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A DINOSAUR museum is coming to WAUSAU CENTER

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David Daniels, director of Colossal Fossils, holds up a protoceratops fossil in what will be the museum's first physical space at the Wausau Center mall.

David Daniels stood with a student at GD Jones Elementary School recently, talking for about 10 minutes following a Colossal Fossils presentation. The child spoke excitedly about dinosaurs, asking him question after question and sharing different theories. It's something Daniels has grown accustomed to as he brings his mobile Colossal Fossils exhibits to various schools in the Wausau area.

What surprised him came afterward: Teachers approached him, amazed. The child hardly ever says a word to anyone at school, they told him.

That's the power of dinosaurs, Daniels says. He hopes to share that sense of wonder with more people when Colossal Fossils opens in the Wausau Center mall the first weekend in May. The museum will have about 3,000 square feet of space to display its large collection, says Daniels, the executive director of Colossal Fossils, a nonprofit based in Wausau.

"I took a look at all the fossils we had, about 3,000-4,000 square feet worth of exhibits," Daniels says. Other than the few times a year he and his volunteers take the relics to schools or events, "they've been sitting in my basement too long."

If they were to find a more permanent and public space, they wanted to do it right, Daniels says. That means a real attention-grabbing exhibit—say, a 40-foot long, 12-foot tall T. Rex skeleton named Ivan. "Where on Earth would you get a spot with 12-foot tall ceilings?" Daniels says.

The mall, it turned out. It's the first step toward the larger goal of creating a standalone natural history museum. Daniels a year ago outlined to City Pages just what that museum would look like. Designs for a \$10-\$15 million facility already have been done by students at Northcentral Technical College.

But those are long range plans, and having the first version of the museum at the mall allows Colossal Fossils to start growing awareness of the group, and build excitement about the museum among the general public.

Colossal Fossils has revamped their activities to make them a little more hands-on and bought fossil replicas durable enough to withstand children's explorations. Future exhibits could include a 12-foot tall bear skeleton or a shark jaw that's so large a person can walk through it.

The organization, founded in 2011, has seen a lot of interest from school groups and other organizations for partnerships, such as with the Boys & Girls Club of Wausau. "We'll have many opportunities to impress those kids," Daniels says. And probably more than a few adults too.

Public hours and ticket prices to be determined. For information about Colossal Fossils, visit their Facebook page and ColossalFossils.com.

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