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Dino museum readies for fall opening



By Jocelyn Turner, Grande Prairie Daily Herald-Tribune
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An artist's rendering of the Philip J. Currie Dinosaur Museum. (Supplied)

It's crunch time to get everything completed and ready for a September soft opening at the Philip J. Currie Dinosaur Museum in Wembley.

George Jacob, president and CEO of the facility, said the displays are currently in the production phase, with hopes to have them ready in 32 weeks.

"We hope to see installation commencing in June, and ending by Aug. 15, which is a extremely ambitious timeline," he said.

"There (will be) large casts of completed dinosaur species and there is a considerable amount of AV (audio visual) technology; interactive kiosks, augmented reality stations that will allow you to pan your iPad-like device on top of existing skeletal forms and flesh them out and also visualize an ecosystem around it."

In addition to getting the unique displays finished and installed, there's still some work left to complete on the building itself.

"We have to finish the auditorium, we have to finish the exhibits, we have to have all of our education programs active," he said. "We have to finish the café and the restaurant, we have to finish the Dino Park, which is outside (and) there's a fossil walk that girds the building so there is a considerable amount of work on different fronts that needs to conclude to have a soft opening."

During his presentation to the County of Grande Prairie council on Monday, Jacob also noted the cost estimates to the run the museum is projected at about \$1.5 million a year.

“(That’s) on average. That includes you know, your fixed costs and your variable costs, payroll, utilities, administrative costs and then costs associated with inventory and so on,” he said.

“The first year is going to be interesting because we have about three-and-a-half (to) four months before it closes for Christmas and depending on what the weather conditions are going to be in November and December, that will kind of dictate the inflow of visitation but September and October, we’re definitely expecting full houses, so anywhere between 6,000 to 7,000 visitors a month.”

While all the needed funds to get the museum up and ready to go are in place, Jacob said the Amber Ball would continue to be an annual gala, the main fundraising event for the facility. The next ball, he said, is scheduled for Sept. 26, and will be held every year in September.

“We’re fully funding for all the capital and the asset accumulation (right now),” he said. “Operations is always a challenge but you know, like I mentioned we have some source of revenue including the gift shop, ticket sales and programs and facility rentals, special events and so on. They all kind of add to the revenue target.”

For more information about the museum, visit www.curriemuseum.ca.

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