

The image shows the interior of the Bell Museum. In the foreground, a woman and a young boy are looking at a large, circular, interactive digital display. The display features a globe and a colorful circular chart with segments labeled 'How do others feel?' and 'do you feel?'. The background is filled with various informational panels and displays, including one titled 'Future Forests'. The Bell Museum logo is prominently displayed in the upper right corner.

bell
museum

2025 Report to the Community

JANUARY 1 – DECEMBER 31, 2025



MISSION

***The Bell ignites
and sustains
curiosity for nature
and the universe.***

The Bell envisions a hopeful future where all are inspired by nature and empowered by science.

The Bell Museum welcomes all people regardless of race, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender, or other protected identity.

The Bell Museum is located on the traditional and treaty land of the Dakota people, in the area known as *Mnisóta Makhóche* (the land where the water reflects the skies).

DEAR BELL FRIENDS –

As I reflect on the highlights and accomplishments of the Bell Museum in 2025, the classic environmental adage, “Think Global, Act Local,” keeps popping into my head.

This phrase suggests that we can address large-scale, environmental challenges by collectively engaging and acting at the local, community level. It’s an ethos that we tap into in our newly revitalized *Imagine the Future* gallery – where, by focusing on climate impacts and solutions right here in Minnesota, we aim to motivate and inspire our visitors and Bell community to take their own next steps towards climate action.

Yet I don’t think this adage encompasses the full scale of the Bell’s institutional impact. As you’ll read in our 2025 Report to the Community, we’re thinking AND acting across local to global scales – doing so with a commitment to partnership, collaboration, and inclusion.

We are truly a “Museum without Boundaries,” where our work extends well-beyond our physical walls – whether that’s co-hosting a Community STEM event in Frogtown or at Split Rock Lighthouse on the North Shore, studying fishes in Kenya or birds in Madagascar, developing an original fulldome film about Minnesota’s seasons or distributing our films to planetariums across the world. We ignite and sustain curiosity and wonder for nature and the universe here in the Twin Cities, across Minnesota, and throughout the world.

We are grateful for the support from donors, partners, collaborators, and committed community members like you who make this work possible. You allow us to expand our impact from the local to global scale, and share our vision for a hopeful future where all are inspired by nature and empowered by science.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Holly Menninger'. The signature is fluid and cursive.

HOLLY MENNINGER, Ph.D.
Executive Director, Bell Museum
University of Minnesota



Deepen our Community Commitment

AS THE STATE'S OFFICIAL NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM, serving all Minnesotans is paramount to our mission. Through authentic relationship building, we build and grow community partnerships. These mutually beneficial relationships have transformed the Bell's work and have made us a more inclusive, responsive, and culturally relevant institution.

Minnesota Historical Society Partnership

The Bell Museum and the Minnesota Historical Society completed a second year of partnership to connect science and nature through the shared stories of Minnesota's natural and cultural heritage. This collaboration draws on the unique strengths of both institutions, creating a reciprocal partnership that enhances programs and learning experiences statewide.

Through these joint efforts we offered Indigenous astronomy programming with Jeffers Petroglyphs in Comfrey, provided Bell Museum campers in Grand Rapids with unique opportunities at the Forest History Center, and supported a Community Science Day at Split Rock Lighthouse during lighthouse construction work. We're looking forward to extending our collective impact, bringing deeper understanding and added value to communities across Minnesota, with continued partnership for years to come.

Somali Astronomy Night

Over the course of many months, Bell Museum staff from the Statewide Engagement and Planetarium teams worked closely with partners from the Somali community to co-create a new planetarium program centering Somali cultural and astronomical knowledge.

In November, the program – Dayax iyo Dirir Markay Kulmaan: Cilmiga Xiddigaha (Where the Moon Meets Spica: Somali Star Wisdom) – debuted



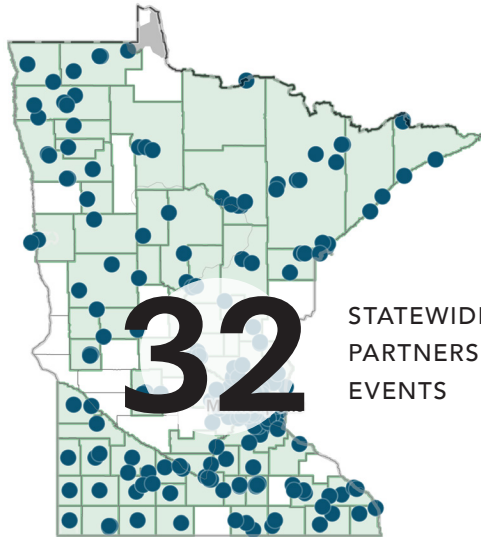


at the Bell with a well-attended, joyful community celebration. In the dome, primary speaker and knowledge keeper Sabrin Nur delivered a powerful presentation – rooted in the stories and wisdom of Somali culture, supported by images of the Somali night sky, and layered with original art by Lokho Kotile.

