gallery, and behind the scenes, you'll be able to see how this lace culture was created. This artist Her name is Veronica Castillo. She's from Mexico. And for many generations, her family have been created this, these trees of life. Originally, they were made to tell like the creation story, but today she just uses these these are to just, you know, talk about contemporary issues. So we commission the space and this tree of life actually showcases many of For the objects and people that we featured on the last section of shaping the nation, so I think it's a very unique piece that just summarizes the present day. And that's why for me, it's one of like, the most amazing objects that we do you mind

Ashley Biggs

if I describe the piece? Yeah, of course. So for those who are listening, this is not your traditional tree of life, you know, with branches coming out and shaped like a tree, it is wholly different. But still, you get the essence of tree of life from it. It's got almost a bowl shaped upside down bass. And dead center is a is the is the column that all the, quote, branches come from, and the branches bend into each other. So what's really cool is, as you're looking at it dead center, the branches that start at the top, curl into the base, or into the trunk of the tree, and it continues to do that through to to the bottom, and then

branches of the tree, come out from those, those branches and curl into the other branches. It's very, it's a very interesting piece. I hope one day it can be a tactile piece. I know it's very delicate. But it would be interesting to feel it, it really would maybe maybe we can do a 3d printed one one day?

Natalia

Well, I would say in the gallery, we do have a sample of one of the clay figurines outside of the case as a tactile element. So you might not be able to touch the whole tree. But definitely you can touch like, how, like the texture of the clay and how one of those figurines feels like, yeah.

Ashley Biggs

And what's really cool is that at the end, I believe it's painted, isn't it? Yes, yes. And it, I can't quite see it from the picture. But it has objects hanging from the various branches, very tiny objects or tiny in the picture that hanging from the branches. And I think that's probably what part of what tells the story.

Natalia

Yeah, like, for example, just like an example of one of the figurines represented. One of the first objects that we have in the gallery was the dress of Cuban artists, Celia Cruz, she was very famous for singing salsa. So what the artist is that inspire on that dress, then she actually made a figurine of that dress. And it's there in the, in the tree of life. We rotate objects. So it's another way of still showing objects that we might not have on the exhibit because we had to do a rotation. But you know, at least it's still there in the tree of life as like, Oh, we did have this in the show.

Ashley Biggs

There's a 3d tour of the tree of life, which is really cool. The Tree of Life has flowers on it, it has children, adults, it has figurines, photographs. It's just an amazing piece. I could tell why it's your favorite.

Natalia

Yes. And all on the top of the tree. There are a lot of birds and butterflies. And those are representative of the countries of origin of the people featuring the tree. So basically representative of the countries in Latin America, so even that don't like even that touch is just so so amazing.

Ashley Biggs

She's a very talented artist. Yeah. So that that was two.

Natalia

Yes. Third one will. My third one is the education baby. And that's the General Motors learning Lounge is our education space for families. It's for everyone. And it's in the back of the gallery. So think of it more like a small classroom that can fit like Around 20 people. We have a reading area, we have tables with hands on activities. Sometimes we have like dominoes, or like the Mexican game Lotteria we have children's books, adult books. And this is a space that is multipurpose. So we also use it for schools, or we transform it and use it to do a lecture. So I was part of the team that focused on developing this space. So that's why I'm like I just need to choose three because it's so you know, important for us. And there's a chandelier on top of the the learning lounge that hath images representative of Latini that is

very bright, different colors. We also have a bean bag that is inspired on a Mexican pastry. Oh my gosh, I just forgot the name just but it's very it's pink and bright contrast. That's the main contrast. So every time people come in, they see this beanbag you know that looks like a die on Phase Three and they'll I just want to jump in there

Ashley Biggs

and jump into a giant pastry. Yeah.

Natalia

So it's really it's really fun this space and also to see, you know, families because our focus was this needs to be for families, not just children, but we want that interaction between you know, the grandparent and the grandkid, a teen and you know, mom, like, we want those interactions. So the space has, has many ways that you could use that. So maybe a kid comes in with the family and the kid might focus and again, but maybe the adult might grab some books or read to the kids. So for us, that was very important. And there's a lot of tactile elements here. And we understand that there's so many objects behind the cases that we wanted another space for people, you know, to just enjoy, reflect on the gallery and expand on what we have on the gallery. And those are the three.

