

SciTech aims to put the stars within reach

By **JUSTIN KMITCH**

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Being a hands-on museum, it only makes sense that Aurora's SciTech wants to help children touch the sky.

The museum, located at 18 W. Benton St. on the south half of Stolp Island, has launched a \$5 million fundraising campaign to build the 5,000-square-foot John C. Dunham Planetarium on its campus. If it succeeds, it

would be the second-largest such facility in the state behind Chicago's Adler Planetarium.

SciTech Deputy Director David Alexander said he believes the money can be raised and the project built by 2011. The donation drive was launched with an initial matching grant of \$750,000 from the Dunham Fund.

SciTech Executive Director Shawn Carlson said the museum plans to build a 150-seat domed theater, complete

with a state-of-the-art \$1 million projector that makes the stars and planets appear within reach.

"We believe this project would push us over the edge into being a world-class science and technology center that could serve 100,000 kids a year," Carlson said. "We do great things now, but we can do so much more. There aren't enough true planetariums in our area, but we believe there is plenty of interest out there."

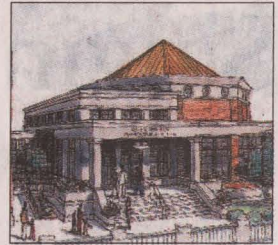
Waubonsie Valley High School, also in Aurora, opened its own planetarium in 1975 as part of its instructional technology curriculum. The Waubonsie facility was upgraded in 1999 and accommodates about 16,000 students and residents a year.

Waubonsie planetarium director Stephanie Grove could not be reached for comment Thursday, but Carlson said he anticipates working closely with the school's

program to collaborate on events and research projects.

"The planetarium community is not at all competitive," Carlson said. "We share information, best practices and so on, so I anticipate working closely with them."

Mitch Gerdisch of the Naperville Astronomical Association also is excited about the plan. "We're quite happy with anything that will let people see the beautiful things happening above the air



RENDERING COURTESY OF SCITECH HANDS ON MUSEUM

SciTech has launched a \$5 million fundraising campaign to build a planetarium.

pollution," Gerdisch said.

For more information on the museum and planetarium plans, visit scitech.mus.il.us/.