

Museum planning high-tech 'journey'

BY PAUL COWLEY
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Red Deer Museum and Art Gallery has unveiled plans for a \$1.5-million permanent exhibit that promises a high-tech and interactive journey into the area's past.

The exhibit called *The Place Between: Stories from the Heart of the Parkland*, will take up about half of the museum's display space.

It will be ready in March 2013, in time to kick off the city's centennial celebrations, said museum and art gallery executive director Lorna Johnson at a news conference on Wednesday.

Also announced was a \$500,000 fundraising campaign to cover the remaining cost of the exhibit that has already received \$1 million in city funding. Grants, sponsorships and individual and corporate donations will be pursued in the campaign dubbed *Making History*.

More details are coming in two weeks.

Already two years in the planning, the new exhibit will draw upon the expertise of award-winning Toronto-based design firm Reich and Petch.

The international company has designed museum spaces in nearly two dozen countries and boasts a client list including the Smithsonian Institution National Museum of Natural History, Toronto's Royal Ontario Museum and the Saudi Arabian National Museum.

Reich and Petch was chosen from among 14 companies to answer a call for submissions from as far as the United Kingdom and Iceland.

Johnson said the goal has been to create a landmark exhibit telling the stories of Red Deer and surrounding communities.

It will be divided into 10

themes beginning with the land and the changing landscape.

The city's beginnings at the Red Deer River crossing will be followed through the early boom years, through both world wars and into the present.

The museum wants to create an interactive and educational exhibit far removed from dusty museum stereotypes.

Exhibit planning has only just begun but the use of holograms, video databases that can be accessed at the touch of a screen and other high-tech approaches geared to bringing history alive for all age groups is being considered.

"We plan this to be a centre of discovery and learning for many generations," said Jean Graham, the museum's board chair.

While taking advantage of the latest technology to tell the region's stories, the team behind the project is determined not to let the museum's impressive collection of more than 80,000 artifacts be overshadowed.

Tony Reich, a founder of Reich and Petch, called the museum's collection world class and said he and the team have talked about creating an "artifact-rich gallery" to display some of the treasures hidden away in storerooms for years.

Concept designs for the planned galleries will be unveiled on Feb. 29.

Mayor Morris Flewelling, a former director of the museum, was enthusiastic about the prospect of a new permanent exhibit.

"This is almost as exciting as when we opened this building," he said of the museum that opened its doors in 1973 after a public fundraising campaign. "The only difference is this is very high-tech.

"There's so much we can tell. There won't be room for it all."

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