

The Zuhl Geological Collection: A Dino-mite Publicity Initiative

New Mexico State University Library, December 29, 2000



NEEDS ASSESSMENT

COMMUNITY SERVED: Since 1890, the **New Mexico State University Library** has been the primary provider of the scholarly information and knowledge required for high quality teaching, learning, research and service at New Mexico State University (NMSU), New Mexico's land-grant university. The Library serves a **student population of over 15,000 and is the premiere research library serving the needs of over a million residents of the borderland** of southern New Mexico, west Texas, and northern Mexico.

PROCESS: In 1996-1997, forty members of the Library administration and staff and forty members of the campus and public communities met in a participative process that generated, discussed, analyzed, and finally recommended a Library Strategic Plan for 1997-2002. The Library's boilerplate copy from 1998, based on the strategic plan and used for development and publicity purposes, indicated that the yet-unnamed New Library:

*"...completed in 1992, focuses on the humanities, arts, and social sciences, and serves as a busy undergraduate library.... One strategic initiative that will implement the goals in the Library's 1997 strategic plan is **obtaining a donor for our 'Name the New Library' opportunity**.... As the Library, like NMSU, begins its second century, **a naming gift for the New Library is an excellent investment toward high quality library services for the students and faculty of NMSU and the larger statewide, regional and international community that we serve.**"*

Little did the Library know how soon its dream would become reality – and how soon a dinosaur would become the most popular attraction on campus — **the “signature” visual for a Library that needed a less generic name and a more distinctive identity!**



PLANNING

As the Library entered the new century, it promptly received the opportunity to conduct a **publicity campaign complete with “signature” visual relating to a naming gift for the New Library**. In January 2000, the Library received the good news that a local couple was interested in making a major donation to the university. Together, the Advancement Office and the Library organized a dry-run tour and then the actual very low-profile tour of the new Library for the prospective donors.

The donors, Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Zuhl, who had moved from Manhattan to Las Cruces to retire, were looking for a public building to display their world-class private collection of 1000 geological specimens, including petrified wood, invertebrate and vertebrate fossils, and minerals and rocks. In addition to their private collection, the Zuhls previously operated a geological gallery on Madison

Avenue in New York City. The bulk of the Zuhl Geological Collection consists of **petrified wood from three regions in the American West** from the Late Triassic Age (220 million years ago) and the Early and Middle Tertiary Ages (20-40 million years ago). Fossils from all over the world, including trilobites, corals, ammonites, insects, and fishes, are also well represented. **The fossil collection includes “Stan,” a cast of a Tyrannosaurus Rex skull, named after its discoverer.** High quality mineral and rock specimens from all over the world, including many large ground and polished spheres, are also represented. All parties agreed that **a university in the U.S. West was the perfect campus to house and the New Library the perfect place to showcase this extraordinary collection.**

In March 2000, the Zuhls pledged a donation of \$3 million to NMSU through an irrevocable provision in their estate plans as a naming gift for the New Library. The Library will receive 75% of the earnings of the endowment to spend with no strings attached. **The Zuhl Library also houses and showcases the Zuhl Geological Collection, which is valued at \$400,000.**

The formal acceptance of the Zuhl gift by NMSU’s Board of Regents of the largest gift in the university’s history was an event that generated substantial media coverage in the local newspapers and television.

TARGET AUDIENCE: The primary target audience was the **university campus community**, with secondary audiences **of Las Cruces residents and the regional public and library communities.**

GOALS: Having achieved its **first goal of receiving a naming gift**, the Library’s second goal was to **incorporate a focus on the gift and the unusual collection into Library public relations efforts through the following objectives** 1) Honoring the donors with public recognition, 2) maximizing the educational potential of the collection by mounting an educational display, 3) attracting people to the Library, and 4) capitalizing on the opportunity for additional library and campus publicity efforts.

OBJECTIVES MEASURABLE in quantitative terms for the second goal included: **1) Honoring the donors with public recognition.** The Library and Advancement Office planned a naming celebration, consisting of an unveiling ceremony, program, and elegant reception, as well as the debut of an educational display, to be held on June 16, 2000, in Zuhl Library. **2) Maximizing the educational potential of the Zuhl Geological Collection by mounting an educational display.** Dr. Greg Mack, a professor in NMSU’s Department of Geological Sciences, in consultation with the Zuhls and university and library officials, drew up a preliminary long-range plan for an educational display of the collection in the Library. **3) Attracting people to the Library.** The Library planned to compare gate counts for Zuhl Library for July 1999 and July 2000. **4) Capitalizing on the opportunity for additional Library and campus publicity efforts.** The Library planned to incorporate the naming gift and geological collection into ongoing publicity efforts centering on Zuhl Library’s new name and identity.

PUBLIC RELATIONS STRATEGIES AND COMMUNICATION TOOLS: Visuals: All publications, decorations, and displays associated with the naming celebration and geological collection were **designed to reflect the beautiful colors and sculptural qualities of the visually impressive Zuhl Library building and the Zuhl Geological Collection.** Photos were taken by the *Las Cruces Sun News*, University Communications and Library personnel, and other NMSU colleges. A photo

of “Stan” became a logo by removing the background digitally. Community and campus-wide use of images of the geological collection, notably the dinosaur, is freely permitted in a win-win public relations opportunity for the Library and the university.

