



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### ***Virginia Museum of Natural History Explores New Digs*** *Original building makes way for new, world-class museum.*

**MARTINSVILLE, Va.** (August 23, 2006) – From bold vision to 89,127 square feet of imposing reality, the Virginia Museum of Natural History will make the implausible true to life when the original museum facility on Douglas Avenue closes its doors to the public on September 4 and relocation to the new, world-class facility begins.

A series of key events will take place in anticipation of the Grand Opening on March 31, 2007. Educational programs start the ball rolling when all programs begin at the new Starling Avenue location on October 2, 2006. The one-of-a-kind Education Center will include two grade-appropriate classrooms, a computer and distance learning center, as well as a comprehensive Teacher Resource Center.

“We’re very excited to offer classroom space that wasn’t available in the original building,” said Dr. Dennis A. Casey, director of education and public programs. “These classrooms, along with the tremendous technology that will be available, will make educational programs much more engaging and exciting for students of all ages.”

On October 28, visitors will get the chance to sink their teeth into the special opening exhibit “Chinasaurus: The Great Dinosaurs of China”, as part of the preview opening of the museum.

“‘Chinasaurus’ is a tremendous exhibit for the museum to display when we open our doors to visitors this fall,” said Timothy J. Gette, VMNH executive director. “Not only will it be a premiere event in the region and state, but for the nation, as well.”

The preview opening will also give visitors a first look at the museum’s Harvest Foundation Great Hall, which features a 14 million-year-old fossil whale skeleton and the skeleton of an *Allosaurus*. The museum’s high-definition theater, which is the first site in Virginia to offer CineMuse high-definition, digital cinema, and the William Dudley Walker Lecture Hall, will also be available to visitors.

In mid-December, a special exhibit from China, which features the spectacular feathered dinosaur fossil among others, will join the “Chinasaurus” exhibit in the Special Exhibit Gallery. Cheng Liwei, director of the National Geological Museum of China, which provides the fossils, will make an appearance at the VMNH Grand Opening.

“We are honored to receive these extraordinary fossils loaned to us from China,” said Dr. Nicholas C. Fraser, director of research and collections. “Interestingly enough, a number of the fossils VMNH researchers have found in the Solite Quarry in Pittsylvania County share similar characteristics with the ones we will receive in December.”

On March 31, 2007, the new facility fully opens with brand new, state-of-the-art permanent exhibits. A ceremonial ribbon cutting is scheduled for the day before. When all three permanent exhibits open to the public, visitors will enjoy a completely different experience than what was offered in the original building. “Uncovering Virginia”, “How Nature Works: Rocks”, and “How Nature Works: Life” will offer visitors an extraordinary, interactive and walk-through experience that few museums present.

“You’ll have to see it to believe it,” said Gette. “I think all visitors will get a thrill out of the new museum, but those who are familiar with the original building will be in awe of the new facility and our new, world-class exhibits.”

Plans are to use the original building as a research site for visiting researchers, as well as a storage facility for millions of items in the museum’s collections.

## **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 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. and Sundays from noon to 5:30 p.m. Admission is \$7 for adults, \$6 for seniors 60+ and college students, and \$5 for children and youth 3-18. Members and children under 3 are admitted free. For more information about membership or volunteer opportunities, please call 276-666-8600 or visit the museum's Web site at [www.vmnh.net](http://www.vmnh.net).

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