Leonardo exhibit at WISTEC

When I was a little boy, my grandfather constantly was developing some contraption that never failed to intrigue me. I was always impressed by the innovative toys he built, using mainly the expertise and practicality men gained while coming of age during the Great Depression. The toys he built, for my cousins and me, exemplified the ultimate in human innovative potential.

My grandfather comes to mind because of a recent visit to the Willamette Science and Technology Center.

As I strolled through WISTEC's new exhibit of Leonardo da Vinci's farsighted inventions, the idea struck me that, indeed, Leonardo is the grandfather of mankind.

The exhibit, titled "Leonardo da Vinci 1452-1519," opened at WISTEC July 27.

Visitors can see and operate 24 working scale models of Leonardo's most brilliant inventions. The models are part of an exhibit constructed in the 1940s by a Los Angeles man who displayed them at the county fair. Sometime later IBM Corp. purchased the models and developed a touring exhibition.

Jere O'brien, the editor of Oregon's regional arts magazine, is responsible for the exhibit's first-ever appearance in Oregon and at WISTEC, said Muriel Willingham, a WISTEC public-relations intern.

In its first weekend on display, the Leonardo exhibit attracted nearly 500 visitors Sunday, which is more than 10 times the normal one-day traffic load, she said.

The first exhibit is Leonardo's clock, which shows minutes on one face and hours on another. It is the first clock to show both elements of time, although it shows each element on opposite sides. Visitors may wind the clock as they enter the building.

Models of his military inventions on display include a conical armored tank that is operated from inside a shell designed to deflect cannon balls. A scaling ladder that can be cranked up or down for climbing fortress walls, much like the ladders on modern fire trucks, also is displayed.

Other inventions on display include three prototypes for enabling human flight, the first roller bearings and chain drive, a variable speed drive similar in theory to modern-day automobile transmissions, an odometer and three designs for more efficient boats.

A brilliant artist, architect, engineer, sculptor, designer, philosopher, scientist and more, Leonardo was centuries ahead of his time as a master of many occupations. He refused to concentrate on any one profession, however, and spent his life in debt.

He was born in 1452, an illegitimate child of a country girl in the village of Vinci, near Florence, Italy. His paintings include "The Last Supper" and "Mona Lisa."

Leonardo died in 1519 in Amboise.

The exhibit will continue through the end of September.

Story by Chris Norred

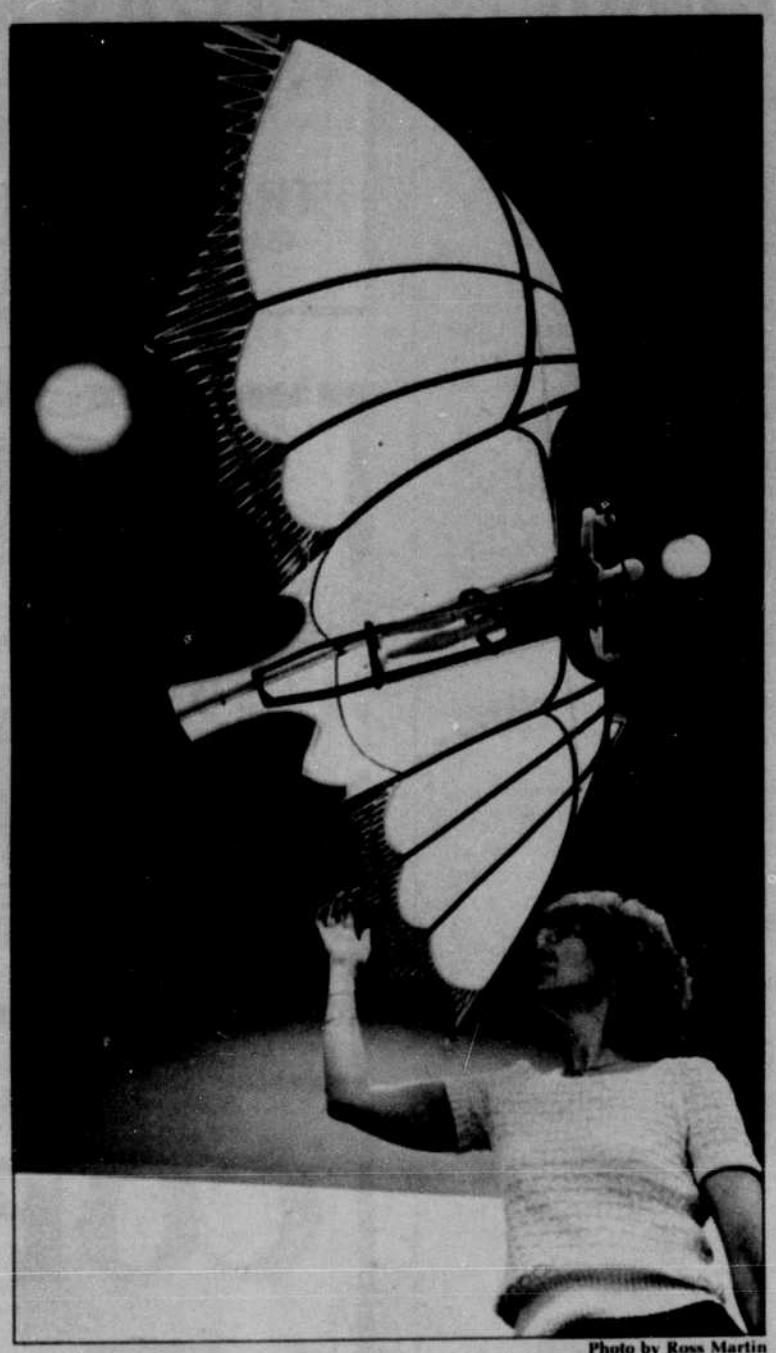

Photo by Ross Martin

Muriel Willingham demonstrates the operation of one of 24 Leonardo da Vinci models on display at WISTEC.

Southeast Asia studies funded by education grant

By Michael Rivers
Of the Emerald

The proverbial mystical veil that separates Eastern and Western culture may be lifting thanks to the recent establishment of a Southeast Asia studies project at the University.

The project is funded by a two-year, $110,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Education and offers students courses in the history, politics, languages, literature and cultural practices of Southeast Asia.

Two University faculty members prepared and submitted the grant last October. Political science Professor Gerald Fry and history Professor Glenn May learned of the Education Department's approval of the grant in May and will begin teaching the first courses in the fall, Fry said. He and May are each teaching a course on Southeast Asia this summer, he said, but the two courses are not formally a part of the project.

About eight to 10 professors from various other disciplines also will teach courses, he said.

Fry and May applied for the grant because they believe there has been a serious neglect of Southeast Asia studies nationwide, Fry said. Study of Southeast Asia is important because of the proximity of the Pacific basin to our own area, he said.

"The Association of Southeast Asian Nations is our fourth largest trading partner after Canada, Japan and the European community," Fry said. "The growth of trade has been phenomenal."

The study of Southeast Asia is coming back into prominence after a decline following U.S. involvement in Vietnam, Fry said.

The decline was "very substantial" because America didn't like having to face the Asian countries after the war, May said. The Ford Foundation also stopped providing funding for Southeast Asia programs, he said.

The funding withdrawal can be explained partly by the leadership of the Foundation's president at that time, McGeorge Bundy, May said. Bundy served as national security adviser to President Kennedy, which may have affected his

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Photo by Allan Lazo

Glenn May, left, and Gerald Fry will begin teaching courses in Southeast Asia studies in the fall as part of the recently established Southeast Asia studies project.

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