The 2011 Congress of the ICMM was held **October 9-15 2011** in Washington, DC, and Newport News, Virginia, USA.

After more than a decade, the ICMM returned to North America. *Connecting with the Future* seemed to be an especially appropriate choice of theme, given the venues in the 'new world' and given the challenges and opportunities facing our museums in the new millennium.

Jointly hosted by the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History – the only truly *national* history museum in America – and the Mariners' Museum, the Congress provided magnificent venues for sessions, receptions, tours and conversations.

The Congress began in Washington, DC with a Sunday reception on the national mall at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History. After an optional day or two of visits to other great museums along the mall, our colleagues were welcomed by Paula Johnson and by Richard Kurin, Smithsonian Under Secretary for History, Art, and Culture. The centerpiece of the evening was the Smithsonian's major maritime exhibition, *On the Water: Stories from Maritime America*. The sumptuous dinner was the perfect antidote to jetlag and a welcome chance to reconnect with our colleagues old.

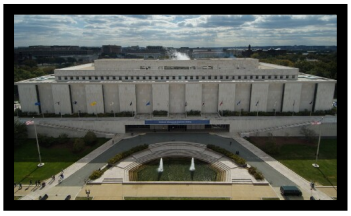
The real business of the Congress began Monday morning, as sessions got under way at the nearby National Portrait Gallery. The keynote session "Museums as Community" featured a presentation by Ford Bell, the president of the American Association of Museums, who described the economic and professional challenges facing the thousands of museums in the United States and the international museum community.

The balance of Day 1 was spent in sessions exploring how museums in Gothenburg, Vlaardingen and Hong Kong are working to connect with real visitors On-Site in real time and real space, and then how organizations in Rotterdam, Oostduinkerke and Stockholm are creatively connecting with them On-Line in virtual time and space.

After just a brief pause to catch our breaths, we were transported by coach across the city to the historic Washington Navy Yard, cleared through the obligatory security checkpoints and treated to an evening food, local beers and song at the National Museum of the United States Navy.

Day 2 offered spouses and companions a behind-the-scenes tour of the Capitol and the Library of Congress, while the delegates reconvened at the Portrait Gallery once again. Tuesday morning's sessions focused on how we can be leaders in Social and Cultural Regeneration. Examples of initiatives in America, Taiwan, Bermuda and Greece provided proof of the broad cultural impact we can have in our own communities and nations. Colleagues from Liverpool, Hamburg and Sydney next made convincing cases for their museums' role in their regional economic health and revival.

Tuesday afternoon offered attendees a menu of short reports from the field, a welcome chance to explore more of Washington's historic sites and museums, or an opportunity to just relax before heading to the evening reception hosted by the Australian Embassy. Arranged by the always-diplomatic Mary Louise Williams, the evening featured delicious foods, wines and art with a definite Aussie accent.



Wednesday was a travel day, as we bid adieu to Washington and headed south along the Chesapeake Bay toward Newport News, Virginia. The coach trip featured a stop at Jamestown Settlement, the site of Britain's first successful colony in America (1607). Today, Jamestown features rich archaeological finds, recreated fortifications, buildings, vessels and trades, and a magnificent museum filled with the art and artifacts of the era. A light rain only added to the atmosphere of this voyage back into America's beginnings.

Arriving at Newport News, we were welcomed to the Mariners' Museum by our host William Cogar and his volunteers and trustees. They received us with traditional Tidewater hospitality and treated us to a magnificent dinner and tour of the museum's extensive exhibitions.

Thursday morning tested the limits of ICMM's 21st-century interconnectivity. A keynote address from Rick van der Ploeg, Professor of Economics, was webcast into our meeting room from the University of Oxford, UK. Despite the best efforts and technology available at Mariners', the session ended with us all wishing that we actually had Rick with us in Virginia, to question much more deeply.

The sessions that followed suffered from no such lack of spontaneity. A truly amazing range of Partnerships was explored by our colleagues at Mariners', Mystic Seaport, NOAA, Gdansk and the Vasa Museum. Partnerships with universities, corporations, communities and national agencies were all honestly described, with unvarnished attention given to both benefits and dangers.

The Future of Collections in our museums was next on the program and featured provocative presentations on the use and preservation of historic vessels and maritime art from representatives of the Zuiderzee Museum, USS Olympia, and the Flensburg Maritime Museum.

Thursday afternoon (and again Friday afternoon) provided time for "Master Classes" where attendees could have in-depth discussions with leaders in our field. Thursday's Masters were Lyles Forbes, on the care and presentation of historic small craft collections, and James

Delgado, diving deep into maritime archeology. On Friday, Kevin Sumption would lead a brilliant, fast-paced primer in social media, and Anna Holloway would share her vast experience with interpretive techniques.

Friday's last formal session dealt (perhaps ironically, perhaps appropriately) with Leadership. Three of our most respected leaders – Kevin Fewster from Greenwich, Stephen White from Mystic Seaport and Marika Hedin from the Vasa – shared their valuable insights into what it will take to lead our museums in the 21st century. In so doing, they underlined one last time the overall theme of the Congress – that we need to constantly be looking forward, not backward, as we preserve and present our maritime heritage to new generations of real and virtual visitors.

As has become an ICMM tradition, the closing dinner was held aboard ship. Although Norfolk/Newport News, Virginia comprises the largest US Navy port in America and is filled with hundreds of huge naval vessels, every last one of those ships was strictly off limits to us. We did the next best thing - heading out among them aboard America's version of a bateau-mouche. My guess is that our dinner cruise will be remembered as much for the harbor views and the warm conversations as for the band that tried so very hard to get us dancing to contemporary American beats.

All of us here in the US were delighted to have our ICMM colleagues on our shores again, and are looking forward to having our colleagues in Portugal manage the next Congress.

Stuart Parnes
Long-serving Secretary General, ICMM

Photographs of the Congress and videos of the papers presented are being prepared for this section of the website.