

# DISCOVERY



GRATITUDE REPORT

2024



# Mission

Be a catalyst! Ignite our community's passion for nature and science.

# Vision

The Denver Museum of Nature & Science envisions an empowered community that loves, understands and protects our natural world.

Image: reconstruction of the ancient 67-million-year-old landscape of North Dakota with a juvenile Tyrannosaurus rex.







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2024



## Dear Friends & Supporters,

We are thrilled to share the Denver Museum of Nature & Science's 2024 Gratitude Report. As we look back, we do so with immense pride and gratitude for the remarkable achievements we have accomplished together. Here are a few of the extraordinary discoveries and moments of inspiration we celebrated in 2024.

**Discovery of the “Teen Rex” fossil that captivated the world.** After three boys uncovered a rare juvenile T. rex in North Dakota’s Hell Creek formation, Denver Museum of Nature & Science paleontologists led a dramatic excavation. The adolescent T. rex fossil is the star of the Museum’s “Discovering Teen Rex” exhibition and an acclaimed giant-screen documentary “T. REX 3D.”

**In partnership with Denver Parks & Recreation, we completed Nature Play, a highly anticipated four-acre outdoor experience in City Park.** People of all ages are now able to actively explore nature and discover the wonders of Colorado’s natural ecosystems, right in our very own backyard.

**Museum archaeologist Dr. Michele Koons and her team made an astonishing find at Pañamarca in Peru, uncovering a Moche throne room and compelling evidence of a female ruler.** Not only did this groundbreaking discovery garner international news coverage, but it was also the cover story for Archaeology Magazine’s “Top 10 Discoveries of 2024.”

**We received a historic donation from renowned conservation photographer Wendy Shattil, who entrusted us with her life’s work – more than 100,000 images.** Wendy has spent her career, alongside her late husband and collaborator Bob Rozinski, using the power of imagery to inspire environmental awareness and action.

**Our beloved Discovery Zone celebrated its 10-year anniversary.** Throughout the past decade, hundreds of thousands of children took their first steps here into the world of scientific discovery in this incredible space of wonder and awe.



These milestones, discoveries and achievements underscore the profound impact of our collective efforts to expand access to nature and science education. None of this would be possible without the unwavering support of our donors, volunteers, members and community partners.

Your generosity ensures that the Museum remains a place of discovery, inspiration and lifelong learning for all.

With gratitude,



*George Sparks*

**George Sparks**  
President & CEO



*Steve McConehey*

**Steve McConehey**  
Board Chair

# 2024



**YEAR IN REVIEW**

# 2,091,655 PEOPLE SERVED

# ONSITE & OFFSITE 1,314,526 & 777,129

833,641  
visitors welcomed  
into 4 temporary exhibitions



member  
households served  
48,000



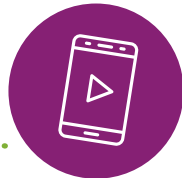
students + educators  
served 200,754

Includes virtual, Curiosity Cruiser,  
Dinosaur Gulch at Cherry Creek Shopping  
Center, Mars Outpost at Colorado Mills  
Mall and science division outreach.

## INSTITUTE FOR SCIENCE & POLICY

1 Cutting Edge National Award  
from the Association of  
Science & Technology Centers

& 16,000  
podcast downloads



77,897 visitors on SCFD  
Community Free Days



108,424  
volunteer hours

20  
teen  
science  
scholars



\$273,834  
in donor funded  
scholarships  
provided

## RESEARCH FIELD EXCURSIONS

30 excursions over 201 days  
in 9 states and 3 countries



97.35 tons of waste diverted from landfill



# Treasurer's Report

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The Denver Museum of Nature & Science is pleased to have ended 2024 in a healthy financial position enriched with new insights and inspiration to better meet the evolving needs of our community.

The Museum welcomed approximately 2.1 million people through its doors in 2024. Our ability to attract and engage an audience of this size is made possible by countless individuals and organizations whose continued support is vital to our mission.

We owe special recognition to the citizens of the seven-county Denver metro area, including Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, Broomfield, Denver, Douglas, and Jefferson counties, the City and County of Denver and the Scientific Cultural Facilities District (SCFD) for their ongoing operational support. SCFD's renewal was approved by voters in 2016. In 2024, SCFD revenue for the Denver metropolitan area remained the same as 2023, a reflection of citizens' uncertainty about the economy.

Support for the Museum's \$53.4 million in operational expenditures came from \$49.4 million in revenues and use of strategic reserves. Overall operating revenues for the Museum were consistent with the prior year.

