

THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION IN THE 21st CENTURY

For more than 161 years, the Smithsonian Institution has remained true to its mission, “the increase and diffusion of knowledge.” In that time, it has become the largest museum and research complex in the world, the most respected provider of museum experiences supported by authoritative scholarship, and an international leader in scientific research and exploration.

Historian David McCullough has described the Smithsonian as a “storehouse of ideas.” It is indeed that and much more. With 19 museums, numerous research centers, and the National Zoo, the Smithsonian stands out as a unique entity, a leader in science, history, art, and culture. As an international institution, it offers the world a picture of America and America a picture of the world. At the same time, the Smithsonian’s pioneering science initiatives and innovative education and outreach programs continue to advance both “the increase and diffusion of knowledge.”

The Smithsonian Institution’s collections, containing more than 137 million objects and documents, are staggering in their breadth and depth. Consequently, by a large margin, more people visit the Institution than any other museum complex on Earth.

Although English scientist James Smithson’s bequest launched the Smithsonian in 1846, the debate and counsel of the Congress helped to shape the Institution from day one — and does so to this day. In fact, the Smithsonian simply would not be able to function without the generous support of the Administration and the Congress.

This support takes many forms, including oversight. In 2007, the Smithsonian moved forward with a vigorous and thorough reform agenda. The Institution’s management and staff rallied around the Board of Regents’ efforts to improve governance. As a result, an aggressive effort to implement the reform recommendations of the Board of Regents is well under way.

The Institution’s overall goal is much more than to fix past problems; the goal is to become a leader in good governance. Throughout this transition period, thanks to its dedicated staff and volunteers, the vital work of the Smithsonian has continued.

The Smithsonian takes its task of serving the American public very seriously, and last year we kept that commitment. During fiscal year 2007, millions of Americans enjoyed the continuing success of all our museums, including the National Air and Space Museum’s (NASM) Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center in Chantilly, Virginia, the National Museum of the American Indian on the National Mall, and, in the renovated, historic Patent Office Building, the Donald

W. Reynolds Center for American Art and Portraiture, which is home to the National Portrait Gallery and the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

Smithsonian collections are a national and global resource that millions of visitors and researchers access each year to explore subjects from aeronautics to zoology. Through its collections, the Smithsonian presents the astonishing record of American and international artistic, historical, cultural, and scientific achievement, with a scope and depth that no other institution in the world can match. Collections are acquired from tropical rainforests, archaeological sites, everyday life, the depths of the oceans, and the heavens above. Currently, Smithsonian museum collections total more than 137 million objects and specimens. In addition, the holdings of the Smithsonian include 1.5 million library volumes, including rare books, and 89,000 cubic feet of archives.

Researchers from the Smithsonian and from around the world use these collections to pose new questions and advance our knowledge. In turn, our educational efforts touch every part of America through traveling exhibitions, affiliate museums, curriculum guides, Web outreach, and much more.

More than 13 million visitors have come to the Smithsonian's National Zoo to see our giant pandas, Mei Xiang and Tian Tian, and their cub, Tai Shan. More people are also coming to see our new Asia Trail — home to seven different Asian species. Work on Asia Trail II, *Elephant Trails*, which is a new home for our Asian elephants, is under way. Scientists at the Zoo have been conducting research on the reproductive biology of endangered species. The results of their work have enabled the successful reproduction of animals such as the golden lion tamarin, the black-footed ferret, and the giant panda, bringing some of these animals back from the brink of extinction. In addition, scientists at the Zoo have monitored the sharp decline of bird populations caused by the West Nile Virus across the eastern United States.

Smithsonian astronomers at the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory (SAO) in Cambridge, Massachusetts, study the origin, evolution, and ultimate fate of the universe. They continue to make breakthrough discoveries, finding new planets outside our solar system. Last September they discovered a new planet unlike any other in that it is the biggest planet ever found inside or outside our solar system, yet has the least density of any planet ever seen. It is bigger than Jupiter but lighter than a giant ball of cork — it is called a “puffy” planet.

