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UNCOVERING VIRGINIA'S PAST

Exhibit to portray Virginia's Native Americans

MARTINSVILLE, Va. (May 4, 2006) – The Virginia Museum of Natural History will provide visitors with a glimpse into the lives of this region's early inhabitants with the exhibit "*The Dan River People: Virginia's Indians*", opening Saturday, May 6.

Depicting a typical Indian village and a present day archaeological excavation of the same village, this full-scale two-part diorama allows for a fantastic opportunity to learn about the lives of early Native Americans.

An exhibit that the museum has shown before, *The Dan River People* quickly became a favorite for visitors of all ages. "People love it!" said Dr. Elizabeth Moore, curator of archaeology and collections. "It's an ever-popular event." She went on to say that a widespread interest of Native Americans and their way of life keeps bringing people back to view the exhibit.

Using the environment to its fullest, Virginia's Native Americans developed a culture lasting well into colonial times. One diorama depicts their progress from a hunting and gathering culture that lived in temporary camps, to a culture that began living in fortified villages after adding agriculture to their daily lives. The village diorama depicts dates back hundreds of years and allows the viewer an exciting chance to see the many innovative ways these people lived. From unconventional use of amphibians and reptiles in medicine, to novel fishing techniques, the exhibit recreates the fascinating lives of the Dan River People.

The second diorama depicts the same village as a recent archaeological site. While hundreds of years have passed since this village was inhabited, many artifacts remain that the exhibit shows being investigated carefully and methodically. Visitors will get to see the remarkable tools and techniques archaeologists use to piece together the past lives of Virginia's Native Americans.

The Watersheds of Virginia exhibit will accompany *The Dan River People*. This exciting exhibit will help expand visitors' experience of the Dan River and other Virginia waterways.

These exhibits combined will give visitors a fun and exciting way to learn more about Virginia's Native Americans and its waterways.

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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