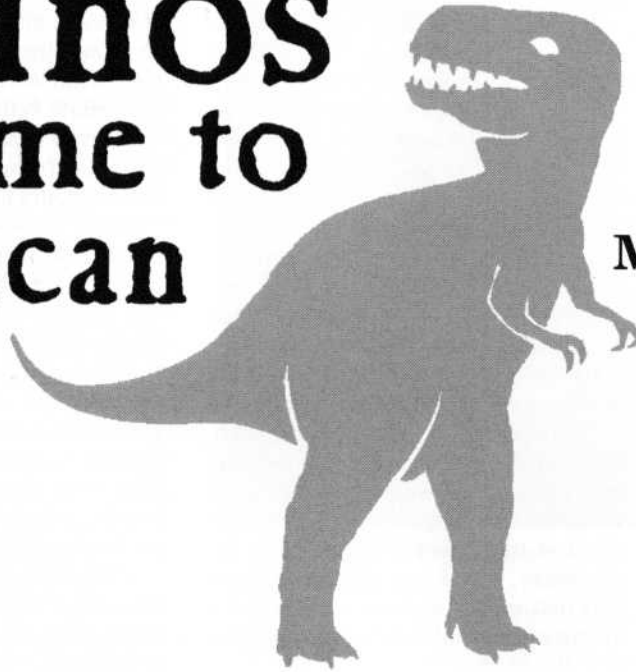


# Dinos come to Duncan



**Enthusiasm for a new Oklahoma Museum of Natural History has transformed this civic-minded community into Museum City.**

**by Anne Barajas**

*photos by Dave Smeal*

**I**f you were to ask people in Tulsa or Enid or even Antlers what they know about the city of Duncan, Oklahoma, they might mention such industries as Halliburton Oil Company or the championship Duncan Demons football team. The notion of Duncan as a museum city probably would never cross their minds.

These days, however, Duncan is very much a museum city; in particular, Duncan is an Oklahoma Museum of Natural History city.

Thanks to the work of its citizens, Duncan is taking the lead in a broad-based, statewide campaign to build a new University of Oklahoma campus home for five million of Oklahoma's natural history treasures. The city's efforts have involved literally thousands of individuals, but Duncan's pace-setting performance began with one person—Glenda Cobb.

Cobb, who is the principal of Lee Elementary School, volunteers as Duncan's community campaign coordinator. She has given countless hours to spread the word about the new

museum to anyone who will listen. Civic clubs, corporations, schoolchildren and town leaders have heard firsthand how the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History will be a resource that Smithsonian experts are predicting to be one of the finest natural history museums west of the Mississippi.

The new museum is being planned as a 190,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art facility. Campaign leaders in communities across Oklahoma are working to raise the remaining \$9.3 million in private funding for the \$37.5 million building and a \$5 million operating endowment.

"Glenda Cobb is a wonderful organizer," says Shawnee civic leader Nance Diamond, who shares the title of co-chair of the broad-based museum campaign with former Oklahoma secretary of state John Kennedy. "The beauty of what she has done in Duncan is getting a lot of people involved. When you do that, the enthusiasm just spreads."

Emulating organizers of the famous schoolchildren's penny campaign in

the 1950s to bring "Judy the Elephant" to the Oklahoma City Zoo, Cobb began by spreading her enthusiasm in elementary schools. She worked with teachers assigned to produce enrichment activities for their students. The result was an entire "Museum Month" in all Duncan elementary schools that included such activities as designing a moonscape and devising a special curriculum unit on the importance of keeping valuable items in a museum.

Horace Mann Elementary School even went so far as to design a mock museum in the school library, complete with exhibit halls named for the collection areas in the new state museum: the Hall of Natural Life, the Hall of Ancient Life and the Hall of Cultural Life. Duncan Mayor Phil Leonard and other city dignitaries were special guests at a ribbon-cutting ceremony and proudly were shown the students' handiwork, Cobb says.

"The kids brought 'artifacts' from home," she remembers fondly. "There were old reading glasses that had belonged to a grandparent, books that

were special to the students, even tools from their garages."

Duncan elementary schools also were the first to receive special dinosaur banks created and donated to the campaign by the internationally successful Oklahoma figurine company United Design Corporation of Noble. The limited edition, collectable banks, which will be offered to schoolchildren in targeted Oklahoma communities, depict a baby acrocanthosaurus—a dinosaur unique to the state—emerging from an egg. Each class collecting \$50 was allowed to keep its bank as a remembrance of participation in the campaign. Horace Mann Elementary School alone raised \$200 in pennies.

"Every child from kindergarten to sixth grade has been involved in the museum project in some way," says Cobb, an OU alumnus whose daughter Amy is an OU sophomore, a National Merit Scholar and student leader chosen for such honors as the President's Leadership Class.

Older Duncan students also got into the museum act. The Duncan High School Leadership Class made personal appearances in classrooms to pitch the museum project to students and sell some 100 special-edition Old School T-shirts, designed by Harold's Stores of Norman. The proceeds from the T-shirt sales are being donated to the museum campaign.

Adults in Duncan did their part for the museum effort during a special May fund-raising dinner held in conjunction with the Stephens County Historical Society and Museum. To garner support for the event, Cobb and a group of volunteers made personal visits to Duncan residents who had a known interest in museums and presented them with a packet of information. Many of these individuals later made donations to the dinner fund. The McCasland Foundation of



Duncan, the *Duncan Banner* and local banks also provided funding for the event, while local grocers and long-time OU supporters Tommy and Linda Goodner supplied decorations.

