



ENTERTAINMENT LOCAL

Museum Matters

Envisioning the future



By George Jacob, Museum Matters
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An artist's rendering of the Philip J. Currie Dinosaur Museum. (Supplied)

This is the first of the columns that will appear regularly in the DHT offering insights into museum practice and principles of extended civic reach.

With Grande Prairie communities coming together to support the creation of a world-class museum, the Peace region has entered the realm of the futurists. Museums, galleries and similar destinations of non-formal learning, experimentation and visual repositories of continuing education, are vehicles of economic regeneration and inspiration in civil societies. Often leisure destinations attract not only tourists, but other investment in allied sectors and industry keen on offering the quality of life that such an ambience offers.

Translating an idea into reality is a significant leap of sorts that most often than not begins with identifying an architect to construct a shell. Culling research, Interpretive planning and exhibit design are integral to the master plan that enables experiential learning, factoring in sustainability, operations planning, programming, education, outreach and other elements vital to the long-term viability of the museum. The 14-month construction cycle that won it four awards for design, engineering and construction in the last four months, coupled with an 8-month exhibit design-build-installation process when completed this fall, will make the Philip J. Currie Dinosaur Museum the fastest museum project in Canadian history! It is indeed an ambitious target with little margin of error.

While many in the community have seen the building from the inside and taken tours of the inside space, few have been exposed to the specifics of content and exhibits being envisaged in the galleries. While relatively much smaller than other provincially-funded museums, the County of Grande Prairie, the City of Grande Prairie, MD of Greenview and numerous other corporate as well as individual stakeholders have invested wisely in their collective quality of lives in the region. The intangible benefits that will shape the minds of thousands of school children in years ahead is on the path of realization as we inch closer to its completion.

Apart from being a visual landmark, the museum provides significant investment opportunities that could have tremendous public and corporate interest. Examples of such initiatives with investment potential, urban planning, community revitalization and econometrics of success abound in various parts of the globe and quite poignantly, right here in the province with the Royal Tyrell Museum at Drumheller galvanizing a quiet hamlet. These institutions have the power to influence trends, shape policy and engage diverse audiences in informative ways in the universal human quest for knowledge.

Apart from generating direct revenues, employment, e-commerce, tourism, hotel, transportation, restaurant investments, real estate, retail and rentals, the museum has the potential to serve as a symbol for strategic presence in the region that has national and international significance. A working formula that offers a combination of tax incentives for donors, contributors, researchers, publishers and philanthropists, can harness gains towards a higher societal purpose. Such an investment in the non-profit sector has the ability to contribute to the world of science, strengthening our social fabric and triggering the need for infrastructural development, offering new destinations for audiences looking beyond the conventional.

Museums are cradles of imagination where visitors come in contact with material evidence of our heritage, our explorations and our ingenuity as inventors and innovators. Without Imagination there is no creativity and without creativity there is no economic driver, resonating the words of the great philosopher Immanuel Kant (b.1724) who once said, "experiment without theory is blind, theory without experiment is just a mere intellectual play."

– George Jacob is President and CEO of the Philip J. Currie Dinosaur Museum

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