The event and the collaborative process from which it emerged truly embodied the Bell’s commitment to community engagement and the power of creating space for community voices to lead.



NEIGHBORHOOD EVENTS



STATEWIDE PARTNERSHIP EVENTS



K12 EDUCATOR EVENTS



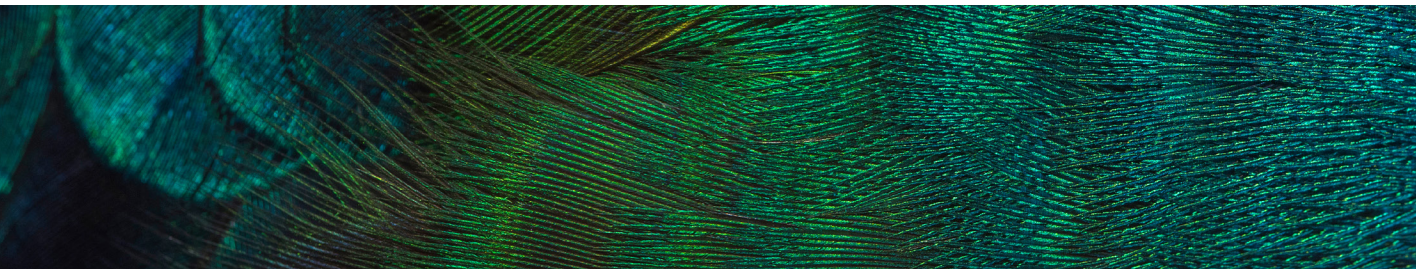
COMMUNITY FESTIVALS



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA CAMPUS EVENTS

Bell Fairs and Festivals

From neighborhood festivals to campus collaborations, the Bell Museum is everywhere Minnesotans gather to explore, learn, and celebrate science!



AT THE HEART OF THE BELL MUSEUM is our scientific collections and the knowledge generated from them. As the state's natural history museum and a gateway to the University of Minnesota, the Bell contributes to every aspect of making science more accessible: generating new knowledge, preparing future researchers, interpreting science for the public, and engaging the public in the scientific process.



Dr. Cassandra Ford
Assistant Professor,
Curator of Fishes

Exploring Kenya's Waters

This summer, Dr. Cassandra Ford, the Bell Museum's Curator of Fishes, spent three and a half weeks in Kenya on a research trip that blended science, collaboration, and cultural connection. Dr. Ford has long studied electric fishes—found in both South America and Africa—and was eager to see African species in their natural habitats.

Dr. Ford partnered with the National Museum of Kenya and ichthyologist Edward Njagi to co-develop a collaborative research project. Together with University of Minnesota graduate students, colleagues from the University of Washington and Kenyan graduate students, the team collected fish, soil, and water samples from the Lake Victoria region to document biodiversity and gather environmental DNA (eDNA).

This data will provide a vital baseline for understanding fish populations affected by pollution and overfishing. This is information that can help communities sustainably manage their fisheries.

All physical specimens will remain in Kenya's national collection, and digital CT scans of the specimens will be made publicly available so researchers around the world, including Dr. Ford and her students, can continue to study them.





Solution Studio: 2025 Impact Goals Award

The Solution Studio, the Bell’s annual summer makerspace inspired by University of Minnesota research, was recognized with a 2025 Impact Goals Award from the Center for Advancing Research Impact in Society (ARIS). The award recognizes the Bell Museum for significantly advancing engagement in and translation of research to public benefit and showcasing our role as a gateway to the University.

