

CHICAGOLAND



SciTech Hands On Museum officials have started a fundraising drive to build a planetarium next to their downtown Aurora site.

Aurora museum reaches for stars

Campaign kicks off for new planetarium

By Russell Working

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Aurora's SciTech Hands On Museum has launched a \$5 million fundraising campaign to build a west suburban planetarium that would be the state's second largest, officials said Tuesday.

The state-of-the-art planetarium would seat 5,000 and include a domed theater capable of showing 3-D movies and rotating projected images of the planets and stars, said Shawn Carlson, executive director.

"We believe it will take us from a high-quality, mid-sized science center to a world-class science center," Carlson said.

Officials are hoping to raise

\$3 million to construct the building and another \$2 million as an endowment that would allow SciTech to be financially independent, he added. The facility is projected to open in 2011.

The center now gets support from the city of Aurora's gaming funds. In fiscal 2008 that amounted to \$110,000, along with rent in the city-owned building of \$1 a year, said Amy Roth, a spokeswoman

for the city.

The downtown museum, at 18 W. Benton St., has 36,000 square feet of exhibit space, and the planetarium would add another 5,000.

Chicago boasts the Adler, the state's largest planetarium. "There are a lot of people who would find a planetarium in the suburbs a lot more convenient," he said.

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