Ashley Biggs

So in total, I think there's 14 or 15 stops in the gallery. Yes, to complete this. And one of the sections is called meet us. Meet us. Yes. Tell me about that section.

Natalia

Yeah. So meet us is actually our, our entrance, it's like when you first come in, you meet us. So this is a large and when I'm talking largest, like the size of like a movie theater. It's a digital panel outside the gallery. And it features digital, like images of people moving, like if they were going walking towards the gallery, it has photos that we are showcasing inside the gallery, it has videos. And what's fun about meet us is that in the middle, we have on the floor, like like a golden stop, like a circle, let's say like a sticker on the floor. And when you when you stand there, this is digitally activated. And a greeter, like a greeter person pops up and welcomes you. And they might tell their name and say welcome to the Molina family, Latino gallery, let's explore. And then they walk as if they were going in silent gallery. So you don't know who you're gonna get. But it's really fun because it's, it's how we how you start the tour, right? How you start your visit, if you go there, and you're greeted by, by a digital storyteller, that's how we call them. Wow, the digital storyteller. And And now, what's fun about that, too, is that if you actually want to learn more about that person, we do have them feature in another section of the gallery, which is more towards the middle center of the gallery, we have an area called Photo, like if it was a forum. And we have this like large media devices, think of it as if it was like a, like a vertical TV. Lobby large like six feet. Wow. So when you approach it, you're gonna see that there's a person seated there a digital storyteller. And when you select and you just click on it, you can hear about them. So they'll introduce themselves and tell you a little bit about who they are. And then you can keep like scrolling and selecting more about their different the different stories about the person. We have educators, activists, entrepreneurs, you name it, they're featured there. So that's another way for us to like, have the visitor learn more about contemporary Latinos, because we also understand that there's so many objects that you know, might be like 100 years old or more. But we wanted to incorporate contemporary

stories of people that are still alive today and are part of our community. So you can learn more about that in that photo section in the middle of the gallery, and have 12 oral storytellers, the digital oral oral storytellers.

Ashley Biggs

Wow, that's something I've seen. I saw recently, actually at the Spy Museum, they had some digital storytellers. And I thought that was really interesting approach, because it felt more like a, it felt more like someone talking to me. Yes, more so than it was like, oh, I want to, you know, and I didn't have to fight to look around to see if I could see the object and read the description from somebody who's standing nose pressed against the glass, you know?

Natalia

Yeah, yeah. And that's exactly what we were thinking about. Like, we want it almost like a one on one conversation. Of course, this is not live, but at least you get that experience of like, as if you were talking to someone in person. And that's why they're so big because, you know, we, we wanted that experience. And what's interesting is that there is a way that you can actually click on the image and like, lower it. So let's say children or maybe a person using it Wheelchair like we can actually lower the image so that they can have that experience. Or if there's someone who's taller than we can also like, move the image up so that they can also have that similar experience in this section of

photo. And photo means forum. Yeah,

Natalia

photos, the word in Spanish, f o r. Oh, but it will just translate like forum. Yeah.

Ashley Biggs

And it and housing different people from different backgrounds is exactly what a forum should be. Yep. You know, so. That's really cool. So going through the various sections, you know, you're telling a story in four parts, two through 15 sections. The last section, section 16, is support the museum, which everyone should totally do. You know, as you're building up your collection, are you are you constantly adding more pieces? I mean, I know that there are digital artists out there there are, you know, traditional media artists, there are people who do sculptures, how are you? Or how are you building this collection to be rotating and moving constantly?

Natalia

So this is is a complex question. But I have your answer. So yeah, love and prices for this particular exhibition for presenting. Because we started as a center within we were the center Latino Center. And then we switch to the museum centers as a center, we didn't have a collection, and we didn't collect. So all these objects in this exhibition are on loan from other Smithsonian museums, actually, some are from American history from American Indian from the Anacostia community museum, also, from museums outside the Smithsonian, and even individuals like there were families that the curator talked to, he explained the type of theme that he was covering in the exhibition, and they loan objects. So at the end of this exhibition of presenter, these objects will go back to their owners. Because this is an