Back on Earth, visitors continue to flock to Smithsonian attractions such as the annual Folklife Festival on the National Mall; the National Museum of Natural History's (NMNH) *Hall of Mammals*; and the NASM exhibition, *America by Air*. Although the National Museum of American History (NMAH) is closed for an extensive revitalization, its work continues. Research, traveling exhibitions, and public programs throughout the country are planned, and a

special exhibition of more than 150 iconic objects, *Treasures of American History*, has been installed at NASM.

In addition, the NMNH has announced a partnership to launch an online *Encyclopedia of Life*, with a webpage for each of the 1.8 million known species of animals, plants, and other life forms. The database will be configurable for everyone from students across America to scientists, policy makers, and the general public worldwide.

Scientific expertise and leadership are at the core of the Smithsonian's reputation for excellence and central to achieving our mission to promote the "increase and diffusion of knowledge." The Smithsonian's more than 500 scientists have pioneered efforts to improve our understanding of how the Earth and similar planets were formed, and they are world leaders in the fields of anthropology, ethnology, and archaeology, including the fields of forensic anthropology and human origins. The Institution is also internationally recognized for its expertise in systematics, paleobiology, ecology, and biological conservation, and is uniquely situated to explore the loss of biodiversity and respond to governmental initiatives on climate change, tropical forest conservation, control of invasive species, and protection of endangered species.

Our large and diverse collections of art continue to attract numerous visitors. Some of the greatest works of art in this country — and the world — are at the Smithsonian. The Smithsonian's art museums, the Freer, the Sackler, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, the National Museum of African Art, the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum in New York City, the Smithsonian American Art Museum and its Renwick Gallery, and the National Portrait Gallery, collectively, are the fourth most visited art complex in the United States. Hundreds of thousands of visitors came to see *Encompassing the Globe: Portugal and the World in the 16th and 17th Centuries* when it was on view at the Sackler Gallery and the National Museum of African Art. Many global partners helped put more than 260 extraordinary objects on display in this beautiful exhibition on art, history, economics, and politics.

In the context of public service, the reach of everything the Smithsonian does — in both the research and the museum activities — is expanded exponentially by websites and education and outreach programs. The Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (SITES) is the largest traveling exhibition service in the world, and reaches roughly five million people throughout the nation every year. In 2007, SITES traveled to more than 400 communities in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and Guam. These exhibitions reach learners of all ages in museums, schools, libraries, community centers, veterans' halls, municipal buildings, transportation terminals — wherever the public is.

The Smithsonian's electronic outreach has been equally impressive. Our Web presence has expanded dramatically in a short period of time and several of our websites have won awards for their content and design. Six years ago, we had half as many visits to our websites as physical visits to our museums. Now, visitation on the Web is more than 750 percent of our museum visitation, with more than 180 million visits to our various websites.

Furthermore, we are engaged in a major national outreach program. We now have 159 affiliates in 39 states, Panama, Puerto Rico, and Washington, DC. To bring the Smithsonian's collections to the American public, we lend impressive objects to these local affiliates (in addition to the many artifacts that tour nationwide as part of the SITES exhibits).

The establishment of Smithsonian Networks, a joint venture with CBS-Showtime, will expand how the Institution shares its vast collections with the American people and educates the public about the richness of Smithsonian-sponsored discoveries in science, the arts, and the humanities.

The Smithsonian Center for Education and Museum Studies (SCEMS) is collaborating with the Council of Chief State School Officers to create new ways for teachers and students to enrich classroom instruction by accessing Smithsonian collections and talking to experts. SCEMS, as part of the collaboration, leads SI-based professional development opportunities for the State Teachers of the Year.

One of the biggest obstacles we face in continuing this important work is resolving our facilities revitalization and maintenance problems which directly affect our mission. This issue concerns not only the buildings themselves, some of which are priceless national treasures in their own right, but more importantly the fact that the buildings enable us to educate the public, exhibit and house the national collections, and create the ideal museum experience for our visitors. Without the proper facilities in safe operating order, none of this is possible.

