A Message From the Director
by Susan Weller, Director, Bell Museum of Natural History

Cradle of Innovation
For Science & Culture

Our friends, members, board and staff have so much to celebrate in this 2014 Annual Report. We experienced success at the legislature, engaged in high profile faculty research, and delivered a vibrant year of public programs and exhibits centered on the highly successful Audubon and the Art of Birds exhibition. It was a great year of science discovery and accolades for our faculty. George Weiblen was one of ten University professors awarded a McKnight professorship for his research accomplishments. Curator Bates received a MN Drive grant with colleague Professor Kinkel to investigate the community diversity of soil microfungi and bacteria at Cedar Creek Ecosystem Reserve. Curators published on diverse topics, including the population dynamics of the extinct Passenger Pigeon (Zink), the evolution and diversification of South American marsupials (Jansa), and the dynamic microdiversity of bacterial and fungal communities found in different composting substrates (Bates). And, we are celebrating the legacy of botanical research at the U with the 125th anniversary of the Herbarium and Plant Biology Department this year.

In 2014, attendance was very strong for Audubon and the Art of Birds. This exhibit, made possible by the generosity of private donors and foundations, was visited by 44,553 visitors, a nearly 30% increase in visitors over the past five years. The Resident Artist Research Project, funded by the McKnight Foundation supported local writers and visual artists to work with our scientific collections and faculty to create new works, which were premiered at our Bell Social events. I am delighted to announce that the museum has received another two-year McKnight award to continue this innovative incubator program for local artists.

Museum outreach into the community also increased dramatically in 2014—an increase of 27%. Our portable science lab, the ExploraDome, brought immersive earth science and astronomy experiences to over 11,000 people at destinations (schools, science fairs, teacher conferences) in the Twin Cities and Greater Minnesota. And a pilot partnership with the Early Childhood Family Education program in St. Paul’s Dayton’s Bluff neighborhood is helping us reach and support the youngest of learners!

This positive growth in so many areas underscores our need for a new facility to sustain additional innovation in community engagement and outreach.

As our incoming Advisory Board chair, Lee Pfannmuller notes, we are on the brink of a new era for the museum—we are moving to the St. Paul campus. The new museum and planetarium will be a catalyst for inquiring minds. When our visitors step into the new lobby, they will be immersed in a new environment that celebrates Minnesota’s nature, inspires wonder about our place in the Universe, and promotes youth STEM education through the integration of science and humanities. I look forward to having you there beside me on opening day.

VISION
Our evolving vision is centered on the principle that creativity and scientific literacy will flourish as people are inspired to ask about our place in the Universe. As a result, people will be moved to act and become teachers, researchers and community leaders in environmental issues.
A new era is on the horizon for the Bell Museum of Natural History and Planetarium thanks to countless supporters who rallied for a new facility this past legislative session. There are so many people to thank!

First, success at the state capitol depends on a legislative champion. Ours was Representative Alice Hausman, chair of the House Capital Investment Committee. Representative Hausman not only supported the Bell, she never missed an opportunity to talk to audiences, constituents and fellow legislators about the need for a new facility to better serve the STEM education needs of K-12 students.

Second, legislators need to hear from the public they serve. Our supporters did an exemplary job insuring that legislators knew of their support for the museum and planetarium.

Third, public figures add credibility to the cause. Many community leaders helped but I want to especially thank meteorologist Paul Douglas and climatologist Mark Seeley. Both were vocal advocates, writing editorials and blogs, contacting legislators and allowing us to freely use their names and statements.

Fourth, leadership is essential. Steve Birke, our Advisory Board chair for eight years did a remarkable job. His enthusiasm and executive leadership skills were critical. Indeed, the entire board gave graciously of their time.

Our request for $51.5 million in state bonding dollars took an unexpected twist as competition for the dollars intensified during the session’s final weeks. In response, President Kaler and his staff worked with legislative leaders to address the need for a new facility by offering to have the University bond for the project in return for state funds to cover the debt service incurred by the University. We are deeply indebted to the President for his support in making this happen.

Since it opened in 1940, the Bell Museum building has been an iconic institution in the Twin Cities community, serving as a gateway for audiences of all ages to appreciate and understand Minnesota’s rich natural history. Many of the museum’s supporters have a deep connection with the current facility. The board and staff are committed to retaining those features that are critical to the Bell’s success while at the same time expanding the learning opportunities it provides, enhancing its accessibility, and adding a state-of-the-art planetarium.