exhibition that is going to be I think, two and a half years, we do need to rotate many objects. So from the beginning, the curator had to not only have one object for, let's say, a specific theme, he had to have at least three, when it comes to dresses, we need to rotate those every six months, when it comes to like delicate paper items, we also need to rotate them, but they at the end, we'll go back to their owner. Now what happened is that because we turn into a museum, the policies to begin to collect were just implemented like a couple months ago. So what's happening now is that the curator and we have a register are beginning to start, actually the process of collecting. So they are in the initial stage of reaching out to different people that might have objects or different collections, you know, saying like, Hey, we are new museum, our policies have been established. And we are in the process of beginning to collect. So it's, it's very new. So our collection, I cannot like it's starting it's baby. But by the end of the time, you know what, by the time we have the actual building, we will have a collection because this also implies, you know, having storage like you know, the facilities

Ashley Biggs

to care for the aliens, they

Natalia

care for the item. And it also implies that you need to have a team, not just a curator and a registrar, but you need more people that can you know, look up and make sure that these objects are taking care of and all of that and like making sure that you have all the right paperwork and information that it takes. It takes time. But yes, we are on it. That's why I say it's a complex answer, but very announcer

Ashley Biggs

I've never I've never seen a museum at the start, ever. You know, I've seen museums that are very well established. I've seen museums kind of in the middle where they have a lot of items on loan, but there's they're building their collection. They have a building, things like that. I was actually a docent Oh word for the bigs Museum, which was funny because it was my last name.

Natalia

But you're not like you're not like, yeah, the owner.

Ashley Biggs

But I would say my name at the end of the tour. I'm like if you liked this, my name is Ashley Biggs. If you don't blah, blah, blah. I would always get rave reviews and and I think it was because they were they thought I was the guy's hit or something I guess. But no, I've never seen a museum at the start. So tell me From the emotional side, you know, dip into that, that, uh, literally that emotional pot, and tell me what it feels like to start a museum from the ground up?

Natalia

Well, first to be part of it, and I'm just getting chills now. It's huge. Like, I feel like, like, I'm going to the moon, like at that level, it's like, I cannot believe that I'm part of this team. It's like, I come from a small town, in Puerto Rico in an island, small island. And now I'm here, mainland us in DC part of this is like, like looking back, I'm like, I could never even imagined that I will be part of something. So historical. So on a personal level, it feels. And then, as I work with the team, with the education team, you know,

you're learning so many new processes that we didn't know, because right, it was a center, and now we're in museums. So there's a lot of learning. Smithsonian is a big institution. So there's a lot of processes. And sometimes I'm like, Oh, my God and other prophets. So there could be moments that you're like, frustrated, because it's like another problem. But you know, it is what it is. And at the end of the day, it's just super exciting to just see this all, you know, come together. And what we're doing now in the gallery is basically like, we are learning and we're testing things that in the in the future will work for the museum. So every time you know, we do a program, it's like, okay, how does this program help us in the in the future, like, what worked, what didn't work, what we what we need to improve what people like, or want to see. So we're like testing all the time. All of these things for the future building that we're gonna have.

Ashley Biggs

Sorry, I'm just I'm getting a little emotional, because I'm looking at the main picture. And I'm, you know, of all these people looking at the gallery and hearing you say it's like this big. I mean, it must feel like putting your heart and soul into this thing.

Natalia

Yeah. And I remember when I was an intern a couple years ago, several years ago, when it was just this, this dream of having a gallery, and they were like, draft, like on paper of like, oh, we wish to have something like this. And they will go to the board and try to discuss like, oh, like we would love to have a gallery like, we will need to fundraise. And it was just a dream on paper. And that was just a couple of years ago. And I know all the team members have been longer working with the Smithsonian. So it's just to see it go from like a dream on paper, to now we have an actual museum that Congress, you know, passed the law that we could have a museum to now see that we had first a storage space. And now we have a gallery. It's just huge to see that process just in a couple of years. Like for me and a couple of years. For other people. It's been decades. But it's huge. It's just, it's just big. And I hope I can be part of you know, when the building opens, I hope is not that many years. I hope it's just a decade, or a little bit more. But it's exciting.

Ashley Biggs

Oh, my goodness. What are your team's vision? For the, you know, moving the gallery into an actual museum, you know, this 10 year process of fundraising and trying to make it a reality?