Unlocking Madagascar’s Birdlife

For more than a decade, Dr. Sushma Reddy, the Bell Museum’s Curator of Birds and Breckenridge Chair of Ornithology, has been studying the incredible birdlife of Madagascar. Her recent research expedition—made possible through an NSF grant and long-standing partnerships—took her to three remote sites, including a newly

protected forest that had never been surveyed before. By safely collecting fresh DNA samples, Dr. Reddy and her team are building a clearer picture of how Madagascar’s birds have adapted and diversified over time.

Dr. Reddy’s research doesn’t just advance science—it also supports people on the ground. Her field team included local students, guides, and community members who gained valuable training and employment through the project. These collaborations, along with long-standing partnerships with the Field Museum in Chicago and Stony Brook University, helped extend the Bell’s impact far beyond Minnesota.

Back at the Bell, Dr. Reddy’s lab is using innovative tools—like a light surface scanner funded by a museum donor—to study both living and ancient bird specimens. From Madagascar’s rainforests to the Bell’s collections, Dr. Reddy’s work helps uncover how species adapt to a changing world and connects discovery to conservation in a truly global way.



Dr. Sushma Reddy
Associate Professor,
Breckenridge Chair of
Ornithology, Curator of Birds

Elevate Climate Solutions

CLIMATE CHANGE IS AFFECTING EVERY CORNER of the globe, with consequences for biodiversity, food production, and human health, especially right here in Minnesota. As a trusted resource, the Bell Museum engages, educates, and empowers audiences to work towards a more sustainable and resilient climate future.

Imagine the Future Grand Opening

In April 2025 we celebrated the grand opening of the revitalized *Imagine the Future* gallery. The gallery positions the Bell as a hub for engagement, connection, and community around climate change and climate action.

In the gallery, visitors learn about local climate impacts in Minnesota, and hear directly about climate concerns from community members including a farmer, a nurse, a student, and an

environmental justice activist. With color-coding carried throughout the gallery, we ask visitors to consider content through the frames of Observation, Emotion, and Action.

Through interactives, prompts, and other activities, *Imagine the Future* sparks cross-generational discussion while also giving ample space and time for reflection and conversation. We suggest that there is no single way to act, and offer ways for visitors to identify their own next steps and develop a climate action plan.



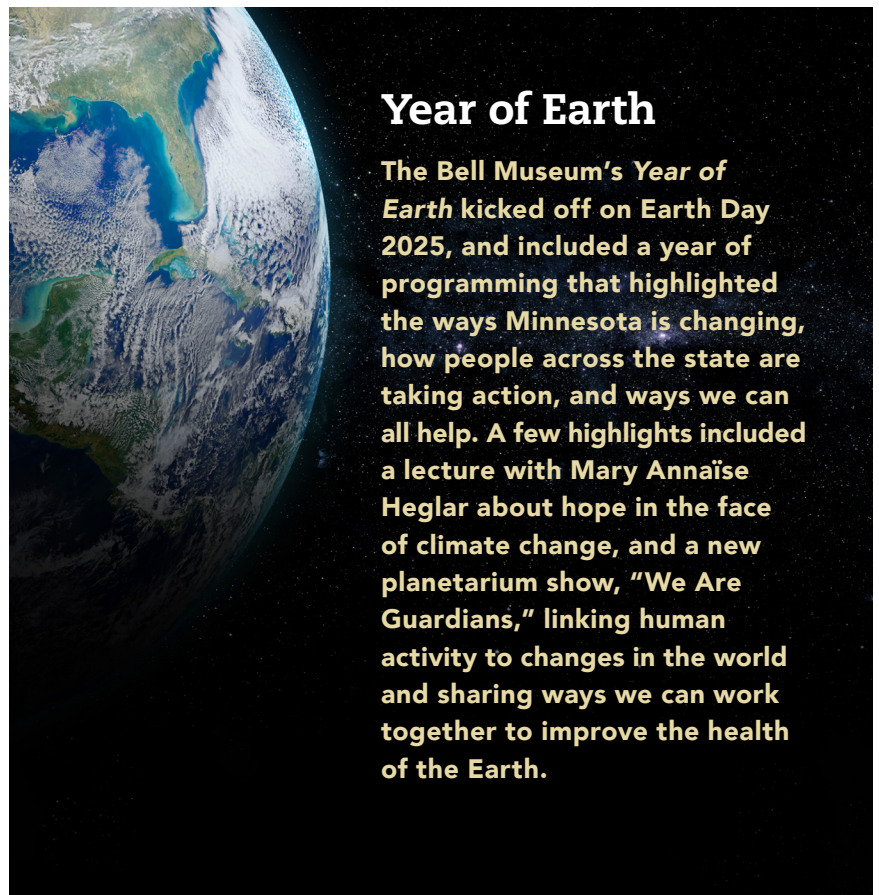


Postcard from the Future

The Bell Museum launched 2025 with an all-staff professional development workshop focused on active hope and imagination as frames for addressing climate change and elevating climate solutions. During one workshop activity, staff members each created a “postcard from the future,” a letter to themselves about what they hope to see in the world 20 years from now. The exercise allowed staff to think about positive changes and to communicate ambitions for a sustainable future.