Critical work remains to raise the remaining private funds necessary to finish our planning efforts and initiate construction. Never have we been more ready and excited to begin work!

Thank you!

We extend heartfelt thanks and best wishes to Gene Allen and Leni Moore who ended their roles on the Advisory Board this year. While no longer involved in regular meetings, both Gene and Leni remain strong advocates whose advice and volunteerism will continue. Thank you for your many years of guidance to the Bell Museum.

As Minnesota’s state natural history museum, our mission is to discover, document and understand nature, and promote informed stewardship of our world.
State Funds Approved for New Museum and Planetarium

After more than a decade of planning, fundraising and advocacy, dreams of building a new natural history museum and planetarium in Minnesota became reality. The project will expand science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education statewide, enhance the museum’s role of training undergraduates in science education, and provide a public portal to University research.

In May the State of Minnesota approved $51.5 million for the project. Design work is now underway to create a modern museum and planetarium with the programs and amenities that 21st century audiences expect. The new facility will be built on the northwest edge of the University’s campus in St. Paul, a location that is close to both Minneapolis and St. Paul and one that provides good access to major freeways and mass transit.

The key to securing the state funding was the leadership of the Bell’s Advisory Board. “The many hours of volunteer service by our board,” says Bell Museum Director Susan Weller, “led by chair Steve Birke, and co-vice chairs Lee Pfannmuller and Peter Leppik was inspiring. They led our advocacy efforts with an infectious brand of passion and commitment to improving and expanding STEM education.”

University of Minnesota President Eric Kaler’s commitment to improving STEM education for Minnesota was pivotal when the funding reached a critical point in the legislative process. “When the opportunity arose to creatively finance the construction, President Kaler stepped up to keep our project alive,” Weller says. The University will issue bonds for the project and the State will pay off the bonds in installments over the next 25 years.

Perhaps the person most responsible for turning the dreams of a new museum and planetarium into reality is Minnesota Representative Alice Hausman, who championed the projects for over a decade. Weller says, “This positive outcome speaks volumes about her outstanding integrity and vision of Minnesota’s future STEM-related workforce.”

The new museum and planetarium will play an important role on the University’s St. Paul campus—a role that thrills Brian Buhr, Dean of the College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences. “This museum complex will be the gateway to the St. Paul campus and a jewel in providing hands-on experiences to future scientists, educators and natural resource professionals.”

The new museum and planetarium will use its new facility to continue to discover, document and understand nature to promote informed stewardship of our world, but with the added benefit of a 21st century facility and technology.
Bell Museum, St. Paul, Colombian Educators to Create Bilingual Science Programs

A team of educators from the Bell Museum of Natural History, the St. Paul Public School District, and Planetario de Medellín (Parque Explora), a planetarium in Medellín, Colombia are beginning a year-long program to develop science curricula for Spanish and English speakers. The project is funded by a $75,000 grant from Museums Connect, an initiative of the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs administered by the American Alliance of Museums. Through Museums Connect, a people-to-people exchange program designed to foster understanding and respect of different cultures, “Stories from the Home Planet – Historias de nuestro Planeta” will connect teachers, their elementary school students and communities in Colombia and Minnesota.

While environmental problems have distinct, local impacts, people in Minnesota and Colombia have common concerns such as how energy consumption, deforestation and urbanization affects water quality, air quality, and the diversity of animals and plants. Using the planetarium technology to foster St. Paul-Medellín conversations, educators will involve students, their families and local communities in a dialogue about how our actions may impact the environment and global climate change. The aspiration is that this dialogue, once begun, can be sustained over several years. “I am excited that we will be co-creating culturally-relevant science programs with our colleagues in Colombia. We will be able to better serve Minnesota’s growing Hispanic population,” says Susan Weller, Director of the Bell Museum and one of the project’s leaders. Minnesota is among the top ten states nationally in terms of Hispanic population growth.

Through virtual classroom meetings of students and teacher exchanges, a series of Spanish and English astronomy and Earth systems science lessons will be created that incorporate the local scientific knowledge and cultural stories of the two communities. The science materials will be distributed to more than 100 international planetariums with compatible software for use in their domes as live, interactive programs. A non-planetarium version for classrooms also will be available. Como Planetarium (St. Paul Public Schools) has agreed to be the first location in the U.S. to test and use the program materials. The STEM Learning Education Center (University of Minnesota) will evaluate the materials effectiveness in Colombia and here in the Twin Cities.