Today the Smithsonian owns or leases more than 700 buildings and other structures in the District of Columbia, seven states, Panama, Belize, and Chile, about 9.9 million square feet of owned space and 1.4 million square feet of leased space with an estimated replacement value of more than \$5.3 billion. Some of these buildings are new, some are 150 years old, many are decades old, and more than half are more than 25 years old. It is an expensive, challenging task to care for these facilities and keep our staff and visitors safe — especially in a post-9/11 world where security is of paramount concern.

Both the National Academy of Public Administration and the Government Accountability Office (GAO) have looked into this matter and underscored its importance, with the GAO saying \$2.5 billion is required to fix and maintain the Institution's facilities in the coming years. With the continued support of the

Administration and Congress, the Institution is making progress in addressing this serious issue.

In spite of the work that must be done to repair our infrastructure, we want to continue with our ambitious plans to revitalize Smithsonian facilities in ways that strengthen both our scientific research as well as our education and outreach efforts. Accordingly, the largest multi-disciplinary project ever undertaken by the Smithsonian Institution is under way — the \$78 million Ocean Science Initiative at the National Museum of Natural History, in collaboration with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The project includes a new exhibition space, the *Ocean Hall* (opening in 2008), a newly endowed Chair for Marine Science research, educational outreach, a new Ocean Web portal, and additional funding for research.

The National Museum of American History will reopen in 2008. Implementing recommendations made by its Blue Ribbon Commission, this Museum will have a new home for the Star-Spangled Banner and a completely redesigned central core.

Farther into the future, the Smithsonian's 19th museum, the National Museum of African American History and Culture, will open on the National Mall. Part of that Museum is up and running right now, with a website, exhibition, and special programs. As directed by Congress, funding for construction of the Museum will be half private and half federal.

The growth of the Internet and related technologies enable new possibilities for sharing the Smithsonian's knowledge from our collections and research in ways never envisioned when the Institution was first created. Over the next several decades, the Institution proposes committing the intellectual and financial resources necessary to create a digital Smithsonian which would provide unlimited access to the national collections and research via channels previously unimaginable on such a grand scale. A digital Smithsonian would contribute to improving the Institution's stewardship and preservation of its collections.

The Smithsonian agenda is ambitious but focused. The Institution's leadership team is committed to a balanced approach that stresses not only the revitalization of the Smithsonian's physical infrastructure, but also important scientific, educational, and collections care programs. Also, to respond to the recommendations of the Board of Regents' new permanent Governance and Nominating Committee, the Institution is requesting funds to support the new governing practices that were developed to strengthen the Board's oversight of the Institution. In addition, to better position the Institution to tell its story, the Smithsonian has packaged the priorities of security, facilities, and collections care under a new heading, *Stewardship of National Treasures*. Given its successes, concerns, and budget realities, the Institution's priorities are:

- Mandatory funding requirements, such as legally mandated federal compensation increases; contractually obligated rental increases; rent requirements; and leases for collections storage space
- Board of Regents' Governance and Nominating Committee support to strengthen oversight of the Institution, including additional staff for the Inspector General and the Chief Financial Officer
- *Stewardship of National Treasures*, which includes:
 - o Security guards to meet minimum security staffing needs; increased security costs at the George Gustav Heye Center in New York City; and measures to provide employee and contractor security screening
 - o Physical facilities maintenance and revitalization, as recommended by the National Academy of Public Administration's 2001 report and reinforced by the Government Accountability Office's 2005 and 2007 reports
 - o Collections care, including improved conservation, preservation, storage, documentation, and accessibility of the national collections
 - o Information technology infrastructure needs

The Smithsonian is a public trust; it belongs to every American, young and old. Tens of millions of students have come to the nation's capital and experienced the Smithsonian. Through the Internet and our expansive education and outreach programs, millions more have experienced the Smithsonian in their own hometowns. This younger audience is America's cultural and scientific future. We inspire the next generation of astronauts, scientists, artists, explorers, and historians. Once they experience the Smithsonian, this great Institution is in their hearts and minds for life.

The Smithsonian Institution faces significant challenges if it is to continue serving the public in an exemplary manner, with both engaging, modern exhibitions backed by authoritative scholarship and groundbreaking scientific research and exploration. What follows is our plan to efficiently and effectively meet these challenges.