Carnegie Museum of Natural History Launches Center for Lifelong Science Learning with Grant from PNC Foundation

Center to study how people learn about science

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania … A $1 million grant from the PNC Foundation, which receives its principal funding from The PNC Financial Services Group, Inc., will fund Carnegie Museum of Natural History’s new Center for Lifelong Science Learning. The Center will bring together museum staff and partners from area universities, the National Science Foundation (NSF), and other organizations devoted to science education to conduct research into the many ways people learn about science in settings other than school classrooms. Their findings will be applied in new educational programs and exhibitions within the museum and published to contribute to a growing body of research on the topic of informal science learning.

“Our Center for Lifelong Science Learning will address a nationwide surge of interest in informal science education institutions,” said Sam Taylor, director of Carnegie Museum of Natural History. “Increasingly, these institutions—which include museums—are being acknowledged as critical components of broad-scale efforts to enhance science literacy for both children and adults.” The PNC Foundation’s grant is the largest gift the Museum of Natural History has received since Carnegie Museums of Pittsburgh’s last major fund raising campaign, which ended in 2007.

"Carnegie Museum of Natural History is addressing a critical concern through its commitment to offer the best possible educational opportunities for people in the Pittsburgh region,” says Joseph G. Guyaux, president, The PNC Financial Services Group, Inc. Guyaux also chairs the advisory board to Carnegie Museum of Natural History. “Strong science learning is essential for our nation to continue to compete economically, to combat the issues that threaten our environment, and moreover to nurture responsible citizens. The Center for Lifelong Science Learning is an innovative
way to build the programs and partnerships that will make this region a leader in science literacy and learning.”

As a result of the $1 million grant from the PNC Foundation, the Center will begin its work immediately, partnering with, among other organizations, the University of Pittsburgh, the William T. Grant Foundation, National Science Foundation (NSF), NASA, and Pittsburgh Public Schools.

Among the projects planned for the new Center are a collaboration with Carnegie Science Center and Pittsburgh Public Schools, called “Change Over Time,” covering the topics of evolution and astronomy; and the Urban Climate Education Partnership, an NSF-funded collaboration among seven informal science institutions to research effective methods for engaging urban students in climate change issues.

A National Center for Excellence
“Just as the scientists at Carnegie Museum of Natural History conduct research to generate new knowledge about their fields, the Center will research and generate new knowledge about how we learn about science in the museum,” Taylor said.

The Center for Lifelong Science Learning will be directed by Mary Ann Steiner, Carnegie Museum of Natural History’s curator of public engagement and a national leader on the topic of informal science learning. Prior to coming to the museum, Steiner worked at the University of Pittsburgh’s Center for Learning in Out-of-School Environments (UPCLOSE), the Science Museum of Minnesota, and NSF, where she was program director for Informal Science Education.

Partnering closely with Steiner to develop the Center is Kevin Crowley, the founder and director of UPCLOSE, who received a William T. Grant Foundation Distinguished Fellowship that will allow him to work with the museum over the next two years to organize the Center and establish core partnerships. Crowley has researched and published extensively on the role of museums and other informal educators in learning science as well as on the relationship between these informal educators, schools, and other formal educators. He is one of the lead investigators with the National Science Foundation’s Center for the Advancement of Informal Science Education studying learning in these environments.
“With the Center for Lifelong Science Learning, the museum is redefining its position in the community and becoming an agent of change,” said Crowley. “Museums are sometimes seen as static environments. This Center will connect the museum with a broad range of schools, nonprofits, and community groups in a dynamic way and make the museum the entity to grow the science-learning ecology in this region. You can do a lot of powerful things with that kind of localized learning, and beyond this community what we discover here at the Center can become a model for other communities nationwide.

“I’m thrilled to be working on this project, and, in particular, with Mary Ann Steiner, who is a national leader in museum-community collaborations,” he added. “She’s the go-to person for how museums can form sustainable partnerships that work for all of the people involved—in this case, locating issues that have traction for the museum, scientists, schools, and communities.”

“Science literacy has never been more important, whether confronting global issues such as climate change or helping our region compete in the science-and-technology-oriented economy,” Taylor said. “The Center for Lifelong Science Learning will leverage educational leadership in Pittsburgh with the world-class collections, research, and exhibitions at Carnegie Museum of Natural History to create new opportunities that advance science literacy and informal science learning. This benefits the Pittsburgh region and the whole country.”

**About the PNC Foundation**

The PNC Foundation, which receives its principal funding from The PNC Financial Services Group, Inc. (NYSE: PNC), focuses its philanthropic mission on early childhood education and community and economic development, which includes the arts and culture. Through its signature cause, *Grow Up Great*, PNC has created a 10-year, $100 million initiative to enhance early childhood education and school readiness.

PNC Foundation has a recent history of giving to museums, science centers, and other informal learning institutions. It is one of the inaugural members inducted into the Carnegie Noble Quartet Society, which honors individuals, families, foundations, and corporations whose total contributions to Carnegie Museums have reached, and in many
cases far exceeded, $1 million. With the foundation’s *Grow Up Great with Science* initiative last year, 14 institutions—including the Carnegie Science Center in Pittsburgh—received major grants totaling $6 million toward programming to foster a foundation of science learning for preschoolers. *Grow Up Great with Science* was initiated to celebrate the five-year mark of *PNC Grow Up Great*. More information is available by visiting [http://www.pncgrowupgreat.com](http://www.pncgrowupgreat.com).

**About Carnegie Museum of Natural History**

Carnegie Museum of Natural History, one of the four Carnegie Museums of Pittsburgh, is ranked among the top five natural history museums in the country. It maintains, preserves, and interprets an extraordinary collection of 20 million objects and scientific specimens used to broaden understanding of evolution, conservation, and biodiversity. More information is available by calling 412.622.3131 or by visiting the Web site, www.carnegiemnh.org.

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