“Winning this competitive grant also recognizes the expertise of all our partners,” Weller says. “This project is an example of an emerging trend—reciprocal public engagement—where teachers, students, educators and the community are consulted and empowered. Together, we and our partners share responsibility to create meaningful science learning in a culturally sensitive context.” The Museums Connect program, now in its seventh year, pairs museums in the United States with museums abroad for a cross-cultural exchange that brings people, especially youth, together to open a dialogue through community projects, partnerships with local or tribal governments and schools and local events.
Funding Recommended for Two Bell Museum-related Projects

A key Minnesota legislative panel has recommended full funding for two projects that would involve Bell Museum staff. The Minnesota Legislature will consider the recommendations in 2015—meaning work on the projects could begin later that year.

Creating a Minnesota Biodiversity Atlas is the goal of a $340,000 project proposed by Bell Museum curators. The online, searchable interface will integrate over 600,000 records on birds, mammals, fishes, plants, and fungi, as well as up to 300,000 high-resolution digital photographs. When completed in 2018, the atlas would dynamically generate species checklists for user defined areas; create distributions of individual species over time and across the state; access a rich library of imagery and species information pages; and assist in specimen identification using interactive keys.

The second project focuses on native bees, specifically wild bees, which are a vital part of Minnesota’s ecosystems. However, we know very little about their distribution, abundance and seasonal activity. The Minnesota Wild Bee Atlas would document the distributions of tunnel-nesting bees, which comprise 30 percent of Minnesota’s bee species, as well as bumble bees. In addition, the project would provide phenologies for individual bee species and develop a statewide group of citizens with enhanced knowledge of native bees. If the Minnesota Legislature approves the funding, the Bell Museum portion of the project will involve training citizen scientists to observe and identify bees at hundreds of locations across the state.

Restoration of Audubon Prints Continues

Restoration of the Bell Museum’s complete set of John James Audubon’s The Birds of America folio accelerated in 2014 due to a grant from the federal government’s Institute of Museum and Library Services and a generous gift from the Martin-Brown Foundation. The multi-year project will complete the restoration and create an electronic catalog of high quality digital images of all 435 prints. The digital images will promote public access by scholars and others while protecting the originals,” says Bell Museum curator Don Luce. The grant also funds the purchase and installation of an archival print storage system, and moving the collection into the University’s Anderson Library’s secure, climate-controlled underground facility.

The Midwest Art Conservation Center at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts is performing the conservation work. The folio was donated to the Bell Museum in 1928 by William O. Winston.

Bequest Enhances Graduate Fellowships

Philanthropists and nature lovers Wallace C. and Mary Lee Dayton established a fund in 1972 to support research fellowships for graduate students at the University of Minnesota. Since the inaugural research projects—“Mammals of Cook County, Minnesota” and “Predatory Strategy of the American Badger”—the Wallace C. and Mary Lee Dayton Natural History Fund has supported more than 500 graduate students as they pursue their scientific interests.

Mary Lee passed away in 2013 and her bequest has accelerated the number of students helped by the fund each year.

For the Daytons, conservation, protection of the environment and enjoyment of the natural world were personal as well as philanthropic priorities. They were birders, avid hikers and pioneers in the development of state parks and trails. The Daytons’ gift brings to life the Bell Museum’s mission to “discover, document and understand nature and promote informed stewardship of our world,” and ensures that the museum’s legacy will live on as part of their own.
Think of a scientist and you’re likely to arrive at an image of someone wearing a lab coat, protective glasses and latex gloves. Or you might think of Albert Einstein on a bad hair day. Our vision of who “does” science needs to expand.

Getting up close with scientists is one of the goals of Saturday with a Scientist, an educational program launched by the Bell Museum in 2013. The program is aimed at kids and adults looking for a hands-on science experience. It has featured more than 20 faculty and graduate students from numerous departments across the University of Minnesota and beyond.

The response to Saturday with a Scientist has been unusually strong, averaging more than 80 people and more recent Saturdays drawing over 100. “I’ve been amazed and pleased by the number of families that have attended and their enthusiasm for learning,” says the program’s developer Katie Speckman, K-12 school and family programs specialist.

