The North Education Center expansion at The Bishop is now open — Explore Our New Backyard!
Building the Best Backyard

What a fantastic, exciting year this has been for the Museum! We launched our new logo and name, The Bishop Museum of Science and Nature, we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the moon landing with special events in our revitalized Planetarium and, now, we’ve opened our new wing: the North Education Center with its cornerstone exhibition, the Mosaic Backyard Universe!

I couldn’t be more pleased to share this special issue of our newsletter, Connections, that is focused on our expansion.

The renovation that we began planning in 2011 and undertook in earnest with the kickoff of our Connect Capital Campaign in 2015 has resulted in new classrooms and the Backyard, a permanent exhibition that is a major new contribution to the educational landscape of the region. We now have a robust way to serve younger children and their families — the students who come as part of school or youth groups as well as the thousands of families who visit from our surrounding communities and as tourists to our region.

In addition, our expansion will have big impacts on our community’s tourism and economic sectors.

We couldn’t have done it without the donors who helped make it all possible, especially The Mosaic Company Foundation, which encouraged us to dream big when we began planning for the Museum’s future. Along the way, others joined in to support our success. We now have the Willis Smith Construction Classroom Suite, which will allow us to expand our programming, including field trips and homeschool classes. The Ralph S. French Charitable Foundation supported the Mighty Oak and the Manatee River Garden Club supported our landscaping.

But we’re not finished yet! Already we’re looking forward to the next phase of our expansion: the outdoor components that will become a part of the Backyard. Thanks to the Founders Garden Club of Sarasota, we’ve already started and have installed raised planting beds, which marks the beginning of our next phase of progress.

I hope you’ll join me in thanking all of our supporters — from the state of Florida and the many private foundations and individuals — the students who come as part of school or youth groups as well as the thousands of families who visit from our surrounding communities and as tourists to our region. In addition, our expansion will have big impacts on our community’s tourism and economic sectors.

What an incredible milestone this is for The Bishop and for the community. On behalf of our Board of Trustees and the many, many staff members who helped bring this vision to life, I thank you!

Bryanne Anne Beas
Chief Executive Officer

A Grand Celebration

The Bishop Museum of Science and Nature celebrated the major expansion of the North Education Center and Mosaic Backyard Universe with a special preview party on Sept. 24 and the grand opening ribbon-cutting ceremony on Oct. 1.
Welcome to our New Backyard!

The elements in the Mosaic Backyard Universe were reimagined from our favorite childhood memories.

1. THE RALPH S. FRENCH CHARITABLE FOUNDATION MIGHTY OAK
   This 30-foot-tall beautiful sculpted steel tree is a masterpiece of mimicry with each bit of bark and each individual leaf hand-crafted to imitate the live oaks found in Florida.

2. THE DIG PIT
   Explorers can dig in and examine the Earth’s past in a search for fossils.

3. THE POND
   The freshwater Pond is home to some real-life Florida natives: freshwater plants and turtles – a pair of yellow-bellied sliders.

4. THE TREE HOUSE PLATFORM
   This discovery platform nestled next to the Mighty Oak’s canopy includes binoculars and a telescope perfect for viewing the realistic solar system in the Backyard’s sky. The Platform is accessible so everyone can enjoy the view.

5. THE SCIENCE SHED
   Take discovery to the next level by using scientific tools to explore the Backyard. Inside, you can also check out Learning Expeditions, backpacks stocked with supplies and tools to help you explore astronomy, biology, engineering, geology and paleontology.

6. THE CARDBOARD ROCKET
   Remember that refrigerator box you used to make your own rocket ship when you were a kid? Ours takes that to the next level using immersive media that allows you to take off on virtual adventures of your own – from viewing the microscopic world around us to the outer reaches of the Universe!
The Mosaic Backyard Universe started with the kernel of an idea: To create a welcoming space where kids could be free to explore, investigate and revel in the beauty of nature and that would set the stage for future discoveries throughout the Museum.

As staff envisioned this new space, they were rooted in the idea that the first place young children are free to explore on their own is often a backyard, neighborhood or park. So they went to work creating the best backyard from their own childhood imaginations: A Cardboard Rocket here, a Dig Pit there; a Science Shed on the other side and a Pond for good measure.

