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CONTACT:
Ryan Barber
(276) 666-8659

**VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
INCREASES STAFF**

Museum prepares for October opening.

MARTINSVILLE, Va. (June 15, 2006) – The Virginia Museum of Natural History is actively bolstering its effectiveness by hiring key staff members in advance of the opening of the new, world-class VMNH facility in October 2006. Ryan Barber, director of marketing and external affairs, Nancy Bell, director of development, Michael Moore, development associate, and Zach Ryder, marketing associate, have all been hired within the past year.

Ryan Barber previously served as public relations and marketing manager for the museum before taking on his current position. Barber is responsible for all of the museum's marketing and public relations programs and expanding the museum's institutional identity locally, regionally and nationally. Before joining the museum, Barber worked for Hargrave Military Academy as major gifts officer and as a reporter at the Danville Register and Bee. Currently, Barber also is an adjunct lecturer at Danville Community College where he is an instructor for various English courses. He holds an M.S. in mass communication/media management from Oklahoma State University and a B.A. in communication from Southwestern Oklahoma State University.

"Ryan's exceptional knowledge of VMNH and the support he provided to kick off the capital campaign make him the ideal leader to head our marketing and public relations efforts," said Timothy J. Gette, executive director. "Exceptional communications are critical to help our museum achieve its goal to be a major destination for visitors to Southside and Virginia. I congratulate Ryan on his promotion and welcome this first-class team to lead us into the future."

Nancy Bell takes over a multitude of responsibilities as director of development including securing funds and strategic partnerships for the museum, developing the membership base, and securing sponsorships for special projects. Bell comes to the museum from the Boys & Girls Clubs of Southwest Virginia where she acted as director of grants and communications. She has also served as the grants and public relations coordinator for the Martinsville City School System and as a reporter for the Roanoke Times and Martinsville Bulletin. Bell was instrumental in bringing the Boys and Girls Clubs to the Martinsville and Henry County area two years ago and continues to volunteer on committees supporting the clubs. Bell received her B.A. in journalism from Radford University.

Michael Moore's duties as development associate include grant research, monitoring the new museum's capital campaign progress, cultivating current membership, and managing awarded grants and identifying future grant possibilities.

Previously, Moore worked as a customer service representative for Startek, Inc. in Collinsville, Virginia. Before that, he worked as assistant golf professional at Silver Spring Country Club in Ridgefield, Connecticut. Moore holds a B.S. in marketing from Methodist College.

Zach Ryder takes over the new position of marketing associate. Ryder's responsibilities include assisting the director of marketing and external affairs in implementing all aspects of public relations, advertising and promotions, as well as supporting partnerships in support of tourism. Ryder previously offered freelance public relations services to a variety of non-profit organizations, including the museum. Ryder received a B.A. in communication from Virginia Tech.

"We are delighted to welcome Nancy, Michael and Zach to our team as our

museum prepares for a new era," Gette said. "Along with Ryan's leadership, they possess the talent and expertise we need to build excitement, support and recognition for our new world-class museum. With our very successful capital campaign more than halfway through the \$5 million goal, we are fortunate to have someone with Nancy's experience and knowledge of Southside to lead us into this exciting next phase of the campaign."

Gette continued, "I'm especially gratified to welcome Michael and Zach to our staff. As recent college graduates and Southside natives, they chose to start their careers in Martinsville, just as the new museum will attract young professionals to return to the area."

ABOUT THE VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

The Virginia Museum of Natural History in Martinsville seeks to increase understanding of and appreciation for the natural history of the Commonwealth through education, research, collections, publications and exhibits. The museum – an affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution – is accredited by the American Association of Museums, a distinction earned by fewer than 10 percent of museums in the United States. A new, \$28 million museum currently is being built in Martinsville. When fully completed in early 2007, the new museum will offer five times the exhibit and public space of the current facility.

The museum is a member of the Association of Science-Technology Centers, Virginia Association of Museums, Heritage Preservation, and an agency of the Secretary of Natural Resources for the Commonwealth of Virginia. With 22 million objects in its collection, it reaches nearly 1 million people annually through on-site and traveling exhibitions, classroom outreach programs, the museum's Web site, public events and publications.

The museum is open Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sundays from 1 to 5 p.m. Members are always admitted free. Admission is \$5 for adults; \$4 for senior citizens and youth 12-18; \$3 for children 3 to 11; and free for children 2 and under. For more information about membership or volunteer opportunities, please call 276-666-8600 or visit the museum's Web site at www.vmnh.net.

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