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From: The 2013 Building Museums Symposium of the Mid-Atlantic Association of Museums

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## Three Museum Directors Honored for Achievement in Museum Building



The Children's Museum of South Dakota



The Natural History Museum of Utah



The Botanical Research Institute of Texas

Three museum directors have received the Building Museums "Buildy" Award for 2013 in recognition of their exemplary accomplishments leading their institutions through the challenging process of creating new museum space. On February 17, 2013, in a ceremony at the Ninth Annual Building Museums Symposium held in Fort Worth, Texas, Suzanne Hegg of the Children's Museum of South Dakota, Sarah B. George of the Natural History Museum of Utah, and Dr. Sy Sohmer of the Botanical Research Institute of Texas received the awards. This was the Fifth Annual Buildy Award presentation. The award recognizes museum directors whose completed museum construction projects demonstrate high achievement in the three-part lesson of the Building Museums Symposium: careful, creative planning and diligent implementation, which lead to institutional sustainability.

The Children's Museum of South Dakota in the small town of Brookings, the only children's museum in the State, succeeded in converting a 1936 elementary school building in town into a vibrant, new 46,000 square foot center of learning and activity for children. The museum undertook extensive research before design, sending a representative to tour 50 children's museums. During the design phase, the museum and its architect, Sarah Aldinger, met the challenges of review board criticism in a positive way by listening and improving their plan based on community input. During construction they took every opportunity to address environmental sustainability and community support by such actions as recycling parts of the old building into the new construction and giving the school's old window air conditioners to Habitat for Humanity for local reuse. A large addition to the building serves as an entry and focal point

for exciting activities. The repurposed school building houses further activity, exhibition, learning and support spaces. As a result they have seen far more visitors, 120,000 in the first year, than would be expected for a small rural town.

The Natural History Museum of Utah, which had out grown its Salt Lake City building, did similarly intensive pre-planning work before deciding where and how to create its new museum building, the 165,000 square foot Rio Tinto Center. Representatives traveled statewide to consider possible building sites and to get ideas and opinions from residents. They selected a spectacular site on what was once the shore of a prehistoric lake, but is now a mountainside overlooking Salt Lake City and its environs. Simply being on this site engages the subject matter of the museum, so Ennead Architects designed the building to simulate the local geology, merging inside and outside into a singular, unified experience. The museum has found that even with the move out of the populous city to the hillside perch of the new building visitation increased from 91,000 to 391,000 in a year.

The Botanical Research Institute of Texas (BRIT), located in Fort Worth, (this year's host city of the Building Museums Symposium) has a mission to help preserve the diversity of plant life through collecting plant specimens. This is complemented by an educational mission aimed at teaching the public, professionals and academics the importance of varied plant life. Because of BRIT's focus on the appropriate relationships between human and plant life, making their building ecologically sensitive became a key goal. They incorporated enough green features into the building to achieve LEED Platinum, the highest level of sustainability certification given by the U. S. Green Building Council (USGBC). BRIT staff collaborated with the architects, H3 Design Collaborative and Corgan Architects, to fine tune the green strategies to the local climate and ecology. For the building's green roof the scientists developed a mix of soil and plant types modeled on the Fort Worth "prairie barrens," in which drought and heat tolerant native plants persist on a very shallow stratum of soil. To allocate energy use effectively, the herbarium and library, which need critical interior climate control systems, are in a wing separated from the more standard meeting, teaching and office portions of the building. The building also incorporates living plant materials into the structure and the site in ways that reduce energy consumption, irrigation water and storm run-off. The new building allows BRIT to expand its programs of classes and conferences significantly, from 500 attendees a year to 5,000.

Each of these museums has received previous awards for architectural design, special construction features, or community impact, but the Buildy Award is the only award program that recognizes the museum leadership for its part in guiding the design and construction process to a high level of success. It is frequently the case that a museum director is called on to lead a construction effort only once in a career, so it is especially challenging to go through the complex process without previous experience. The museum director must address the often competing interests of staff, financial contributors, architects, engineers, builders, visitors and other parties. A major construction effort can make or break a museum. Winners of Buildy Awards have managed to guide their teams to create lasting assets for their institutions and their communities within a financially sustainable framework.

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**About the Building Museums® Symposium:**

Building Museums® is an international symposium presented annually by the Mid-Atlantic Association of Museums (MAAM) and open to all interested in the design and planning of museums. The 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Symposium will be held in Fort Worth, Texas, February 17-19, 2013 with sessions at the Fort Worth Museum of Science and History, the Fort Worth Modern Art Museum and the Botanical Research Institute of Texas.

This symposium is for museum leaders and staff, architects, planners, project managers, technical experts, and all those who plan or implement new construction, renovation, or expansion projects for museums. The goals of the program are to:

- Better understand the process of planning, implementing, and surviving new construction, renovation, or expansion projects
- Examine case studies, current trends, topical issues, and specific projects related to building projects across a broad range of museum sizes, budgets, scope, diversity of disciplines, and collecting vs. non-collections-holding institutions
- Actively discuss museum building projects with other museum professionals, architects, planners, project managers, and technical experts to better inform the process of building

Access resources for museum leaders and staff, architectural firms, consultants, and students through the Building Museums Resource Guide.

Building Museums 2013: <http://www.midatlanticmuseums.org/programs/building-museums/>