

Bender
of
Twigs



Jay Price

Twenty-five years ago, Dr. Jay Price was hired as a fresh-faced Assistant Professor of History, with the expectation that he would pump new life into the department's applied graduate program in Public History. He succeeded beyond our wildest expectations. Jay hit the ground running, and he has not stopped since. Indeed, I call him our "Energizer Bunny"—he never seems to run down! He turned the focus of the program to local and community history that has engaged the interest, fascination, and respect of the Wichita community at large, as well as the large number of students who enrolled in the program. Jay's knowledge of and interest in Kansas and Wichita history is frequently exhibited by leading his walking tours of the city, exploring the historic neighborhoods while narrating the exciting, sometimes seamy, past, as well as describing the city's unique architecture and social fabric.

As an award-winning teacher, he imparts his knowledge in class with infectious enthusiasm. Jay can frequently be seen on campus dressed in period costume, showing up as a turn of the 20th century progressive, a 1930s New Dealer, or an American cowboy. The local rummage sales and vintage clothing stores must love him! Beyond that, Jay has a knack for including his students in the process of doing history. By truly collaborating with them and giving credit to them as co-authors or research associates, he provides a mentoring that is treasured by them as they move into their careers. Indeed, there is rarely a museum, archive, or library in the state that does not employ one of his former students.

For twelve years, nearly half of his career at WSU, Jay served as department chair. They were challenging times. Three presidents, and two deans were enough to keep things interesting, but they were also years that brought the special challenges of dislocations brought on by the displacement of the department due to the two-year renovation of Fiske Hall and the relocating of the department faculty to Brennan Hall. It would not have been surprising to see Jay holding a crossing street sign to escort his colleagues and students across busy 17th Street! No sooner had the journey back to Fiske Hall been accomplished when the effects of Covid-19 hit the University. Remotely offered on-line classes were organized or "hybrid" offerings through "zoom" became the order of the day. Jay took on these challenges with glee—almost like a kid with new toys! Additionally, he oversaw the arrival of several new faculty, new courses, and a new Religion program to the Department. Incredibly, he accomplished much of this without the assistance of a full-time administrative assistant for nearly two years. Jay took on the challenges with grace and aplomb.

As a scholar, Jay is remarkably productive and collaborative. Of course, he published the expected and highly praised scholarly monographs. Beyond that, however, his breadth of interests in local and community history have led him into numerous books studying local religious, ethnic, and business groups. Much of this has been done in collaboration with his students, department colleagues, and faculty in other disciplines to produce a truly remarkable array of books, pamphlets, reports, and exhibits for local, state and national audiences. Even graphic novels pour out of his fertile imagination. After 25 years of outstanding teaching, remarkable leadership, collegial collaboration, and great fun, we continue to look forward to the pleasure of Jay's company and congratulate him on his ascent to the exalted status of Bender of the Twig.