

## DINOSAUR MUSEUM MAY BE LEAVING AS LOCAL SUPPORT LAGS

Megan Trotter  
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The Highlands Prehistoric Museum on South Cedar Avenue may be moving away from Cookeville next year if it cannot find more support from the local community. Herald-Citizen Photo/Ty Kernea



**COOKEVILLE** -- The Highlands Prehistoric Museum, Cookeville's dinosaur museum, may be moving to a new city in the near future. Owner Jerry Jacene is currently considering three offers he has been given to move the museum -- one offer from another city in Tennessee and two more from out-of-state. All of the offers are tempting. One promises a building for a lease of \$1 per year, as well as offering to pay for moving expenses and guaranteeing the support of the local school system.

At the museum's current location on South Cedar Avenue, it has been drawing anywhere from 100 to 400 visitors a week, depending on if school is in session. However, even when they are seeing their highest numbers, most of the visitors are not local. "We're having responses from all over the place, except for Cookeville," said Jacene. "(I don't understand) how it is that I can get a 9-year-old girl who lives in New Zealand wanting help with her dinosaur homework, but people up the street don't know we're here." According to his estimates, the museum needs about 100 visitors per day to be able to afford to stay in Cookeville, but they just aren't seeing those numbers.

In addition to displaying fossils like the full T-Rex skeleton, Jacene uses the museum for real paleontologist work. Along with Tennessee Tech earth science students, he has been excavating a 11x8-foot slab of earth from Montana containing the fossils of several dinosaurs. The museum has a special area set up where visitors can see their progress. Jacene will also soon have a set of woolly rhino bones from China, courtesy of a private collector who is letting the museum make a cast of the fossils. "Of all the museums in the United States, we're the one who got it," said Jacene.

Not only does Jacene handle all of the molding and casting work for his own museum, but a company in Missouri has also asked him to handle all of their molding and casting work as well. The Highlands Prehistoric Museum is also involved with the Make-A-Wish Foundation. They hosted a large fundraiser for the Upper Cumberland Make-A-Wish chapter this year, and Jacene himself has taken children with life-threatening illnesses on week-long dinosaur digs in Montana. Though the museum is not seeing as many visitors as Jacene had hoped, he still wants to thank those who have supported the museum so far. Volunteers, including a geology teacher from MTSU and a former Disney engineer, have given countless hours to making the facility a hidden gem of the community.

If economic reasons force the Highlands Prehistoric Museum to move, Jacene says he would strive to keep a downsized version of the museum in Cookeville, though that would mean that the T-Rex and other major exhibits would go to the new location. "No decision has been made, but we are entertaining the offers," he said. "We need to find a way to get the word out in Cookeville that we're here and this is a real museum, and we have exhibits in here that the Smithsonian would like to have." For more information about the museum, visit [www.highlandsprehistoricmuseum.com](http://www.highlandsprehistoricmuseum.com) or call (931) 526-3204.

## PREHISTORIC MUSEUM MOVING TO KINGSFORT

Megan Trotter  
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Tuesday, Dec 22, 2009

Herald-Citizen Photo/Daniel Flatt Highlands Prehistoric Museum owner Jerry Jacene works with some of his specimens at the museum.



**COOKEVILLE** -- Highlands Prehistoric Museum will be closing its Cookeville site permanently on Thursday, Dec. 31, to move to a new location in Kingsport. Since opening in June, the museum has attracted about 3,800 guests, but that has not been enough support to make remaining in the area a possibility. According to museum owner Jerry Jacene, many residents still do not know about the museum -- eight out of 10 visitors have come from outlying areas, not Cookeville. Those who do come in are often surprised at what they find.

"They're surprised at the type of museum it is. They were expecting a kid theme or something. We get a lot of that. We get a lot of people, they call and ask us, 'What do you have for a 2 or 3 year old to do?' Well, not a lot. It's a museum," said Jacene.

