

A-State to celebrate Year of Science 2009 with several activities



Aldemaro Romero | Special to The Sun

Arkansas State University students mount the skeleton of a common porpoise that they dissected, and that will be part of the exhibits planned for 2009.

Celebration will include whale dissection

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SPECIAL TO THE SUN

JONESBORO — The year 2009 is going to be a whale of a year at Arkansas State University. Along with the celebration of its own centennial, faculty and students at ASU will be celebrating the Year of Science 2009 with a variety of activities including a whale dissection. This celebration is a nationwide initiative by the Coalition for the Public Understanding of Science (COPUS) to engage the American public in activities that will stimulate their interest in and appreciation of the process of science.

COPUS is made of a group of universities, scientific societies, science advocacy groups, science media, science educators, businesses and industry having as its goal a greater public understanding of the nature of science and its value to society. Institutions that are members of this coalition include Yale University, University of California, University of

Connecticut, Louisiana State University, the National Academy of Sciences and the American Institute of Biological Sciences.

ASU is the only member from Arkansas and one of the few from the Mid-South.

The year 2009 was selected to mark the anniversary of seminal events in the history of science such as the 200th anniversary of the birth of Charles Darwin and Abraham Lincoln, founder of the National Academy of Sciences, the 150th anniversary of the publication of Darwin's "On the Origin of Species," and the 400th anniversary of the publication of Johannes Kepler's first two laws of planetary motion.

A number of activities are being prepared nationwide to engage the public in science and improve public understanding about the nature and processes of scientific inquiry. ASU is preparing its own slate of events to join the celebration. One of them will be an exhibit of the history

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the biological collections that have been kept at the university. These collections have been built over a 60-year period and are made up of more than 500,000 specimens of plants and animals from around the world.

Another activity associated with this exhibit is the bringing of a carcass of one of the gray whales that regularly strand and die off the coast of California every year, dissecting the animal on the grounds of ASU, and then mounting of the skeleton for public exhibit. ASU has received approval from the federal government to do this. Marine mammals are federally protected by the Marine Mammal Protection Act, so federal permit is required. The exhibit will take place at the ASU Museum.

Museum Concepts, a top exhibits firm located in Ar-

lington, Va., has been retained to design the exhibit. The list of clients of this firm includes The Smithsonian Institution and the National Geographic Society. A proposal to the National Science Foundation is being put together in order to obtain funding for this and other activities.

Other events being planned include conferences and public presentations about the hot scientific themes of our times and will include experts from all over the United States. ASU will also begin a minor on the history and philosophy of science.

Numerous faculty members of Arkansas State will also participate in this celebration with talks about their research and new frontiers of science and all these activities will be open to the public.

The overall objective of these efforts is that a general public with an understanding and appreciation of the na-

ture of science is a prerequisite for a skilled workforce able to compete in a knowledge-based global economy, able to make informed decisions about relative risks such as medical treatments and other quality of life factors, and prepared to engage in public policy discussions involving science and technology.

This yearlong celebration will highlight the progress made at ASU in the last few years in diverse areas of science and technology as a university with an increasing research profile.

For more information contact the ASU Department of Biological Sciences at biology@astate.edu.

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