The Iowa Museum Association Leadership Award is intended to recognize outstanding contributions to the museum field through visionary leadership. Candidates should be employed (or formerly employed) in a top leadership role in a museum and must show how their leadership has impacted Iowa museums. The award is not intended for volunteer leaders of museums such as trustees, board members, and donors.

Jerome Thompson completed his career in 2015, ending as State Curator for the State Historical Society of Iowa, but held multiple positions throughout his career at SHSI, including that of Interim Administrator, beginning in December 2008. As Administrator, Thompson provided oversight to the museum, state historic preservation office, the state archives and records program, historical libraries and historic sites.

Thompson began his Iowa career as the first site coordinator at Terrace Hill, a National Historic Landmark Site, now the residence of Iowa's governors. In July 1977 Jerome began supervising structural rehabilitation work at Terrace Hill, and participated in developing content for the first tours of the historic home.

In 1982, Jerome commenced his work with the State Historical Society of Iowa, as director of the historic sites program. As Historic Sites Coordinator for the State Historical Society of Iowa he managed three external historic sites: Montauk, Toolesboro Mounds, and the Abie Gardner Sharp cabin. He oversaw the addition of five additional sites in the next 18 years: the Matthew Edel blacksmith shop, Blood Run National Historic Landmark, American Gothic House, Western Trails Historic Trails Center, and Plum Grove.

In 1986, Thompson also became Museum Director and worked to develop interpretive themes and exhibit content for the new State Historical Building that opened in 1987. Following the new museum’s opening, Thompson supervised staff in developing additional exhibits detailing Iowa’s rich history on a variety of topics. Among them were the award-winning exhibits “Hay

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THE QUALITY OF WORK THAT JEROME DOES IS OUTSTANDING. HE IS A WALKING ENCYCLOPEDIA ABOUT THE HISTORY OF IOWA AND MUSEUM/HISTORICAL SOCIETY OPERATIONS AND HE HAS A NATIONAL NETWORK OF PEOPLE HE CAN CALL TO GET ADVICE OR HELP RESOLVING A PROBLEM. EQUALLY IMPORTANT, JEROME IS ALWAYS WILLING TO SHARE HIS KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERTISE - AND HE DOES SO IN A GRACIOUS AND UNINTIMIDATING MANNER.

-SANDI YODER, IOWA JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Days: The Horse in Iowa History” and “A Few of Our Favorite Things: 100 Creations of the 20th Century” that received recognition from the American Association of State and Local History.

In 2004, Thompson was named State Curator, returning him to supervision of the Society’s eight historic sites and providing technical assistance to countless statewide historical sites and museums. In the role of state curator countless cultural attractions benefitted greatly from Thompson’s knowledge of Iowa history and dedication to preserving and interpreting Iowa’s material culture and historic resources. He served in this role until his retirement in July 2015.

Perhaps most significant among Thompson’s many accomplishments was consultation with Iowa’s Native-American tribes to identify items within the State Historical Society’s collection to coordinate the repatriation of human remains and artifacts to tribal representatives.

After retirement, Thompson was elected to the State Historical Society of Iowa board of trustees and was asked to serve on the board of the Iowa Jewish Historical Society. In addition, he coordinates the meetings of a local Des Moines history book club and volunteers at the Iowa Gold Star Military Museum. He is also contributing to the Iowa State University biographical dictionary and has authored an article for the Iowa History Journal.

In addition to his professional duties, Mr. Thompson has been an active volunteer in the Iowa museum field for over three decades. He served on the board of the Iowa Museum Association including a term as president 1991-1993; provided guidance as a member of Silos and Smokestacks Partnership Panel, authored an article for the History News magazine published by the American Association for State and Local History, and volunteered at Des Moines area museums.

Receiving the 2011 Silos & Smokestacks National Heritage Area Golden Silos Award.

“Jerome Thompson has impacted and educated almost two generations of museum professionals, nurtured professional standards among the operations of numerous historical organizations, and as a mentor has inspired scholarship and innovative interpretation techniques by many museum professionals young and old for 30 years.”

-Michael Vogt, Iowa Gold Star Military Museum