Natalia

Yeah, so it's, it's many things. It's first like, building that collection, like you mentioned, like, it takes a while to build a collection. Right now with one of my colleagues, his name is Ariana dava. He's the education manager. He's on a national tour and national listening tour going to communities across the United States, Latino communities, and actually telling them, Hey, we are happening, like the Smithsonian is gonna have a Latino Museum. He's having focus groups. He's listening to them to understand what people want to see in this museum. Because this is this our museum is everyone's museum. So right now we're in that process of like, collecting all that information of like, what people who want to see, we're in the process of reaching out to people that might want to donate objects, and also that process of fundraising. So we have another team, the Advancement team that oh, my god bless their heart, because they need to reach out to so many people right to like, fundraise for this

building, because I'm telling you, it's from scratch. building from scratch, and it also implies not just the building, but also staffing. So we're also in the process of like growing the team from like, the Latino Center in the past there were like, I think seven or eight employees right now as a museum where like around 2021 But we need to keep on growing. Yeah, definitely. So it's, it's so many things but I listen to education. We're focusing on that on like that national tour. I also work with local DMV communities doing community engagement. So I'm also we're focusing on that too, right? Like, we wanted to listen to the community, right? Tell them we're here we have this, but also learn more about what the community is interested in doing so that we can create co creative programs in our space. So it's like a, you know, a partnership, like both parties like working on something that they're both passionate about, not just saying, Oh, do this or do a tour, but also like, listening and like learning more about them. So Oh, my God, so many things. Ashley.

Ashley Biggs

I'm amazed, I'm thrilled. And I'm amazed and I can't wait. I don't get down to DC very often, you know, for kids. But hey, I have explored the website, I have gone through the digital galleries. And I'm a huge fan of the Smithsonian in general, just a huge fan. And, you know, I know about the various centers, but I didn't know as much as I now know. And to witness a museum coming from the ground up is just thrilling. Yeah. And, and it's well deserved. Because a lot of hard work has gone into it. Yes.

Natalia

Definitely. Like, when I joined initially, the team, you know, I learned that everything that we do, it's like it's been tested, like everything we do, like we have external advisors, historians, educators, that, you know, even if we're doing an activity, we have, like sample like our the Christian Advisory Council, like we have people from our community locally and nationally, just like giving a feedback, because we want to make sure that whatever we put out there is like well made, and it's what people want. So it's just, it's not just us as a team, but also, like so many other people involved in like helping put this together.

Ashley Biggs

That's amazing. That's amazing. I can't wait to check back within with you guys in a couple of years and see where you are. And

Natalia

I will say like our plan. So in this space, our plan is to have between two or three exhibits. And there's already one in the works. So even though we opened last year, we're planning the next one. Because in the museum, while you know, everything takes time, and we're already in the works of planning one, even though this one is gonna be there for

Ashley Biggs

a little bit. I'm in the library world, I understand everything takes time. years, so yes, definitely. This has been a wonderful conversation. I'm just thrilled and excited. And I can't wait to eventually, one day, get down there and see it in person. Because my kids have not yet been to the American History Museum. I don't think in DC, that might be a trip worth taking. There'll be so much fun. It'll be super fun. And I just I want to say thank you so much for joining LBDP A lot of the people who listen to this podcast, are

individuals who may have limited transportation. So this gets right to the heart of it and shows an amazing museum that that they can definitely plan to visit.

Natalia

Yes, Ashley, thank you so much for inviting me. I'm always so excited to share what we're doing on our work. Because yes, like you say, like, we want people to come over and see the exhibition, like this first exhibition has so much history that most of the time is not taught in school, or it's not talked about perspective that a lot of time, you know, we don't even learn about them. So that's why it's so important for us, you know, to spread the word and have people come over.

Ashley Biggs

Well, thank you so much, ladies and gentlemen, I just want to give a another shout out to the amazing Smithsonian and to the amazing Mr. Chabot, who presented to us today. And join us again for our next LBPD Guest our so thank you again.

Natalia

Thank you all.

Announcer

This has been a presentation of the Maryland State Library Agency. For links to additional resources provided by today's presenter, please visit the show notes. For more information on MSLA or the Maryland State Library for the Blind and print disabled, visit [Maryland libraries.org](https://libraries.org)