The Museum continued with important and exciting capital projects in 2024. As part of the Everyone, Everywhere Strategic Plan, we opened the Museum's first-ever permanent outdoor experience, Nature Play, in partnership with Denver Parks & Recreation. We also completed detailed design and specimen documentation for the reimagined Gems & Minerals Hall. In addition, we finished design plans for the East Wing and plaza restoration and renovation project, thanks to the largest private donation in the Museum's history from the Sturm Family Foundation, with construction beginning in Spring 2025.

On the following page, we present our financial results with the strategic activities separated from operations. The Museum received a clean audit opinion from our independent accounting firm.



**Ashley Bassim**  
Chief Financial Officer



**Steve Halstedt**  
Co-Chair, Finance and Audit Committee



**Paul Washington**  
Co-Chair, Finance and Audit Committee



# Year End Financial Report

Year ending Dec. 31, 2024, in thousands

*Excludes DMNS Foundation operating results*

## 2024 Support and Revenue

	OPERATIONS	INITIATIVES	ALL MUSEUM
Admissions	10,528	-	10,528
SCFD	12,508	-	12,508
Gifts and grants	10,648	6,959	17,607
Memberships	5,047	-	5,047
Gift shop and food service (net)	6,529	-	6,529
City & County of Denver	2,259	827	3,086
Program	1,001	-	1,001
Other	927	2	929
<b>TOTAL SUPPORT &amp; REVENUE</b>	<b>49,447</b>	<b>7,788</b>	<b>57,235</b>

## 2024 Expenditures

	OPERATIONS	INITIATIVES	ALL MUSEUM
<b>PROGRAM ACTIVITIES</b>			
Exhibits/Visitor Experiences	12,778	5,982	18,760
Physical Plant	9,657	1,071	10,728
Admissions	3,819	-	3,819
Collections & Research	7,386	725	8,111
Education	5,501	67	5,568
<b>TOTAL PROGRAM ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>39,141</b>	<b>7,845</b>	<b>46,986</b>
<b>SUPPORTING ACTIVITIES</b>			
General and Administration	7,812	680	8,492
Marketing	3,090	-	3,090
Fundraising	1,963	211	2,174
Membership	1,412	-	1,412
<b>TOTAL SUPPORTING ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>14,277</b>	<b>891</b>	<b>15,168</b>
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURES</b>	<b>53,418</b>	<b>8,736</b>	<b>62,154</b>
<b>CHANGES IN NET ASSETS FROM OPERATIONS</b>	<b>(3,971)</b>	<b>(948)</b>	<b>(4,919)</b>

# Teen Rex Captivates the World

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It's not every day that a family hike turns into an international sensation. But that's exactly what happened to the Fisher brothers and their cousin when they went looking for dinosaur bones in the Hell Creek formation near their home in Marmarth, North Dakota. On that day, the youngest of the three boys, Liam, was the first to notice a particularly massive bone laying out on the side of a rocky hill.

The boys had spent years exploring the nearby Hell Creek area, hoping to find dinosaur fossils. While they had come across fossilized plants and cow bones, a real dinosaur discovery had always eluded them. But when Liam called his brother and cousin up the hill to see what he had found, they knew immediately – this had to be something big!

Fortunately, they knew just the person who could confirm their discovery: Denver Museum of Nature & Science paleontologist Dr. Tyler Lyson. Liam lay down next to the bone while his dad, Sam, snapped a photo to send to Dr. Lyson.

Dr. Lyson, who grew up in Marmarth and had spent his own childhood searching for fossils in these same hills, saw the photo just as he was boarding a plane. His excitement was immediate – the boys had finally found a dinosaur. But what kind? That remained a mystery.

By the summer of 2023, Dr. Lyson had secured excavation permits from the Bureau of Land Management and arrived with a team from the Museum,

ready to unearth the fossil. Traveling with them was a production crew from Giant Screen Films, eager to capture footage of a real dinosaur dig. What they uncovered was astonishing: an extremely rare juvenile *Tyrannosaurus rex* – one of only a handful ever found in the world. The cameras were rolling as the team celebrated, capturing the boys' beaming smiles, bursts of laughter and even their mother's emotional tears of joy.

For the next 11 days, the team carefully excavated the fossil, removing layers of rock and preparing it for transport. In a dramatic moment, the specimen was removed from the hillside in a 6,000-pound protective plaster and dirt jacket, then airlifted off the hill by a Black Hawk helicopter. From there, it was transported to the Denver Museum of Nature & Science, where it now serves as the centerpiece of an extraordinary exhibition.

