

UA is given \$7M mineral collection

Some of best pieces will be on display in special Feb. exhibit

By Eric Swedlund

A \$7 million private collection of hundreds of rare mineral specimens has been donated to the UA's Science Center, and some of the most striking pieces will be publicly unveiled during a special February exhibit.

The gift from the late Hubert Charles de Monmonier, announced Thursday, adds to the university's Mineral Museum and makes the UA's collection among the best in the country.

"We are deeply honored and moved that Hubert de Monmonier entrusted the museum with his cherished and valuable collection," Alexis Faust, executive director of Flandrau: The UA Science Center, said in a statement announcing the gift.

"We're very excited to share this precious collection with the public and look forward to the time when we can showcase it as part of the new UA Science Center."

The collection contains 871 mineral specimens, including more than 70 gold pieces.

One is among the largest found during the 1849 California gold rush, a dinner-plate-sized specimen discovered at the Jamestown mines.

Despite the comprehensive collection, de Monmonier was relatively unknown in the mineral world. He lived most of his life in Los Angeles but developed a fascination with minerals as a boy when he found a box beneath his grandparents' porch in Pearce, about 80 miles east of Tucson.

De Monmonier, who worked as a groundskeeper and sheet-metal worker, died in March and arranged for his collection to be donated to the UA through an estate gift.

A special exhibit featuring pieces from the de Monmonier collection is being organized for February, to coincide with Tucson's gem show.

The collection will be a centerpiece of the UA's Downtown Science Center, which is expected to begin construction by fall 2008 and open in 2011.

The UA's mineral collection dates to 1892, and the Mineral Museum was officially recognized in 1919. With the de Monmonier collection, the museum has accumulated about 18,000 mineral specimens, plus 7,000 in a micromount collection.

About 2,000 minerals are on display.

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