



Geology Exhibit Revitalizes HR Museum Hall

By Bethany Martinez

Just a few months ago, taking a stroll through the old portion of Howe-Russell Kniffen Museum Hall felt a bit like turning the pages of a 1970's Gumbo (see inset below), and though many geologists focus their study on the history of the earth, they are also concerned with present and the future. Museum Curator and Associate Professor of Palynology Sophie Warny worried that the outdated displays did not reflect the new and exciting research the Department of Geology & Geophysics has been up to in recent years.

"I see parents and students taking the LSU tour, College deans having their meetings here, bankers taking their summer classes in our auditorium, and the way it was before was not reflective of the current work we do or its quality," Warny said. "So we wanted the hallway to reflect the fact that we are a top tier research institution and ensure that the first impression of the public and undergraduate students is not a bunch of mismatched furniture and panels from 30 years ago."

In 2012 Warny and Associate Professor of Geology & Geophysics Philip Bart began planning a new display outside room 130, one of the most highly-trafficked areas in the building, that could bring geology to life in the eyes of the students passing through. With help from Southwest Museum Services, who designed and built the exhibit, and support from Vincent Guillory and Charlyn

O'Neil in LSU's Facility Services Office, the exhibit was completed in time for a summer 2014 debut.

Panels mounted on the walls explain various topics covered in introductory Geology classes-many conveniently taught in 130- in hopes of attracting new students to the department. Standing next to a panel full of color, Warny explained that they were designed especially with students in mind.

"This one is 'Minerals in Your Life.' So these minerals are in things that we use, like toothpaste or the coloring of M&Ms or the material for your cell phone. So all the minerals we have on this graphic are actually used in your daily life. We tried to keep everything very global," Warny said.

The exhibit, which includes samples and photographs from Geology faculty and staff, also hones in on Louisiana-specific topics like coastline retreat and the oil and gas industry. With Louisiana leading the na-





tion in these fields, Bart explained that Geology should be more present on the radar of LSU students.

“So many people really don’t know about geology. I grew up here in New Orleans, and I had no clue as a kid about geology and the job opportunities that existed—the kind of exciting science that you could do here in the state,” Bart said.

Warny and Bart applied for a Traditional Enhancement Grant through the Louisiana Board of Regents to fund the exhibit. Their project was the top-rated entry, giving them the assurance that it would be funded.



“The displays did not only allow us to offer a much needed new way to showcase our research, the Board of Regents is also helping raise awareness on ways to improve the economy in Louisiana. We hope the exhibit showcases geology as a job and career path to students,” Warny said. “We tried to showcase Louisiana and the impact a career in geoscience can have on Louisiana citizens. It’s a good job to get if you want to live here.”



But the exhibit is meant to do more than just recruit; in what Bart calls Geo-news Alley, magnetic poster-board panels make it simple for students to both show off their work and practice their presentations skills.

“Our students who are giving poster presentations at an upcoming conference can come out here, post it up and practice and take some questions from their fellow students or the faculty,” Bart said. “We wanted to have a place where we could showcase student work and encourage the students to be proactive about what they’re doing and sharing their research with their department. That’s an important part of training as a scientist, being able to present your work.”



The grant also allowed the department to make other additions to the area. New furniture sits outside classrooms for students to relax or study on. In front of the panels, new display cases exhibit fossils and finds from LSU explorations. Across from the magnetic presentation boards, a new geological map and TV for department news and updates invite student interest.

“We really want to show students and visitors that geology is all around them and that in Louisiana, this is an exciting and rewarding career path” Warny said.