

Building Our Dreams



Photo courtesy of the American Museum of Agriculture.

As she sits on a bench, she thinks back to when she was a little girl walking through the cotton gin with her father. The dirt and dust floating in the air tickles her nose and almost makes it difficult to breathe. The machinery is very loud and the smell of cotton and dirt fill the air. She pictures the cotton going through the different stages before being baled and remembers how different things were back then.

It is people like Lee Ruth Krieg, an American Museum of Agriculture (AMA) board member, who truly appreciate what this museum is all about. She wants people to understand how far agriculture has come and how it has grown over the years.

Just like agriculture, the AMA is growing as well. They are in the process of building a new and larger facility in order to teach people about agriculture's history.

The AMA has been housing its farm-related equipment in a building that was borrowed from the American Wind Power Center. The building was about 10,000 sq. ft. and only about one-third of its collection was on display. The museum had 10 years to reside in that building while it raised money for its own facilities.

"In order to tell the story of agriculture and our heritage in a conducive way, we need a lot more space and the ability to design both educational and interactive exhibits," said Lacey Hoelting, AMA's director.

In 2008, the AMA reached its goal of raising \$1 million to go towards its new facility. By 2009, the

museum was under contract to develop a building plan and in April of 2011, phase I of IV began.

Phase I consisted of moving from the previous building into the first of many buildings to come. The building was dedicated and named the Alton Brazell Exhibit Hall. The large exhibit hall is approximately

274,000 sq. ft. and will serve as a permanent home to most of the museum's large artifacts.

Inside, there is large antique machinery, a cotton exhibit including the earliest cotton gin to the most recent, a black smith shop, a tool room, a repair shop, a toy tractor and pedal tractor room, and a household item exhibit.

So, what's next for the AMA? Phase II of course! AMA aims to break ground on phase II as early as 2013.

The central exhibit hall will be where visitors will enter the museum. There will be an information desk and a gift shop in this area. This will be the place for rotating exhibits and this area can also be used as an extension of the public meeting place.

Phase II will also include the Plains Cotton Growers meeting room which will seat 325 people at round tables and 400 people theater style. There will also be an outdoor patio overlooking downtown Lubbock. A catering kitchen will be available with warming ovens and refrigeration for any event taking place at the museum.

Phase II will really give Lubbock the opportunity to use the museum as a venue for weddings, receptions, meetings or workshops.

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"It will be a pretty large venue for Lubbock. That's huge for the museum because every time someone has a group here, that's a chance for us to tell someone else the story of agriculture and teach them about their heritage," Hoelting said.

In phase II, the AMA wants to have exhibits that focus on modern agriculture, the science behind modern agriculture, and what the future has in store for agriculture.

"We want the people who come here to understand our history and to gain an appreciation for the industry; for what agriculture does for them as individuals and for this nation as a whole," Krieg said. "In terms of individuals, of course food and fiber, and in the nation, it's a great part of the economy. It's a building block for this country."

Phase III and IV have been planned, but a construction timeline has not yet been determined. These phases will include an agriculture literacy wing, classroom/computer lab, workroom/library, and archives for the museum's extensive collection of paper records, periodicals and books.

Hoelting said she is hoping to get more school groups in the future. Hands on interactive exhibits aimed at children will take up the agriculture literacy wing. Within the agriculture literacy wing will be the classroom/computer lab where the public can participate in training and seminars, and teachers can conduct lessons for their students who visit.

"The long term vision is to have more than a museum, but rather where people come to learn about pioneers in agriculture at the same time they

are learning about how modern farming practices are helping to conserve our natural resources," Hoelting said. "Ultimately, we want to be a place where everyone feels welcome and can walk away with a new respect for agriculture."

Building this new facility has been a great accomplishment for the AMA. It has taken many years to get where they are today. While the process is not complete, the AMA will continue on the path to building its dreams.

Fundraising events such as the recent "A Night for the Museum" had 600 people in attendance and raised approximately \$70,000 for the museum.

"We have a lot of amazing support from Lubbock and local businesses, and hopefully we will get to start phase II soon," Hoelting said.

While her time on the bench has been enjoyable, she snaps back to reality. Krieg gives a final glance at the cotton gin exhibit. Those thoughts of where she came from, how far agriculture has come, and how fast things have changed will again flood back every time she steps into the American Museum of Agriculture. For now, she has work to do to help others understand agriculture's rich history. **T**

Madison Norrell
Setima, Texas



Museum director, Lacey Hoelting is a graduate of Texas Tech.



Toy tractor and pedal tractor exhibit is very popular with all ages.



Volunteer, Harold Landrum, works in the blacksmith room illustrating how metal work was done in the past.