

The Suffolk Times, July 15, 2022

Alison Ventura takes helm at Oysterponds Historical Society

By Melissa Azofeifa

Oysterponds Historical Society announced a new executive director.

Alison Ventura succeeds interim director John Holzapfel, who took the position after former executive director Paul Gunther passed away early last month. Mr. Gunther, retired executive director of the Gracie Mansion Conservancy in New York City, had been named to the Oysterponds post in April.

Ms. Ventura, who has lived in Orient for about a decade, is an experienced museum professional and decorative arts historian with a strong background in curatorial studies, design history and interior design. According to the OHS website, she has a BFA from the School of Visual Arts at Syracuse University and a master's degree in history of design and curatorial studies from the Cooper-Hewitt Museum, Parsons School of Design.

Ms. Ventura previously developed two exhibitions for the Oysterponds Historical Society — “Baseball on the North Fork” and “Casting a Wide Net: Fishing on the North Fork” — and has been an active volunteer on other OHS projects. She began her career at the Smithsonian Institution’s National Portrait Gallery and subsequently worked at several exhibition design firms in Washington, D.C. According to the website, she has experience managing all aspects of exhibition production for organizations including the Library of Congress Museum, the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History, the Georgia Sports Hall of Fame, the White House and the Norman Rockwell Museum. She also has experience as an independent exhibition designer.

Ms. Ventura shared her excitement about starting her work at Oysterponds Historical Society in a recent interview with The Suffolk Times.

Q: What motivated you to apply for this position?

A: Personally, the time was right for me to start a new chapter. For the past 10 years I have been involved with OHS in different ways, and the commitment of the volunteers, board members and employees all inspired me to deepen my involvement. It’s an opportunity, too, for me to give back to this community that has brought me to much joy and comfort.

Q: What do you hope to achieve during your tenure?

A: I have a number of ambitions, but my first priority is to continue moving forward on a large scale storage project, so that we can safeguard our incredible collection — over 60,000 objects! And as a champion for the society, I want to reach the Orient and East Marion residents who haven't engaged with us yet — either because they don't know about us or don't know enough about our programs to feel connected. I'd love for the whole community to see all that OHS has to offer and realize that this vibrant little jewel of a museum and all of its programming is for them, too, whether your great-great-grandparents built a home here hundreds of years ago or you're a young family who's just discovered the North Fork.

Q: What challenges do you expect to face?

A: It's a priority of mine to make the lively history and stories of this beautiful place relevant across communities and generations so that OHS can be a community hub for everyone.