
\$1,000,000 donated to UA mineral museum

RENÉE SCHAFFER HORTON

The head of the University of Arizona's Science Center was in a great mood Wednesday afternoon.

"We just got a million dollars," said Alexis Faust, executive director of the Flandrau center. "Why shouldn't I be happy?"

The Freeport-McMoRan Copper & Gold Foundation announced Tuesday that it is giving \$1 million to UA to support the university's mineral museum, which is part of Flandrau.

Freeport-McMoRan, the world's largest publicly traded copper company, bought Phoenix-based Phelps Dodge Corp. in March 2007. Phelps Dodge has had a long-term philanthropic relationship with UA, according to Faust.

"Obviously, Freeport-McMoRan didn't have to take the same philanthropic direction as Phelps Dodge," Faust said. "This is a phenomenal statement, as a new company coming into Arizona, that they are interested in investing and helping the university and community."

The money will be placed in an endowment to support the mineral museum when it moves downtown with the UA Science Center as part of the Rio Nuevo downtown redevelopment project. The investment will be managed by the UA Foundation.

"It will go a long ways toward hiring a curator, which the mineral museum has never had, and this can ensure that the mineral museum will have a future," Faust said. "Around the country, mineral museums have been closing down because they are finding it difficult to stay afloat financially."

The director said a cash gift of this size is uncommon for a mineral museum and she hopes it will act as an incentive for other donors who want to support the growth of the museum.

In August, the Arizona Board of Regents approved an agreement between the city of Tucson and UA for a \$130 million science center-state museum complex that will be built west of the Santa Cruz River and south of Congress Street.