Spotlight Science: Climate Action and YOU

Spotlight Science is a regular program that shines a light on current science research, featuring special guests from the University of Minnesota and community organizations. In November we brought together climate researchers and outreach professionals, environmental non-profits, government organizations, and neighbors to engage Bell visitors in activities and conversations about climate solutions. Attendees left with resources, tips, and next steps to build their unique climate action footprint.



Year of Earth

The Bell Museum’s Year of Earth kicked off on Earth Day 2025, and included a year of programming that highlighted the ways Minnesota is changing, how people across the state are taking action, and ways we can all help. A few highlights included a lecture with Mary Annaïse Heglar about hope in the face of climate change, and a new planetarium show, “We Are Guardians,” linking human activity to changes in the world and sharing ways we can work together to improve the health of the Earth.

Steward Capital Investments

ALL BELL MUSEUM FACILITIES must rise to the high standards and opportunities of the award-winning public facility that opened in 2018. The Bell is charting a course to continually renew and improve our facilities to advance our mission, leveraging public and private investments in innovative ways that support accessibility, sustainability, research and education, and the visitor experience.

Unifying Minnesota's Insect Record

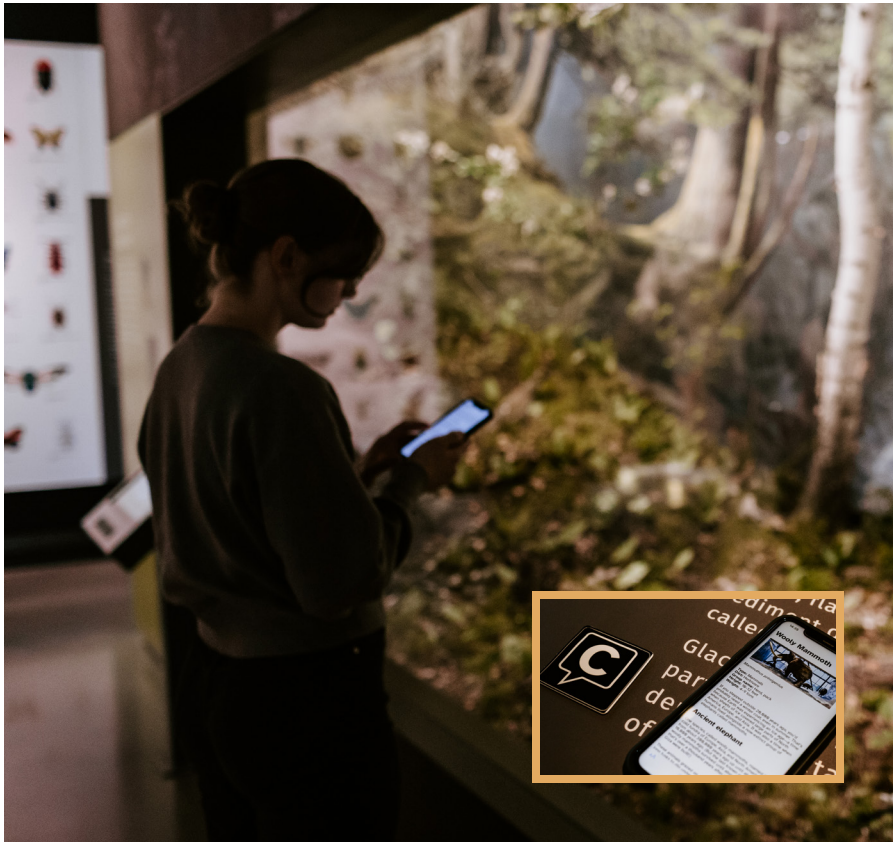
In July 2025, the University of Minnesota Insect Collection officially became part of the Bell Museum's scientific collection. Now with over five million scientific specimens under our oversight, the Bell expands its capacity as the state's natural history museum to steward, grow, and increase accessibility to Minnesota's biodiversity record.

