

Rock stars worth \$7M donated to UA

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The University of Arizona Mineral Museum has obtained an extensive mineral and rare book collection valued at \$7 million from a somewhat mysterious donor.

The museum received 871 mineral specimens, some considered very rare, from the estate of Hubert Charles de Monmonier, who died in March, said Sam Kane, associate director of marketing for UA's Flandrau Science Center. The Mineral Museum is in Flandrau, 1601 E. University Blvd.

The collection also includes 300 books on mineralogy, some of which are centuries old, Kane said.

"This is the largest single gift the museum has received," Kane said.

A special exhibition of a large portion of the de Monmonier specimens will run from Feb. 9 to May 31 at the museum. "Because of the interest we may have a little sneak preview," he said.

De Monmonier, who spent part of his youth in Arizona, worked as a groundskeeper and sheet metal worker for a school district in the Los Angeles area.

It is a bit mysterious how someone on a school district worker's salary amassed a multimillion-dollar mineral collection, Kane said.

"He wasn't buying high-dollar items. He had an eye for some quality things," Kane said. "Over his lifetime the collection generated more and more value. Over time the specimens became more valuable.

"It is a very wide-breadth collection. He collected 64 different species from some of the best-known locations around the world."

The collection includes a dinner plate-sized gold specimen from the 1849 California gold rush's Jamestown mines, Kane said. It is one of the largest known specimens from that site.

"It is the largest piece in the collection and the most valuable in terms of appraised value," he said.

Most of the specimens range from marble to fist size, he said.



Crystalline gold from Eagle's Nest Mine, Placer County, Calif.



Aquamarine from Pakistan



Amethyst from Guerrero, Mexico