CA museum gets big gift to build shuttle exhibit

LOS ANGELES (AP) -- The California Science Museum said it has raised nearly half of the $200 million needed to build a permanent exhibit for the space shuttle Endeavour.

The museum recently received a donation from the Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Oschin Family Foundation that will allow it to start the design phase of the project. The museum didn't disclose the amount of the gift, citing an agreement it made with the foundation.

"This is a huge boost. It gives a vote of confidence for the project" museum president Jeffrey Rudolph said Wednesday.

Rudolph spent the past year fundraising and still has halfway to go to fulfill the museum's goal. The museum has received gifts from private foundations, corporations and individuals, but Rudolph said the latest donation was "very significant and truly transformative."

The museum planned to introduce the foundation at an event Thursday that will be attended by Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa,

When the display opens in 2017, it will be called the Samuel Oschin Air and Space Center in memory of a real estate developer and astronomy enthusiast, and will feature Endeavour in a vertical position, as if it's ready to launch.

Until then, Endeavour will be housed in a temporary exhibit currently under construction. It is slated to be bolted to the top of a modified jumbo jet and arrive in Los Angeles in late September.

Since NASA retired the shuttle fleet last year, technicians have been busy prepping the shuttles to their final destination as museum pieces. Atlantis remained in Cape Canaveral, Fla.

Last month, Discovery wowed crowds by swooping over the nation's capital before landing in Virginia where it will go on display at the Smithsonian Institution's hangar at Dulles International Airport. Several weeks later, the prototype shuttle Enterprise sailed over the Statue of Liberty and past the skyscrapers along Manhattan's West Side before touching down at Kennedy Airport. It will be towed by barge next month to New York City's Intrepid Sea, Air and Space Museum.

Rudolph said he expected the same fanfare when Endeavour arrives at the Los Angeles International Airport. Details are still being worked out, but Rudolph said he expects the shuttle to fly over the Hollywood Sign and other landmarks. Current plans call for towing Endeavour from the airport to the museum near downtown - a move that will require taking out traffic lights and closing streets.

Online:

California Science Museum: http://www.californiasciencecenter.org/ [1]

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