News Releases: General news releases for the campus community and the public were prepared by University Communications and/or Library personnel and released to the regional media. News releases directed to the library community, articles in *Citations* (the NMSU Library newsletter), and advertisements in the student newspaper and campus directory were prepared and released by the Library.

Electronic Publicity: Virtual publicity was provided by the web version of Library news releases and the Library newsletter on the Library’s home page (<http://lib.nmsu.edu>) as well as the Zuhl Geological Collection web page (http://lib.nmsu.edu/aboutlib/Zuhl_collection/Zuhl.htm), developed by a Library faculty member as an instructional instrument for an HTML class.

Display: The educational display of the Zuhl Geological Collection is an ongoing public relations tool that provides visuals for Library and campus publicity and attracts people to the Library.

BUDGET: *The budget totaled \$13,387.39. An account was set up containing a gift from the Zuhls in the amount of \$6,152.98 for the display and ongoing maintenance of the collection. \$4,237.32 from this account was spent on the initial educational display. The naming celebration had a budget of \$10,000, with funding provided by the Library and the Advancement Office. The celebration came in under budget at \$9,039.55 plus \$110.50 for the editing and duplication of the videotape.*



IMPLEMENTATION

TECHNIQUES, ACTIVITIES, MATERIALS, RESOURCES, MEDIA, PARTNERS, GRAPHICS:
Honoring the donors with public recognition: The **Zuhl Library Naming Celebration** held on June 16, 2000, was celebrated in great style. The date was selected to be convenient for the Zuhls and so that retiring NMSU President William Conroy could officiate. It was the public debut of the display of the Zuhl Geological Collection. 5000 invitations were sent to faculty and staff, the Library’s donor list, the Zuhls’ list of invitees, and the regional library community. News releases released through University Communications electronic and paper publications as well as releases to the media announced the event to students and the campus and community at large.

The celebration, which progressed from place to place on Library grounds and in the Library building, was organized in three parts: First, the palm court outside Zuhl Library was the setting for the naming ceremony. After a trumpet fanfare, the “Zuhl Library” sign was unveiled and the ribbon was cut. The second stage was a program in the Library lobby, where the approximately 300 attendees were seated adjacent to the Zuhl Geological Collection display cases. The third stage was a gala reception in a spacious area on Zuhl Library’s third floor, with a string quartet, madrigal singers and a sumptuous buffet. Geological specimens were also displayed on this floor and tours of the Library were conducted. Brochures distributed included a **printed program featuring Greg Mack’s text on the Zuhl Geological Collection and a development brochure featuring photos of the dinosaur, a fossil fish,**

and a little girl admiring the collection. A video documenting the festivities was shot and edited, and the video and copies of all documents relating to the Naming Celebration were deposited in the Library's Archives.

Maximizing the educational potential of the Zuhl Geological Collection by mounting a display: Joan and Herbert Zuhl, Greg Mack, and a work crew became familiar figures in Zuhl Library during April, May, and June 2000 as they undertook the mammoth job of displaying the Zuhl Geological Collection. **Joan, an artist, was especially effective in displaying the artifacts as the Zuhls regarded them, not just as geological pieces but also as works of art. The pièce de résistance of the display, and the most popular item is "Stan," the cast of a skull of a Tyrannosaurus Rex, which greets users as they enter the lobby of Zuhl Library.** In addition to "Stan," the display was organized in two parts. First, a permanent floor and wall-mounted display of petrified wood was set up on all three floors of Zuhl Library. These pieces are huge and heavy logs and cross-sections of logs, some of which had to be hoisted in with a crane. Cross-sections and tops of the logs were polished with a new technology, developed for this collection, that brings out the beautiful colors in concave and convex surfaces rather than the standard flat polished surface. The petrified wood was complemented on all three floors by arrangements of polished mineral spheres.

The second part of the display was a rotating display in three tall display cases located in the first floor lobby. The initial display was designed to show the variety of pieces in the Zuhl Geological Collection, including beautiful small pieces of petrified wood, minerals, and fossils. Subsequent rotations will showcase different pieces from the collection according to themes enhancing the educational aspects of the collections: Paleobotany, the origin of petrified wood and plant fossils and how we use them to interpret ancient climates; the fossil record of life in the oceans; the fossil record of life on land; the Triassic Chinle Formation exposed in the Petrified Forest and Painted Desert; and the art of geology, using rocks, minerals and fossils in jewelry, sculpture, architecture and other artistic endeavors.

Attracting people to the Library: Both the naming celebration and the display were designed with the intent of attracting more people to Zuhl Library. This was measured by comparing Zuhl Library gate counts for pre- and post Zuhl naming gift attendance at Zuhl Library for July 1999 and July 2000.

Capitalizing on the opportunity for additional Library and campus publicity: The Library used "Stan" as a visual for a development brochure which will soon be in its second printing, for an advertisement on the inside front cover of the campus directory, and for a flyer distributed throughout the campus and community by our Outreach Librarian. Copy and photos relating to the naming gift, the naming celebration, and the geological collection were published in the Library newsletter, and news releases were submitted to the local media and the regional and national library communities. Ongoing virtual publicity will be provided by a Zuhl Geological Collection web page, originally developed by a Library faculty member as an instructional instrument for an HTML class, which will be soon linked to the Library's home page. The Library newsletter and news releases are also available on the Library's home page. The student newspaper independently uses photos of the Library and the dinosaur in various articles. **A very rewarding recent development has been the independent use of a photo of "Stan" on the cover of a new faculty newsletter issued by NMSU's College of Arts and Sciences.**