Of course, they also remembered a foundational truth of childhood: The best backyards have massive trees with custom-built tree houses. And so the centerpiece of The Bishop’s Backyard — the 30-foot-tall Ralph S. French Charitable Foundation Mighty Oak — began to take shape. “There are a lot of fabricated trees out there, but we wanted something that was as realistic as possible; something that looked and felt like the live oak tree on the north end of our own campus,” said Matthew Woodside, The Bishop’s Chief Curator and Director of Exhibitions, who helped to conceive the tree and served as project manager for the interior build-out of the Backyard space. “That’s why we reached out to NatureMaker Steel Art Trees. They have a unique process that allows them to mimic nature down to the tiniest details.”

From consultation to final installation, the creation of The Bishop’s Mighty Oak took more than a year, said Gary Hanick, President of NatureMaker. The arboreal auteurs worked with Woodside and other Museum staff to learn about their vision for the tree — its height, its girth, the size of its canopy — then went to work, first on an artist’s rendition and then on engineering plans that would bring their vision to life.

The Mighty Oak is a cantilevered design with a steel and mesh structure fabricated into trunk, limbs and branches built as a series of telescopically interlocking parts initially built at the NatureMaker studios in California, then disassembled, shipped and rebuilt on site. The tree bark is a malleable, slow-curing sculpture medium developed by NatureMaker that was hand-applied to the structure. The silk leaves — more than 100,000 of them — were also made and applied by hand.

The building process included a team of artists, engineers, welders and sculptors. “There were probably 20 people who helped create the Oak,” Hanick said. “We don’t use molds and we have installers on site to finish the trees, to touch everything up and make sure the sections blend naturally. We want to make sure that every tree we design looks like it grew in place.”

From trunk to branches, the Mighty Oak had more than 250 sections — so many that it took two 53-foot tractor-trailers to move it from the studio in California to the Museum in downtown Bradenton. “It’s probably in the Top 10 in size of all the trees we’ve ever built,” Hanick said. And, just like trees in nature, The Bishop’s Mighty Oak is an individual like no other, he said. “From the nuances in the bark and the special drawers that pull open and reveal a secret, to the graceful flow of the branches and leaves, every inch of the Mighty Oak in the Mosaic Backyard Universe represents someone’s handwork. Every tree we build is different, and no two trees are alike. Our whole process is designed to ensure that we’re creating a realistic, seamless sculpture — it’s the magic of what we do.”
Wile the opening of The Bishop’s North Education Center brings the coolest backyard to the community, the cornerstone exhibition in this major expansion — the Mosaic Backyard Universe — is more than just a series of neat activities for young learners. It’s a new portal for discovery that allows people of all ages to explore the world around them as they follow their own interests and paths to wider discoveries about the Universe.

In this microcosm of a real backyard, the young and young-at-heart are free to follow their imaginations as they try their hand at paleontology in the Dig Pit, look through the binoculars from the Tree House Platform or find out what secrets the Ralph S. French Charitable Foundation Mighty Oak holds. The youngest visitors also have the opportunity to develop their physical, mental and emotional dexterity — essential elements of early childhood development. “We specifically did not design this area to include typical exhibition components that require reading labels or understanding directions on how to use something,” said Matthew Woodside, The Bishop’s Chief Curator and Director of Exhibitions. “Instead, we designed our Backyard as an open-ended space where different generations of adventurers can let their curiosity guide them as they explore the area. In this way, we’ve provided the community with a unique resource that capitalizes on the developmental benefits that come from early exploration, while at the same time helping to facilitate fun and fascinating adventures for everyone.”

The Backyard is built on the importance of place, change and the fact that life adapts over time. It serves as a portal for people to gain an awareness of natural history and the natural sciences and how the world functions on a basic level. For children who visit, learning these concepts also helps to connect them to the larger experiences they can have in other areas of the Museum — continuing their appreciation for the wonders of science and nature.

