

# Museum organizes, cares for ancient fossils

By John Higgins  
Emerald Contributor

Stacked boxes of fossils ranging from walrus tusks to rolled-up rattlesnake skins line the walls of the small basement room in Pacific Hall that houses the Condon Museum.

Each specimen is marked with pink paint and a University number, which is catalogued with the museum's other specimens on a computer file.

"The trick is to keep it in order," said Condon Museum Director William Orr. "My wife is a librarian, so she's putting it in kind of a librarian mode."

Orr, a University professor of geology, has inherited the charge of imposing order on the chaos of bones and rocks in the museum.

The collection includes an 18-million-year-old crab found at Cape Kiwanda, a 26-million-year-old sand dollar found near Silverton and a 44-million-year-old sea turtle found near Coos Bay.

Orr curates the collection in addition to teaching classes, and is currently finding a way to handle the 10,000 to 15,000 new specimens the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry has sent from Portland for storage.

The boxes are part of the biggest addition to the Condon Museum since the museum's first curator donated his findings in 1907.

That first curator was Rev. Thomas Condon, who came to



Dr. William Orr exhibits a drawer full of fossilized mouse teeth from the fossil repository in the University's Condon Museum. The fossils are used for teaching purposes and are available for loans to other museums.

teach at the University in 1876 and brought with him his private collection of fossils.

After exploring the fossil beds of eastern Oregon and the John Day Valley, Condon soon became a well-known lecturer on the subject and eventually was named Oregon's first state geologist.

Today the museum's collection of 35,000 specimens of fossil vertebrates ranks 12th in the nation

for number of specimens.

To help organize the fossils, Orr created a special shelving system along with the computer catalog.

By spinning a large wheel, a geologist who wants to fetch an ice-age horse tooth can create an aisle in front of the shelf he needs.

Orr is having more shelves built to accommodate the new

specimens from OMSI.

However, not all of the specimens in the collection are ancient fossils.

Many people bring in modern bones, which the researchers use for teaching rather than risk breaking the fossilized bones. One of the most unusual donations to the collection was from a circus.

A box of yellowed ribs rests on

top of a storage cabinet along with a massive skull on a metal cart. These bones belonged to Tusko, a circus elephant.

The museum acquired Tusko after he escaped near Portland in the 1920s and died of exposure. His complete skeleton is so big it's easier to keep in separate boxes, which are shoved wherever there is room.

Students who want to study the basic features of mammoths and mastodons study Tusko.

About 80 percent of the collection's most important specimens have come from people who discover something out of the ordinary. For example, Orr is currently working with a boy in Eugene who thinks he's found the wrist of a giant ground sloth.

Orr said he wishes he had more time to collect fossils himself, but teaching keeps him close to the University.

Oregon is one of the world's most complete archives of earth history, making it a treasure trove for anyone with a desire to collect. Up to two-thirds of the state is a patchwork of rocky chunks rafted in from the Pacific Rim.

For example, the Blue Mountains, Klamath Mountains and coast range bear fossils that didn't originate locally.

"We have a repository, a library almost, of rocks from the Central Pacific," Orr said. "It's a marvelously complex problem. You can put together a nice story about what you think happened."

# University students find Little Buddies during Kid Time

By Marion Suito  
Emerald Contributor

A mob of 10 elementary school children attack the college student struggling to escape the chaotic hoard.

In his hand is the spinner for the Twister game, and all of the children are straining to take possession of the colorful piece of cardboard.

In another corner of the room, children mill about, asking in tormented voices, "When is the pizza going to get here?" and "Which movie are we going to watch?"

University dorm residents stand nearby, watching the hubbub with smiles on their faces and occasionally yelling something to one of the frantic kids.

These are regular occurrences at meetings of Kid Time, a Big Buddy/Little Buddy program begun this term by University Housing program assistants Rob Campbell and Shari Waki.

And the mayhem doesn't seem to bother the dorm residents who volunteered to participate in the program.

"We don't usually get to do things with kids this age,"

said junior Kristie Teshima. "Besides, it's a good release from studying."

This term, 17 students from Edison and Harris Elementary Schools spent four weekday afternoons with their respective Big Buddies, and Wednesday's meeting, complete with movie, pizza and popcorn, marked the end of the winter term program.

Grade school students and dorm residents were paired up arbitrarily, but the participants, both big and little, were surprised by how well they got along with their counterparts.

"The funny thing is, even though they didn't know anything about each other, they matched up really well," Campbell said. "They were amazed they had so much in common."

Campbell and Waki initiated the Kid Time program after they proposed a similar plan at a leadership conference last year. The plan was just hypothetical at that point, but they decided to put it into action.

"We didn't think it would ever actually happen," said Campbell, "but then people seemed interested, and we

thought, 'Why not?'"

Every Wednesday afternoon for the past four weeks, the Little Buddies were bussed over from their elementary schools and brought on campus, where they met with their Big Buddies to make crafts, eat snacks and play games.

The co-directors managed to find pastimes that whole group enjoyed, such as tie-dyeing and constructing picture frames to showcase candid photographs from previous Kid Time get-togethers.

"The picture frames were cool," said third-grader Brooke Parrott. "We got to make our own personal ones with any color we wanted."

Waki said many of the students involved in this term's program are looking forward to participating again next term, and some have even committed to telephoning their Little Buddies weekly or spending time with the children's families.

"Some children got really close to their Big Buddies," Waki said. "That's good though, because that is what we encouraged in the program."

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