“I try to provide lots of different kinds of activities for kids and adults,” Speckman says. “If a family wants 15 minutes of fun or if they want a longer, more hands-on experience, they can do either.”

During the past year visitors have learned about a full range of biological and physical science topics including: amazingly adaptable amphibians; friction-free motion; how bird specimens are prepared; the sun, space and asteroids; how insects survive winter; and what a day in the life of a food scientist is like.

The guest scientists have talked about their research and explained their daily routines. They’ve also led hands-on experiences like safely handling live birds, extracting honey from a beehive, making ice cream with liquid nitrogen, and observing our solar system and constellations. The Saturday sessions often involve making something—birdhouses or mini-dioramas or jars of honey—that participants can take home.

“I think the public really likes and has fun talking with University faculty and student scientists,” Speckman says. “And both get to learn from each other.”

Based on the strong showing, the Saturday with a Scientist program is expanding in 2015 to two offerings a month. Check bellmuseum.org to learn about upcoming programs.
Peer-Reviewed Publications


Bell Students

In the past year more than 60 students performed vital roles in the Bell Museum. From educating the public on tours of the museum to helping maintain our scientific collections to conducting research, students touch nearly every facet of the Bell Museum. In return, they receive one-of-a-kind work experience and opportunities to contribute to the Museum’s mission. We couldn’t operate without them.

Current Graduate Students

Josh Egan – Conservation Biology – Ph.D (Simons)
Bridget Henning – Conservation Biology – Ph.D (Weiblen)
Peter Hundt – Conservation Biology – Ph.D (Simons)
Bega Inaho – Conservation Biology – MS (Weiblen)
Ashley Smith – Conservation Biology – MS (Simons)
Sam delSerra – EEB – Ph.D (Jansa)
Juan Diaz-Nieto – EEB – Ph.D. (Jansa)
Danielle Drabeck – EEB – Ph.D (Jansa)
Matt Dufort – EEB – Ph.D (Barker)
Josie Griffin – EEB – Ph.D (Zink)
Vinnie Hirt – EEB – Ph.D (Simons)
Tyler Imfeld – EEB – Ph.D (Barker)
Benjamin Lowe – EEB – Ph.D (Kozak)
Amy Luxbacher – EEB – Ph.D (Kozak)
Marta Lyons – EEB – Ph.D (Kozak)
Tricia Markle – EEB – Ph.D (Kozak)
Dakota Rowsey - EEB - Ph.D (Jansa)
Michael Wells – EEB – Ph.D (Barker)
Heather Hendrickson – Entomology – MS (Weller)
Erin Treiber – Plant Biology – Ph.D (Weiblen)
John Vincent – Plant Biology – Ph.D (Weiblen)

Recently Graduated

Hernan Vazquez-Miranda

Note: EEB=Ecology, Evolution and Behavior
Donors July 1, 2013-June 30, 2014

Thank You to the many contributors for your gifts and pledges received between July 1, 2013 and June 30, 2014. More than 600 donors contributed to a year of successes at the Bell Museum. Unfortunately, limited space prevents us from listing everyone. While every attempt has been made to list donors with complete accuracy, we hope you will inform us if your name does not appear as you wish and accept our sincerest apologies. Please call the Bell Museum development office at (612) 624-0089 with corrections. For a complete listing of donors, visit http://z.umn.edu/bellannualreport

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Martin & Brown Foundation
Xcel Energy

$25,000 +
The McKnight Foundation
Expenses

- Administration: $402,019
- Research and Collections: $923,163
- External Relations: $294,625
- Public Programs: $1,228,693
- Sponsored Projects: $164,188
- TOTAL: $3,012,688

Revenue

- State of Minnesota: $1,711,493
- Earned Revenue: $520,344
- Gifts and Grants: $1,412,164
- Endowment Transfers: $154,062
- Sponsored Projects: $391,186
- TOTAL: $4,189,249*

Museum Attendance

- Adults: 17,104
- Senior Citizens: 4,122
- Children: 10,090
- K-12 Students: 24,488
- U of M Students and Employees: 3,804
- Community Outreach: 18,581
- TOTAL: 78,189

* Includes $1,176,561 in multi-year grant funds and/or gifts to endowments