This administrative action is the first step in the Bell's larger, ambitious initiative to unite insect records across the state.

Insects are Minnesota's most diverse group of organisms, and yet we lack a comprehensive list of what insect species currently (or historically) call Minnesota home. Insect specimen records are scattered among collections in museums, colleges, and universities throughout the state, and in many cases this information is not digitally accessible.

During a time of well-documented insect decline and increasing threats of insect pests on agriculture and the natural environment, thoroughly documenting insect biodiversity is both urgent and necessary. The Bell is now positioned to take on this important challenge.





Recognized Leader in Accessibility

The Bell Museum was honored to receive the 2025 Outstanding Unit Award from the University of Minnesota Office of Equity and Diversity. The award recognized the Bell Museum for its longstanding commitment to and transformative work in accessibility, creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for visitors and staff who identify as people with disabilities.

Improving Accessibility with Capption

In 2026, thanks to a donor's gift, the Bell Museum will launch Capption throughout our galleries and exhibits. Capption is a web-based platform that translates exhibition information into 136 languages. With one tap, visitors can take the text off the wall and display it on their own (or a loaned) device using whatever accessible features as useful for them, including screen readers and size adjustments.

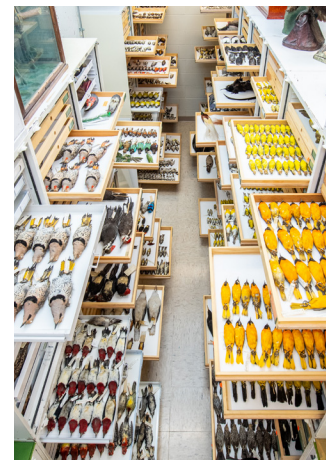
The technology was first tested at the Bell in the temporary exhibition *Monarchs and Milkweeds* and its success inspired the touring company to implement it in their other traveling exhibitions—meaning the benefits will be felt across the country.

Collections Stewardship

This year the Bell Museum faced equipment failures and space challenges that required investments in new freezer equipment and renovation of Research & Collections spaces.

The Bell swiftly secured funding from diverse streams to update equipment and centralize storage of our genetic resources collections. We launched a matching gift appeal that raised \$40,000, utilized University internal grant support, and renewed our state funding appropriation to ensure the safety and stewardship of our scientific collection.

We continue to identify new sources of support, to ensure that regardless of circumstance, our collections and facilities are cared for to the best of our ability.



Forge a Strong Future

THE BELL'S HISTORY IS MARKED by inquiry, innovation, change, and resilience. By focusing on our core resource—our people—as well as organizational and business planning, the Bell is well-positioned to make sound, principled decisions in the face of uncertainty and change, maximize our potential, and meet the needs of diverse partners.



Secrets from a Forest

Planetarium Shows Worldwide

The Bell's original planetarium productions have a life and reach far beyond the Whitney and Elizabeth MacMillan Planetarium. Organizations and planetariums across the world lease or purchase our full-dome films. Distribution brings a new revenue stream to the Bell, increases the return on investment in producing new shows, and extends our reach.

Thanks to acclaim garnered through screenings at international film festivals and planetarium conferences (including the Great Lakes Planetarium Conference hosted by the Bell in October 2025), audiences are clamoring for Bell-original productions!

This year two Bell shows have traveled around the U.S. and beyond, *Mars: The Ultimate Voyage* and *Mysteries of Your Brain*. We also recently launched the international distribution of our award-winning planetarium show, *Secrets from a Forest*.