The overall North Education Center expansion also allows the Museum to provide more daily opportunities for public programs, expanded homeschool courses and is home to collaborative endeavors with the School District and other public schools, private schools and the Early Learning Coalition. The opening of the accessible Backyard also coincides with the development of some new additions to the Museum’s school field trip offerings. Starting in November, the Museum will offer four different themed field trips for each grade in pre-kindergarten through third focused on:

- **Life Science**
- **Earth and Space Science**
- **Physical Science**

Whether for the youngest learners or high school students, all of the Museum’s field trips are designed to support age-appropriate developmental skills and state educational standards. The newest offerings may also include classroom time, interactive exploration in the Backyard and visits to other Museum spaces. Educators facilitate creative exploration while promoting important skills such as questioning, hypothesizing, observing, recording and communicating.

“This is a developmentally appropriate learning space where early learners can imagine, play, make and share as they interact with interesting materials and possibilities,” said Dr. Robin Thompson, Director of Early Learning Curriculum at the School District of Manatee County.

But that doesn’t mean older folks are left out of the fun. Early reviews indicate they find The Bishop’s Backyard “Wicked Awesome,” “Amazing” and “Out of this World.”

**CONNECTIONS**

**TAKE A LEARNING EXPEDITION**

Have you ever wondered what it was like to be a biologist? Or maybe your sights are set on the stars and you want to explore astronomy?

Now you can explore both — and more — thanks to The Bishop’s new Learning Expeditions.

These special backpacks hold tools and activities for different topics of scientific inquiry — biology and astronomy, of course, along with paleontology, geology and engineering. Because having caring adults involved in kids’ learning is so important, the Expeditions are designed for children and grown-ups to use together. (Of course, you don’t need to be with a kid to use one!)

The Learning Expeditions — which you check out in the Backyard — help spark curiosity and include activities to try out in the Backyard, ways to explore one of the topic areas in other sections of the Museum and special activities to do at home.

The Bishop’s educators have also developed Sensory Scientist backpacks for visitors with sensory differences. They include a Social Story that helps visitors understand what to expect, a Visual Vocabulary with pictures of Museum features, ear defenders, sunglasses, a magnifying glass, binoculars and Museum-themed textured items. (The Sensory Scientist backpacks can be checked out and used throughout the Museum.)
Thank You!

Building the North Education Center and the Mosaic Backyard Universe was truly a community endeavor made possible through gifts from long-time supporters and new friends that helped to transform Bradenton’s much-loved attraction. We want to offer a special thank you to those who supported us along the way through the Connect Capital Campaign...

$100,000–24,999
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$10,000–24,999

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$250–999
The Connect Campaign supporting The Bishop Museum of Science and Nature’s major expansion continues as we enter our next phase, which will focus on outdoor spaces and other improvements supporting our overall campus master plan.

We’re very excited to share the news that an anonymous donor has pledged up to $2 million to triple each donation made to this ongoing Campaign. That means each $1 donated to the Connect Capital Campaign will be matched with $2 and have triple the impact!

If you’re thinking ahead to your end-of-year gift planning, don’t forget that you can make a Qualified Charitable Distribution from your IRA and pay no income tax on the gift. The Qualified Charitable Distribution allows individuals older than 70½ to make direct distributions from their IRAs to qualified charities without having to count the distributions as income for federal tax purposes. The gift may count toward your required minimum distribution (RMD) for the year.

Please contact your financial adviser to begin the process of directing your distribution to The Bishop. Contact the Museum for a convenient form you can use to make your request or to explore your many options for making a difference at The Bishop Museum of Science and Nature today. For more information about making a gift, please contact Development Director Ashley Berridge at ABerridge@BishopScience.org or (941) 216-3457.
New Event Space

A VENUE LIKE NO OTHER

Planning an enchanted wedding, a corporate retreat or a holiday celebration? The Bishop Museum of Science and Nature's newest space, the Mosaic Backyard Universe, is now available for booking. This new space features stunning architecture and all the elements of the outdoors — and you won’t have to worry about the weather!

For more information, booking or to schedule a tour of our venue please contact FacilityRentals@BishopScience.org or 941-746-4131, Ext. 155.