Though the museum has seen support from some areas of the community, such as Tennessee Tech, elsewhere support has been lagging. "It's kind of like an extinction. We can't put our finger on just one (cause) -- it's been a combination of many things," he said.

The museum's last full day will be on the 31st when it will close at 5 p.m. After that, groups of 10 or more will be able to schedule visits while the museum packs for departure during the month of January. Jacene plans to have everything packed and ready to go by the end of February and hopes to be open at their new location in Kingsport by mid to late March. Going with the museum will be all of the exhibits, including the full T-Rex skeleton that is larger than the one displayed at the Smithsonian. "That thing alone has made some kids cry. They have stood in front of it and been absolutely terrified and couldn't get out of here fast enough," chuckled Jacene. "If people want to come see the T-Rex before it's gone, next month is it. After that they'll have to come to Kingsport."

Though sad to be moving away from Cookeville, Jacene will have plenty of opportunities waiting for him at his new location. He hopes to set up a positive working relationship with the Gray fossil site, where he was once the foreman, and with a nearby museum in Virginia. He wants to develop new programs, including family dino digs. Jacene has also been invited to explore Blue Springs Cave to identify prehistoric cat tracks as well as produce his hand-made souvenirs, like his miniature T-Rex skulls and teeth replicas, for museums and shops across the country. He also wants to keep working with Tennessee Tech and their earth science department. "The support and understanding of why we're moving has been really positive. And a lot of people like the fact that we're staying in Tennessee," said Jacene.

"If one door closes, another one will open, though it might not be what you had in mind, because we certainly didn't start all this with the intention of moving." The museum is open Tuesdays-Saturdays from 9 a.m.-5 p.m. and Sundays from 11 a.m.-4 p.m. For more information about the museum, call (931) 526-3204 or visit [www.highlandsprehistoricmuseum.com](http://www.highlandsprehistoricmuseum.com).

## PREHISTORIC MUSEUM NOW EXTINCT IN COOKEVILLE

Megan Trotter  
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Thursday, Jan 28, 2010

Herald-Citizen Photo/Megan Trotter From left, David Johnson, Jacob (Jake) Corona and Jerry Jacene, owner of the Highlands Prehistoric Museum, maneuver a load of fossils through a hole in the side of the building that had to be cut to remove the dino bones to their new home. Another photo on Page 2.

**COOKEVILLE** -- BOB has left the building. BOB, or Bag of Bones, was one of the last items to leave the Highlands Prehistoric Museum early Wednesday morning as Jerry Jacene, museum owner, finished packing for his move to Kingsport. "I think this dino has covered more ground now that he's dead than when he was alive," Jacene joked. BOB originally came from a dig site in Montana and consists of a collection of several real dinosaur fossils that Jacene, earth science students from Tennessee Tech and other experts have been working to excavate from the rock around them.

Measuring about 7 feet by 6 feet, getting BOB out of the museum and into his new home has proved to be a challenge. The fossils were first brought in through a bay door in the back of the museum, however the owner of the building had removed that door since then. This left Jacene with the problem of how to remove many of the museum's pieces. The nearly 40-foot long and 14-foot high T-Rex that had been housed in the museum had been assembled in sections and so could be taken apart and fit through the front door with minimal problems. However there was no way to take apart a collection of bones encased in rock.

So early Wednesday morning, with help from David Johnson and Jacob (Jake) Corona, Jacene had an 8-foot-by-7-foot hole cut in the side of the museum for BOB's exit. The fossils were taken from the building with little problem and were loaded up to be driven to the new location the same day. After Jacene has the hole patched and does a little last minute cleaning, he will be headed to Kingsport himself where the new location of the museum is scheduled for opening in late March. Announcements of their reopening will be posted on their Web site at [www.highlandsprehistoricmuseum.com](http://www.highlandsprehistoricmuseum.com).

<http://www.ajlambert.com>