The discovery of the "Teen Rex" sparked worldwide fascination, earning coverage in *The New York Times*, BBC News and even a mention on *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*. This remarkable fossil was featured in the Museum's "Discovering Teen Rex" experience, where visitors witnessed firsthand the fascinating process of fossil preparation.

The documentary film crew went on to produce a 40-minute documentary "T. REX 3D," introducing this incredible find to millions of museum visitors around the world.

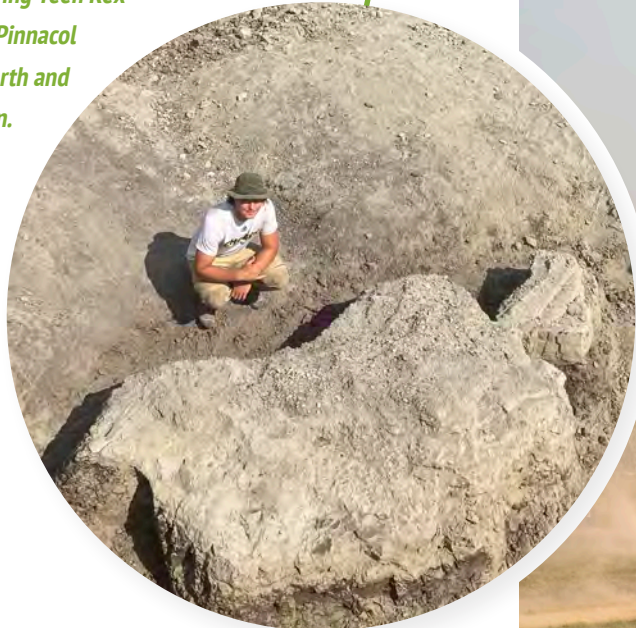
By winter 2024, the preparation team at the Museum had uncovered significant portions of the skull, including the upper jaw and many teeth. The team also uncovered, in a separate jacket, the carnivorous dinosaur's powerful leg and foot bones.

This has been a truly historic discovery that has captivated the world. And it was all made possible by your support.

*Special thanks to our "Discovering Teen Rex" exhibition sponsors: Chevron, Pinnacle Assurance, Montgomery Cleworth and Genessee Mountain Foundation.*



Learn more: Scan to watch the DMNS 8-minute video, "Teen Rex Discovery."



Images: Teen Rex excavation.





# Discovering an Ancient Queen

Excavating rock and scratching through dirt for months under the intense equatorial sun is a challenging endeavor – and let’s be honest, it’s not for everyone. But for those drawn to adventure and discovery, there is a reward to be had through the dust and sweat. This past summer, Dr. Michele Koons and her team of Museum archaeologists and international researchers made an incredible discovery: a Moche throne room and compelling evidence of a powerful female leader in the coastal desert plains of Peru’s Nepeña Valley.

“This discovery opens a fascinating window into the world of the ancient Moche people, who thrived in northern Peru for half a millennium,” said Dr. Michele Koons, director of anthropology. “It also deepens our understanding of gender dynamics in ancient society, suggesting that women held positions of significant power and influence.”

The Moche civilization, known for its elaborate artwork, sophisticated architecture and richly adorned tombs, has long been studied by archaeologists seeking to understand its social and political structures. Pañamarca, an important Moche religious and cultural site, is famous for its murals depicting priests, warriors and mythological beings. In 2024, the research team uncovered an adobe throne surrounded by walls and pillars adorned with murals depicting four different scenes of a powerful woman.

Among the newly revealed murals is an extraordinary depiction of a crowned woman associated with the crescent moon and the sea, overseeing a bustling textile workshop. Nearby, a procession of men carries textiles and the leader's crown, complete with her signature braids. The presence of these detailed paintings, combined with the physical evidence of the throne, strongly suggests that this was not merely a mythical figure but a real historical leader. The discovery challenges long-held assumptions about gender roles in the Moche world and offers new insights into the governance of this ancient society.

Beyond the throne room, excavations revealed an entirely unknown monumental structure: the "Hall of the Braided Serpents." This hall features intricate murals of intertwining serpents with human legs – a motif previously unseen in Moche art. Other paintings depict warriors,

anthropomorphized weapons and a monstrous figure in pursuit of a man. These findings further illustrate the complexity of Moche religious and political life.

These discoveries have captured widespread attention. The throne room was recognized by Archaeology Magazine as one of the "Top 10 Discoveries of 2024," highlighting the importance of this work in reshaping our understanding of the Moche civilization.

