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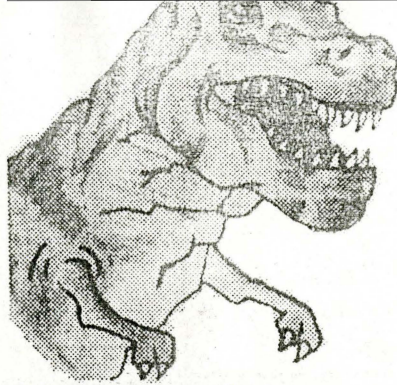
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Breathing life into fossils

\$1 million gift boosts FHSU museum drive

By Mike Berry

Eagle Western Kansas bureau

Fort Hays State University took a giant, dinosaur-sized step toward relocating its famous Sternberg fossil museum in a dome-shaped building filled with life-sized robotic dinosaurs Saturday night.

At a special viewing of the movie "Jurassic Park," the university president, Ed Hammond, announced that a Hays couple had donated \$1 million toward the museum project. He described the donors, Ross and Mariana Beech, as "two of the greatest friends that Fort Hays State University and the Sternberg Museum ever had."

The Beeches, longtime supporters of the school, made their fortune in oil, ranching and banking.

Hammond said that the donation from the Beech family brings a \$7 million fund-raising drive to within \$1.2 million of its goal and that the new museum, just off I-70, could begin attracting more than a quarter of a million visitors a year by the summer of 1995. Renovation of the building is to begin by the end of this year.

It was only natural to tie in the Sternberg announcement with the opening of the Steven Spielberg movie about dinosaurs, Hammond said. "In fact," he said jokingly, "the doctor in the movie who puts the genetic material together to re-create the dinosaurs is named Hammond... but he's a little flaky."

Plans call for the Sternberg collection of 3.75 million artifacts to be relocated from the present cramped, on-campus location to a \$4.5 million dome-shaped building

MUSEUM

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sold to Fort Hays State for a dollar by Chrysler Corp.'s finance arm.

The move will allow more exhibits to be put on display and will increase the museum's visibility at both the national and international levels, said Jerry Choate, curator of museums. The Sternberg Museum already can claim the third-largest collection of flying reptiles in the world but is probably best known for a fish-within-a-fish fossil that shows one huge prehistoric fish preserved forever in the gullet of an even larger fish.

Those displays will have to share billing with the new animated robotic dinosaurs planned for the Sternberg's "walk through time" exhibit, an infinitely safer experience than that depicted in "Jurassic Park," in which the dinosaurs sometimes devour visitors. Life-size re-creations of huge dinosaurs will appear in natural settings, roaring and moving as visitors pass by.

Parts of the new museum will

have to be constructed around the enormous mechanical skeletons of the robotic dinosaurs, and designers aren't sure how many of the computer-controlled creatures will prowl the halls. Hammond said at least a half-dozen dinosaurs will open the feature.