"It quickly became apparent that there were individuals who were very excited about the museum project," Cobb says.



*United Design's Dino Banks went first to Duncan schoolchildren.*

That excitement was apparent at the May 4 dinner, which featured appearances by OU President David L. Boren and Los Angeles Comedy Store humorist Argus Hamilton, a 1974 OU graduate. Ticket proceeds were designated for the Stephens County Historical Society and Museum, with other donations earmarked for the Oklahoma Museum of Natural History. The dinner raised nearly \$6,000 for the state museum and \$4,500 for the Stephens County museum.

Diamond and Kennedy agree that Duncan serves as a model for communities across Oklahoma—from Afton to El Reno—that are involved in the

yearlong campaign, scheduled for completion in the spring of 1996.

"One of the exciting things about the project is that everyone will have an opportunity to become involved, from the youngest schoolchild to the chairman of the board," says Kennedy. "We want the entire state to have a feeling of ownership and to help support this effort."

"I think Duncan has set a wonderful example in getting the whole community excited and aware of the museum," Diamond adds. "They have created a good deal of awareness, and I would like to see that momentum continued all over the state."

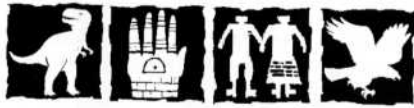
"It is an easy sell," Cobb insists. "It is so easy to excite people about the Oklahoma Museum of Natural History project. They can't believe that we are actually going to have something that incredible in Oklahoma."

Cobb has noted a keen interest in the fact that most of the museum's artifacts relate directly to the state and its people. And, she adds, many of those who have become interested in the campaign had no idea Oklahoma's natural history treasures are in peril. The museum's collections are scattered among 10 buildings on

the OU Norman campus; many artifacts are stored in wooden World War II barracks or horse stables.

"You talk about all the collections at the museum, and then people hear that the local fire marshal said the buildings would burn in less than seven minutes. It just amazes people that priceless artifacts are stored in such condition. That usually gets their attention."

Cobb finds that middle-school students usually enjoy hearing about birds and other natural history collections in the museum, and high school students want to learn about collections that relate to Oklahoma and



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American Indian history. But the museum’s paleontology collections are a sure bet to get the attention of elementary school students.

“It’s just extraordinary,” she says. “They love to hear about dinosaurs.”

She recalls one elementary classroom visit during which she showed clips from the movie “Jurassic Park” to represent dinosaurs in the museum’s collections. Cobb put the wrong name to one species and quickly was corrected by an entire room of young dinosaur experts. But she redeemed herself when she pointed out that the movie’s vicious, slashing velociraptors actually existed in prehistoric eastern Oklahoma.

“You should have seen their little faces when I told them, ‘That didn’t



*RIGHT: At the May 5 volunteer recognition dinner for the state-wide Sam Noble Museum of Natural History campaign, Duncan coordinator Glenda Cobb, center, with her daughter Amy, a 1994-95 member of OU’s President’s Leadership Class, visit with McCurtain County campaign coordinator Jone Kendrick, Idabel, left.*



*TOP: OU President David L. Boren, right, greets Duncan supporters of the museum project, Kim and Dennis Jett, at the reception preceding the benefit dinner. Dennis Jett is president of Oklahoma National Bank, one of the institutions sponsoring the Dino Bank drive in Duncan.*

*RIGHT: OMNH Director Michael Mares, left, was on hand before the museum dinner to point out special features of the architect’s model to Duncan businessman Lloyd Pace, right, and his wife, Albernice.*





Enrichment teacher JoAnn Pierce and her class at Duncan's Horace Mann Elementary School transformed the library into their own natural history museum, using the OMNH model to guide their study of ancient, cultural and natural life and the workings of a real museum.



happen across the ocean somewhere. Oklahoma was the land of the dinosaurs.' ”

Adults get equally excited about the museum's paleontology collections, which rank in the top 12 for the nation. Especially intriguing is a proposed display for one of the collection's greatest treasures: the remains of the world's largest apatosaurus, or brontosaurus. The museum's specimen, which until this decade went unidentified and still was wrapped in 1930s newspapers, was probably 90 feet long, 30 feet tall and weighed 40 tons. Exhibit designers hope to build the new museum's apatosaur exhibit next to a glass elevator, so that passengers actually can travel up the height of the great animal.

“I tell people, ‘Imagine seeing that through the eyes of a third grader,’ ” Cobb says. “That gets lots of ‘oohs’ and ‘aahs.’ They can really see themselves taking their children and grandchildren to the museum. I tell them, ‘You’re not going to have to go to Denver or New York to see this. It’s going to be in Norman.’ ”

The museum is especially important to a rural state like Oklahoma, Cobb maintains. The museum has an extensive series of traveling exhibits that has been seen in nearly every Oklahoma county, as well as numerous other states. For many children, the Oklahoma Museum of Natural History is the only natural history museum they will ever visit. For that reason alone, Cobb believes the museum campaign deserves statewide enthusiasm and support.

“This museum has so many educational benefits to our state,” she says. “Not every child can get to the Smithsonian, but any child in Oklahoma can get to Norman.”



Inspecting the dinosaur skeleton models in the “Hall of Ancient Life” are the curators of the Horace Mann exhibit, Lindsey Jones, left, Jennifer Rush and Jeff Postlethwaite.

More information on the museum's collections and the role individuals and communities can play in the campaign is available from the OU Office of Development, 339 West Boyd, Room 118, Norman, OK 73019-5142 or by phoning (405) 325-3701.