

RICK PETRIE ON THE MULTI- ETHNIC SETTLEMENT MUSEUM



Rick Petrie is a UW- Milwaukee and Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design graduate, and executive director of Urban Anthropology Inc. He recently sat down with Off the Cuff to discuss the Old South Side Settlement Museum (707 W. Lincoln Ave.).

What should people know about the area?

Lincoln Village and Baran Park are home to individuals from 100 different nations! That is incredible, staggering diversity, even in big- city America. Nearby Forest Home Cemetery was once an Indian village. In the 1850s Increase A. Lapham surveyed it, and found effigy mounds. So local Native heritage here stretches way, way back.

The museum showcases those cultures? We have a 105- year- old house. Different rooms represent different families, in different times.

Irish get the barroom? Haha. Not quite. Two main families are featured: Rozgas and Figueroas. The former still live on the block, and own the funeral home next door. The living room is “theirs” and set in the 1920s. They provided free funerals during the Great Depression. The kitchen is Mexican, set in the 1950s when a Latino migration arrived, working in manufacturing, factories and tanneries. Most settled around Walkers Point. The Figueroa family — one of Lincoln Village’s first — lived down the block.

How did Poles and Mexicans coexist? Actually, swimmingly. Interestingly, across America, wherever large Eastern European communities are, Mexicans move in next door. They share Catholic faith, rural backgrounds, language struggles, and even soccer and accordions. Also similar family structures — multiple generations under one roof.

So grandma has a room? Sadly no. But there is a boarder: Detlaff, a Kashube.

Kashube? Kashube are a cultural group from the Baltic Sea. They were once a community of more than 1,500 on Jones Island. The city evicted them. They have a small room here, including a mini- tugboat, representing their island livelihood — mainly fishing.

Seven years and counting for the museum... highlights?

I fondly recall painting, minor carpentry and refinishing furniture before we opened. I love students, though. We hold 25-30 comfortably, and they bring a lot of energy. We get a handful annually. Smaller tours, every couple weeks. We just wrapped up Doors Open Milwaukee, too. Three hundred people came. It turned out very well. People were fascinated.

Art is central to the mission? Definitely. Our reception room displays historic and contemporary art. We organize public art, too. For instance: the Family Tree Project honors 13 Southside heroes with trees; the Native Couple Bench is stainless steel by Juan Flores. Youth Art Pillars features fire- glazed tiles, designed by children, representing (among others) Germans, Puerto Ricans and African- Americans.

We did semi- circular gardens around Kosciuszko’s statue, in the park. The statue has since been restored and will be featured in a rededication ceremony on Monday, Nov. 11 — Veterans Day. We’d like to do more community gardens.

For more, check out [urban-anthropology.org/ Virtual.htm](http://urban-anthropology.org/Virtual.htm). For tours, call 414-271-9417 or email rickpetrie@gmail.com or urbanmke@gmail.com. Tour admission is \$10 for adults or \$8 for children, students and seniors.