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### Gateway Science Museum getting close to completion

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Slowly and methodically, a place for history is being built on The Esplanade. Visitors can walk through time, whisk by a representation of the Sacramento River Delta, look up at birds that frequent the Northern California sky and soak up information at the outdoor amphitheater.

The Gateway Science Museum (known formerly as the Northern California Natural History Museum) will be a 9,700-square-foot educational facility next to Bidwell Mansion on The Esplanade.

Construction of the main building and grounds is on schedule to end this month. After that, exhibit designers will take over to prepare the facility for the public in the fall.

It's been a long process for organizers of the project, who have been raising funds for years while holding educational programs elsewhere, including the Museum Without Walls lectures held since 2003. Even without a structure, the "museum" has also been holding family nature walks and other educational events.

Now it's time to have something more concrete.

A recent tour of the facility found the place shaping up. While piles of dirt and building materials were still being moved from place to place, the main structure has taken form.

Debra Smith, of Anova Architects in Sacramento, and Erik Elliot-Duke, project engineer for Otto Construction of Sacramento, pointed out the highlights of the regional educational facility.

As visitors approach the entrance to the museum, a wall on the east side creates a "time walk" that outlines historic eras of time and puts Chico's founding history in perspective.

Another section outside the building is taking shape to be a representation of the delta. Larger rocks have been assembled to illustrate the waterways, and plants that are native to the delta will be installed.

An amphitheater has been built outside, with a half-circle of seating and an area where presentations, including video, can be made.

Inside, the features also are representative of the natural history features of Northern California.

The lobby room was made to be shaped like a volcano, Smith explained, with tall walls and a round opening with a 12-sided skylight.

To the left, inside the entrance, will be a gift shop for the museum.

In the interior of the building is a long, narrow room with natural light provided by north-facing windows.

This will be the "flyway," Smith said. The tall ceilings will allow both resident birds and migratory birds present in the valley to be displayed above visitors' heads.

The "discovery room" will be a highlight for children who visit the museum. Glass-encased displays have been built into the walls to show off things such as snakes and reptiles, Smith explained. Within this room will be a smaller work area, separated by glass, where students from Chico State and helpers at the museum can work on projects, allowing visitors a clear view.

Also in the discovery room, carpet-like material will be placed on certain walls, so that Velcro can be used to affix educational materials.

Lurking farther into the museum-to-be is a larger room that will include permanent exhibits. The space will be controlled for humidity to keep an even moisture for protection of the displays.

Smith said she estimates the permanent exhibits will be changed every few years.

Other space is for running the building, such as office space, a meeting room, bathrooms, storage and heating and cooling.

Leaders for the museum chose to make the building LEED Certified, meeting standards for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design standards by the U.S. Green Building Council.

Chico State University, and other public agencies such as Butte College, have been following the guidelines for most recent new construction.

The guidelines set standards for environmentally sustainable construction. For example, toilets and sinks will have low-flow fixtures, designed to save up to 40 percent in water use. Drip irrigation outside will also save on water. Other features include a white roof that will reflect heat.

Part of the LEED certification is documenting that construction meets certain standards. Elliott-Duke said the project has reached more than 80 percent recycling of the material that must be thrown away. This involves sorting and transporting excess materials to appropriate places.

Pavers for the front of the building are designed to be reflective, for low heat in Chico's hot summers.

During the tour, a pile of pavers were assembled near the museum entrance. Names of contributors to the museum will later be engraved on the pavers.

The parking lots will include pervious concrete that allows water to seep into an underground retention basin, rather than running off.

Native plants have been chosen to reflect different regions of the area, Smith explained.

Another phase of development is planned for the future, which could add an additional 8,000 square feet. The main construction is schedule to be completed June 30. Then an exhibit designer will come in for preparations before the final opening.

The project budget is \$4.2 million. A Proposition 40 grant provided \$3 million, and Chico State donated the land in 1999. The remainder of the funding has come from local contributions.

The impetus for the museum began in 1996.

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[Photo:](#)

[Construction on the Gateway Museum continues last week.](#)

[\(Bill Husa/Staff Photo\)](#)

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