Thanks to the generosity of our donors, we continue to push the boundaries of scientific discovery and share the untold stories of the past. We invite you to follow the journey of the Pañamarca project on social media and visit [www.panamarca.org](http://www.panamarca.org) to learn more.

Your support fuels discovery. Thank you for helping us bring history to life!

“

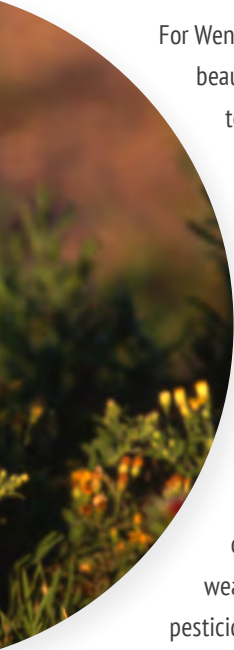
This discovery... deepens our understanding of gender dynamics in ancient society suggesting that women held positions of significant power and influence.





# Connecting to Nature's Stories

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For Wendy Shattil, photography has never been simply about capturing beautiful images. Her goal has always been to use photography to tell stories that move people to action. A renowned conservation photographer featured in National Geographic, Outside Magazine and numerous other publications, Wendy has spent her career – alongside her late husband and collaborator, Bob Rozinski – using the power of imagery to inspire environmental awareness and action. We are incredibly fortunate that her life's work has found a permanent home at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science.

Perhaps one of the most significant chapters of Wendy's career unfolded in the late 1980s and early 1990s at the Rocky Mountain Arsenal, a 23-square-mile expanse outside of Denver that was once considered one of the most toxic places on Earth. Originally a chemical weapons manufacturing site during World War II and later used for pesticide production, the area had severe contamination issues. Despite this, an abundance of wildlife thrived in its remaining prairie ecosystem, prompting the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to enlist Wendy and Bob to document the site's surprising biodiversity.

The duo spent six years photographing the Arsenal's wildlife, capturing compelling images that brought national and international attention to the area's ecological importance. Their work played a vital role in conservation efforts, leading to the site's transformation into the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge

in 2004. Today, the refuge is home to more than 330 species, including bison, bald eagles, prairie dogs, burrowing owls and the once-endangered black-footed ferret. Nearly half a million visitors experience this urban oasis each year.

Shattil's donation to the Museum includes more than 100,000 images, all carefully cataloged with metadata detailing the time and place that each photo was taken. This complete documentation provides an invaluable record of biodiversity changes over time, a resource that could one day be analyzed using artificial intelligence to uncover trends invisible to the human eye.

Laura Uglean Jackson, digital archivist at the Museum, emphasizes the wide-reaching impact of this collection for researchers of the public: "The collection is going to be used widely and by all sorts of different types of users, from the elementary school student that needs something for their assignment to organizations that are trying to improve the environment."

Shattil hopes her images will continue to inspire future generations to engage with and protect the natural world. "All of this doesn't just document wildlife, it tells stories. And the stories connect people to the natural world and hopefully create a deeper understanding of why conservation is important."

Thank you to our donors for providing the Museum with the capacity to accept this incredible donation. We are honored to care for Wendy and Bob's life's work and ensure that it will continue to educate, inspire and contribute to conservation efforts for generations to come.



# Celebrating the Discovery Zone's First Decade

The Discovery Zone is truly one of our most cherished spaces at the Museum. For the past 10 years, thousands of children have taken their first steps here into the world of scientific discovery.

Every day is a new adventure: a young engineer marvels at the forces of water pressure, a team of “astro-tots” embarks on their first mission to the moon and a flurry of handmade butterflies flutter away through a wind tunnel. Here is a place where experimentation, creativity and discovery happen naturally – a place where play and learning are as inseparable as they are in the minds of our children.

The Discovery Zone's mission is simple yet profound: to give children the opportunity to think, experiment and problem-solve like scientists. Every activity – whether constructing model cities, creating art or even handling live insects – nurtures scientific inquiry. Research consistently shows that play-based learning not only enhances education but also fosters a deeper connection to science.

The space simultaneously gives children opportunities for social development. For parents like Andrea Serlet, whose son Henry is a frequent visitor, the impact

is clear. “It provides so much social interaction and turn-taking. It's really helped Henry develop socially.”

The Museum's passionate educator performers are at the heart of the Discovery Zone. Building model cities, painting and coloring, petting cockroaches and facilitating demonstrations in the science kitchen are all part of the daily routine, but most importantly, educator performers allow the children to guide the experience and focus on the things that matter most to them. Educators are also able to form tight bonds with the children and their caretakers – often receiving invitations to birthday parties!

