

THE SACRAMENTO BEE



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Science museum turns 60, looks to expand its universe

BY GINA KIM
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Moon rocks are taking the place of diamonds in the 60th birthday celebration of the Discovery Museum Science & Space Center, and the gift is still more than two years out – a new home 10 times larger than its cramped quarters along Auburn Boulevard.

But the modest Sacramento museum continues the orbit it has followed the past six decades, teaching tens of thousands of adults and children every year about scientific topics including animals, archaeology and space.

"Teachers have their standards for math and reading," said Beth Callahan, the museum's director of marketing and development. "Sometimes they just run out of time for science."

And that time constraint has left Sacramento-area fourth- through eighth-graders in the moon dust when it comes to scientific literacy, said Callahan as she offered up this number: California students rank 49th among the 50 states in science competency, with those locally falling in the lowest 25 percent.

The Discovery museum now serves 80,000 people a year at its 10,000-square-foot location and 10,000 people in its outreach programs with 43 lesson plans that range from weeklong summer camps to one-hour activities.

It will be able to offer astronomically more when it becomes the Powerhouse Science Center and moves in late 2013 into a three-building, riverfront facility in downtown Sacramento, anchored by the historic 1912 PG&E building on Jibboom Street.

The goal of the new facility will be to demonstrate how science touches almost every aspect of life including the environment, green technology, robotics, space and wildlife, said Ray Burnell, who will head up education programs.

"Science is not just a way of reasoning, but imagining something greater," he said.

The museum began as a



Bryant Owino, 9, of Elk Grove, top right, pilots a space shuttle simulator with Tariq Bishop, also 9, at the Discovery Museum Science & Space Center on Saturday. At left, Joshua Brown, 2, tries the moon rover.

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IF YOU GO

WHAT: The Discovery Museum Science & Space Center is currently showing "Space Quest! An Exhibit About Science & the Solar System," and offers hands-on learning for all ages.

HOURS: Noon to 4:30

p.m. Tuesday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. weekends

WHERE: 3615 Auburn Blvd., Sacramento

COST: \$3-\$5 weekdays, \$4-\$6 weekends

INFORMATION: (916)808-3942, www.thediscovery.org

permanent exhibit sponsored by the Junior League of Sacramento at the 1951 California State Fair, moved to a house in south Sacramento a few years later, and settled at its current 14-acre site in 1976.

A \$1 million annual operating budget – fueled by com-

munity and corporate grants, school programs, admission and membership fees – keeps the museum's planetarium, free art projects and talking robot named Cosmos going, Callahan said.

But the current building has proved itself to be a black hole, requiring that the mu-

seum close for two weeks every year to switch out exhibits, restricting displays because of the 10-foot ceilings, and juggling finite power.

"When the electricity goes off, we unplug something," said Callahan. "We're really limited here."

That didn't stop 5-year-old Erik Homan on Saturday as he watched electricity move up a Jacob's ladder and an electric current travel through a plasma sphere.

"At school, they see things on the board, but here they actually get to touch it," said his mother, Donna Homan, of Sacramento. "And it beats watching SpongeBob."

Call The Bee's Gina Kim, (916) 321-1228.