MUSEUM CORNER

New home, new director, new exhibits
By Elizabeth Denius

With the re-opening of Fay-Coooper Cole Hall in February, the Anthropology Museum gained a new home. In July it also acquired a new director, Jennifer Kirker-Priest (at right).

To christen the museum’s new location, NIU President John Peters and Anthropology Department chair Kendall Thu welcomed more than 300 people from around the state and country to Cole Hall at a February 12 reception. The building underwent a multimillion-dollar renovation after five students died in a shooting incident in 2008.

The museum opened with an exhibit of Korean theatre masks and costumes and a prairie photography show featuring the work of National Geographic photographer Jim Brandenburg. In addition to display space inside the museum, there is a small viewing space for video presentations as well as five display windows facing the hallway.

Kirker-Priest has worked in museums for more than twelve years. Her most recent assignment was at the Freeport Art Museum. “I am excited to work with faculty and students to discover new ways the museum can support the university community and make anthropology relevant to audiences,” she said. “We want to create multiple ways for visitors to experience anthropology and participate in the museum.”

Visitors to the Anthropology Museum this fall will see three different exhibitions, including a major exhibit curated by art historian and NIU faculty emeritus Richard Cooler. “Rarely Seen Southeast Asia: Art, Artifact, Ephemera” will open in the main gallery on September 24 (with an opening reception October 11) and is part of the center’s 50th anniversary celebration. It features items drawn from the museum’s permanent collection of Southeast Asian artifacts as well as from Cooler’s personal collection. This exhibit will be open through May.

Also in the fall, the museum will host “Saving Endangered Species,” a traveling exhibition sponsored by the Institute for the Environment, Sustainability and Energy. It is a family-friendly exhibition that fosters discussion of how people, cultures, and the environment affect animal and plant species. Also on display will be “Water for Life,” an exhibition showcasing objects from the museum’s permanent collection that explores the cross-cultural ways humans depend upon and use water for thirst, hunger, transport and ceremony.

During the academic year, the museum is open weekdays and Saturdays.