

Oregon Paleo Lands Field Center opens in Fossil

By Terry Richard, The Oregonian

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The newest tourist attraction in Fossil is throwing a house warming party.

The **Oregon Paleo Lands Institute**, which opens the window to 400 million years through the geology and natural history of central and eastern Oregon with its programs and exhibits, will dedicate its new Field Center with public ceremonies on Saturday, Sept. 12.

Fossil is the county seat of Wheeler County, Oregon's least populous but nevertheless a great place to visit and spend time.



Oregon Paleo Lands Institute

The plesiosaur metal sculpture that will be displayed in the Oregon Paleo Lands Field Center in Fossil.



Terry Richard/The Oregonian

The new Oregon Paleo Lands Field Center in Fossil.

Events start with music at noon, a dedication ceremony at 1 p.m., and special activities continue through the afternoon. The building is at 333 Fourth St., across the street from the historic Wheeler County Courthouse.

A key attraction will be a 12-foot long metal sculpture of a historic creature called the plesiosaur (plee-zee-uh-SAWR).

This voracious marine reptile prowled the ancient seas of eastern Oregon, 80-90 million years ago, during the Age of Dinosaurs.

Students from Mitchell worked with visiting artist Larry Williams to craft the sculpture. The plesiosaur is a dramatic reminder that eastern Oregon was a vastly different and fascinating place millions of years ago.

The Oregon Paleo Lands Institute, founded in 2003, is devoted to helping people understand the ancient and living landscapes of the John Day River Basin.

The region is rich in fossil history, and is home to two of the three units of the **John Day Fossil Beds** National Monument.

The non-profit institute provides educational resources to students and teachers, conducts tours for visiting professionals, offers scheduled programs and hikes, and also custom-designs day trips for visitors interested in exploring the fossil record.

OPLI also is working closely with counties and communities in the John Day Basin to develop more tourism. This economic development aspect of the Institute's mission promotes the John Day Basin as one of the most unique places on the globe to peer back millions of years.

The new Field Center is now the 1,400-square-foot headquarters for the Institute. Besides housing staff offices, the Field Center includes interactive displays about Oregon's geologic history, exhibits and a unique gift store.

The Field Center is open Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and Saturday, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. More limited fall hours begin mid-October.

The Institute is a 503(c)(3) non-profit organization. It is supported through private donations, membership gifts, corporate, government and foundation grant funds. Initial funding for the Field Center at Fossil comes from a Small Business Administration grant of \$250,000, with additional significant support from Wheeler County and OPLI supporters.

"Many people worked hard for many years to make this Field Center a reality," said Kevin Campbell, president of the board of directors. "A reality not only for the Institute, but for those who share an interest in learning how our plant has changed over time. This center allows the Institute to serve more people in more ways, and we urge everyone to put on their 'to do' list a visit to the center."

Learn more from the Institute's Web site at www.paleolands.org.

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