As the Discovery Zone enters its next decade, the Museum is committed to keeping it fresh, engaging and responsive to the community's evolving needs.

“It's exciting to see how proud kids are of what they create here. They start to understand that their ideas and actions matter,” says Nikki Parker, Manager of Adult and Family Programs. “We know the space is successful, and we're excited about ways to enhance the experience in the years to come.”

“

It's exciting to see how proud kids are of what they create here... that their ideas and actions matter.







# Climb, Explore, Connect: Nature Play

Nature Play opened on September 10, as the Museum's first-ever permanent outdoor experience. Co-created with neighbors and built in partnership with Denver Parks & Recreation, this immersive, four-acre environment in City Park invites guests of all ages to climb, explore and connect. Designed to nurture emotional, mental and physical well-being, Nature Play is free and open 365 days a year, welcoming everyone to discover the wonder of nature right in the heart of Denver.

Nature Play is a community vision brought to life. Over three years, the Museum engaged with thousands of voices to shape an experience that reflects the spirit and diversity of our city. The space includes ADA-accessible paths, a restored historic waterway, local artwork and interpretive signage that helps guests connect more deeply with their surroundings. Since opening, Nature Play has created new pathways for meaningful access to both nature and the Museum, strengthening our role as a place where community and curiosity grow together.

**100%**  
of guests said the  
space was accessible\*

**93%**  
of guests felt it  
was full of wonder\*

**97%**  
of guests would  
recommend to others\*

**2025 Winner**

Westword Best Of Denver® "Best New Playground"



\*Information provided by the Department of Insights & Analytics

# Board of Trustees

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The Museum extends its deepest gratitude for your support, which makes science accessible, fun, understandable and meaningful – creating a vibrant Colorado community today and far into the future.

## 2024 Trustees

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Oliver W. Hickel III	<i>*Passed away in 2024</i>



**BACK ROW (L-R)** Terry Fry,\* Bruce Oreck, Jesus Salazar, Rick Ambrose, Roger Hutson,\* Henry Gordon, Matthew Burkett, Mark Spiecker

**FRONT ROW (L-R)** Donna Lynne, Hayden Hirschfeld, Steve Halstedt, Christine Marquez-Hudson, Steve McConahey, Jena Hausmann, Allegra "Happy" Haynes, Hal Logan, John Levisay, Chris Chavez

**NOT PICTURED** John Couzens, Jandell Allen-Davis, Jenny Hopkins, Alice Jackson, Don Law, Naresh Mandava, Susan McIntire, Amy Parsons,\* Kristin Richardson, Leo Tilman, Paul Washington

\*New 2025 Trustee

# Edwin Carter Legacy Society

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Thank you to these individuals for remembering the Museum in their estate plans.

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*\*Passed away in 2024*



# Endowments

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Thank you for supporting these endowment funds that will sustain the Museum for years to come.

Anonymous

Avenir Conservation Fund

Avenir Endowment for Conservation

Bouslog Fund

Collections Fund

Coors Exhibit Fund c/o Adolph Coors Foundation

Education Endowment Fund

Vida F. Ellison Fund

Founders Fund

The Charles C. Gates & June S. Gates Creativity Endowment

Gates Family Foundation Capital Fund

Gates Family Foundation Hall of Life Fund

Robert P. & Mary S. Hackstaff Fund

Wm. R. Hearst Endowed Fund for Education & Outreach Programs

C. Neil & Carolyn S. Norgren Endowment Fund

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Stucky Postdoctoral Fellowship Fund

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Dodge Wallace Endowment Fund

Dodge Wallace Fellowship Fund

Wilfley Fund

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Thank you for enhancing the Museum's research collections with your donations.

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# Scientific Publications



Denver Museum of Nature & Science staff published 39 peer-reviewed journal articles, books and book chapters.

Cicero, C., Koo, M.S., Braker, E., Abbott, J., Bloom, D., Campbell, M., Cook, J.A., **Demboski, J.R.**, **Doll, A.C.**, Frederick, L.M., Linn, A.J., Mayfield-Meyer, T.J., McDonald, D.L., Nachman, M.W., Olson, L.E., Roberts, D., Sikes, D.S., Witt, C.C. & Wommack, E.A. 2024. Arctos: community-driven innovations for managing natural and cultural history collections. *PLoS ONE* 19 (5): e0296478 (28 pp.). <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0296478>

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