

# Museum of Natural History exhibits a changing future

■ The MNH turns its attention from past to future with a new look and new programs

By Eric Martin  
Oregon Daily Emerald

A replica of a 15-ton meteorite that plummeted to Earth and hit near present day Oregon City more than a century ago stands near the entrance of the University Museum of Natural History.

The museum, which showcases artifacts linking Oregon's future generations to its distant past, isn't undertaking a journey of such intergalactic proportions. But it is driving toward some major goals, fueled by public and private donations.

The staff is now formulating plans for a \$1 million renovation of the museum's 3,200-square foot exhibit area, which should begin in 18 months, museum Director Mel Aikens said. About \$600,000 has been collected through private donations for the project.

"The redesign will fit our existing collections into a higher density of exhibits, which we can change out more rapidly," he said.

The collections, which range from the 6-foot tusk of a mammoth to sharp, black obsidian arrowheads, could be augmented and displayed more effectively with a redesign, Aikens said.

"It's going to be a walk through time," said Patricia Krier, educational programs director for the museum. "It'll cover 425 million years of geologic history to the first human inhabitants 10,000 years ago." Krier said the exhibits extend to a study of natural and cultural history within the past 10,000 years as well.

Museum staffers plan to have a rotating exhibit area, Aikens said. Public money is flowing in to fund the museum's broader mission.

There are plans to improve and consolidate the museum's research and collection storage facility, currently located in multiple locations on campus, thanks to legislation passed by the U.S. House of Representatives on Dec. 19 that allocated \$50,000 to the museum.

Because it is designated as the official state repository, the museum is home to most of the archaeological artifacts found within Oregon's borders. Rep. Peter Defazio, D-Springfield,

said it was important to protect such irreplaceable pieces of ancient Oregon when the money was allocated.

Museum staffers also hope to usher more youngsters into a deeper understanding of scientific research and observation, and were awarded a \$15,000 grant to create after-school programs for three Eugene middle schools: Spencer Butte, Jefferson and Monroe.

The grant will also pay to bind and ink booklets that will allow students and visitors to take self-guided tours of the school's hidden treasures.

"We're trying to tie in the stuff that goes in the Natural History Museum with things located in other departments on campus," said arts management graduate student Gus Baum, who is designing the booklets. Baum said the booklets will initially catalogue items of interest in four disciplines — geology, geography, biology and archaeology — located in departments across campus.

"It's science in our own backyard," he said.

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## Budget

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Provost John Moseley has indicated that the University can absorb a 5 percent budget cut without serious difficulty, but officials at other institutions, such as Oregon State University, are less optimistic.

"We are disproportionately hit," OSU Provost Tim White said. Budget cuts have already been felt at Oregon State, where 34 classified

employees got a pink slip last week.

Kitzhaber's current budget proposal slashes \$5 million in state support for a top-tier engineering school, cuts \$17.3 million from extension services and forestry programs and trims research funding by 20 percent. White said that OSU is bearing the lion's share of these cuts because some of the university's largest programs are concentrated in engineering, forestry and research.

White said that OSU has already "done a remarkable job of curtailing

spending." The university won't cut any academic programs or change their plan for a top-tier engineering school. "We're not cutting the (new) college. We'll simply raise the money with private funds," he said.

Young said that higher education must not be cut by 10 percent.

"If the current budget goes into effect, I will leave the state and never come back," he said.

E-mail community reporter Brook Reinhard at [brookreinhard@dailymerald.com](mailto:brookreinhard@dailymerald.com).

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