Mars: The Ultimate Voyage

76,085 ATTENDEES
95 VENUES
VIEWED IN
34 STATES AND
7 FOREIGN COUNTRIES

Costa Rica, France,
Hong Kong, India, Romania,
Taiwan, Vietnam

Funded by NASA



Mysteries of Your Brain

8,094 ATTENDEES
47 VENUES
VIEWED IN
28 STATES AND
7 FOREIGN COUNTRIES

Greece, Hong Kong, India,
Slovakia, South Africa, Taiwan,
and Vietnam

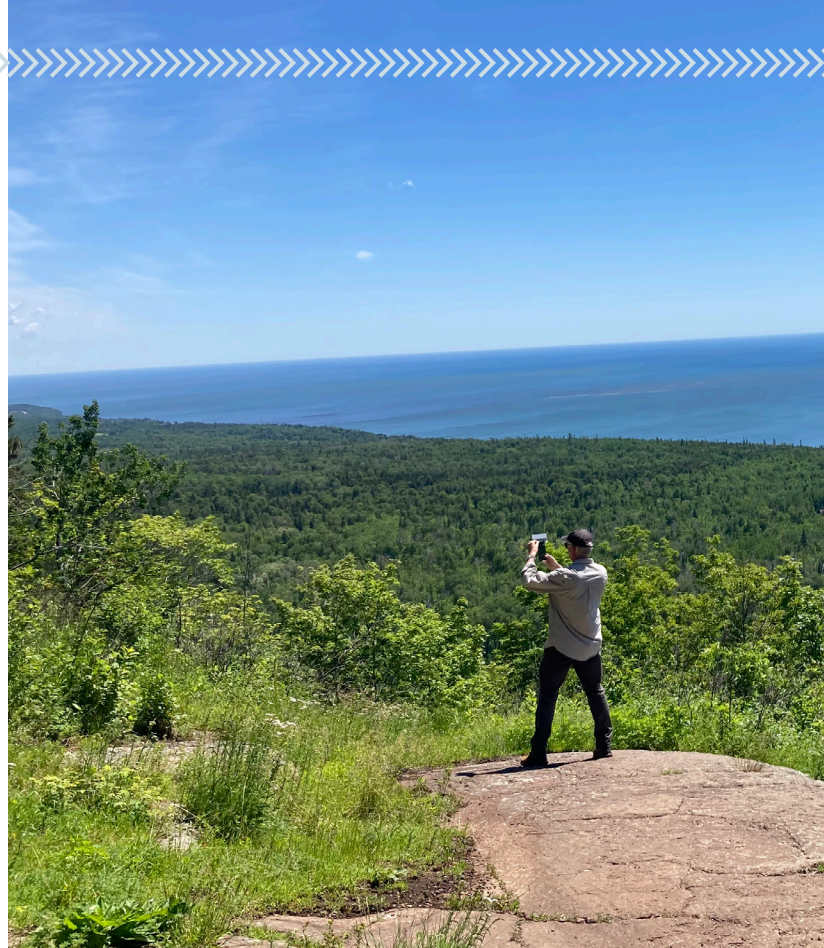
Funded by Richard M. Schulze
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LOOKING AHEAD

Shadows of the Sun

In 2026, the Bell Museum will debut, Shadows of the Sun, a planetarium film that will immerse audiences in a uniquely Minnesota story, one brought to life by our same incredible filmmaking team behind Secrets from a Forest and developed in partnership with the late Jim Brandenburg.

Shadows of the Sun will explore Minnesota's distinct ecosystems and bio-diversity through a full year of seasonal change. From deep under the frozen ice of the Boundary Waters to the waving blades of the tallgrass prairie in the summertime, the film will follow the Sun across Minnesota landscapes and seasons. We look forward to debuting the film in Fall 2026.



Student Staff in Action

This past year, the Bell Museum employed 75 student workers from the University of Minnesota, with jobs ranging from front desk visitor service, to planetarium show presentation and public engagement, to behind-the-scenes specimen curation. Our talented and diverse corps of Bell student employees are essential to museum operations, research, and the visitor experience. The Bell Museum is proud to be a leader in training future museum, education, and STEM professionals. Whether our students are full-time or part-time, they are contributing to and learning about the impact of museums on science, research, and community education.



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Bell Museum scientific collections are made possible with generous support from the people of Minnesota, through legislative appropriation.



The Bell Museum is proud to recognize support from state and government agencies.



Your gift to the Bell Museum nourishes a lifelong love for nature and the sciences — and a deeper understanding of Minnesota, our world, and our universe.

If you're interested in making a contribution, please visit us at: bellmuseum.umn.edu/ways-to-give/



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The Bell Museum is powered by our members. From enabling staff to create dynamic and fresh programs to ensuring our facilities are accessible to all, your membership supports everything we do. Become a member to help make adventure and discovery possible for everyone!

You have the opportunity to shape the future of the Bell Museum through your donation today. Your gift makes the Bell's mission, vision, and values a reality. The investment you make today supports the museum's key initiatives.

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