



Education

Yes, on the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

INFINITY... A World-class Science Center (part 1 of 2)

In South Mississippi, a remarkable destination is on the horizon. INFINITY at NASA Stennis Space Center will be a science center like no other, where learning is taken to unparalleled levels. Located along Interstate 10, just east of New Orleans at Stennis Space Center, INFINITY will create a lasting impression on those entering Mississippi, and that's just from its exterior.

The real wow will be on the inside. The 72,000 square foot glass building, designed by ESI Design of New York, will provide a showcase for the world-class level of exploration and discovery that has been a part of NASA, Stennis Space Center and Mississippi for over 40 years. With unique interactive exhibits, INFINITY will inspire, amaze and engage children and adults alike.

"We got with the engineers and scientists of NASA and asked them to tell us the coolest stuff they do," said John Wilson, INFINITY's education program development director. He continued, "We told them, if you love it, we have failed," meaning that they wanted to adapt the ideas to appeal to everyone.

While highlighting the scientific and technical work at NASA's Stennis Space Center, INFINITY is also aimed at creating a greater interest in math and science and increasing science literacy among the general public.

Larry Barnett, executive director of the Harrison County Development Commission and the Mississippi Gulf Coast Alliance for Economic Development, said that INFINITY fits right in with what he and surrounding counties are doing to promote the growing aerospace corridor along Interstate 10. He said, "With Michoud to our east in New Orleans, Stennis, Northrop Grumman's Unmanned Systems Center in Jackson County, EADS in Mobile and our extensive military presence, we have a very strong science and technology corridor. INFINITY will be a great asset to this, informing the public and inspiring a workforce to support it."

The INFINITY adventure will begin in the courtyard where rockets and rocket engines will signify the authenticity of the place. Upon entering the lobby, guests will be met with Science Express, which will offer a free glimpse of the center's exhibits. Targeted at Interstate 10 travelers who need a rest from their ride, this exhibit is intended to whet their appetite in hopes that they will return for the full experience. The area will also include a restaurant, bakery and gift shop.

Once inside the main museum, visitors can browse on their own or choose a mission – a guided session that places them in the role of "scientists in training." In the Immersive Theatre, guests will receive an exhilarating introduction and orientation for INFINITY.

On the first floor of INFINITY will be the Earth Gallery, devoted to investigations of Earth as a holistic, life-supporting system. Visitors will partake in activities and learn about the sciences, tools and methodologies that scientists at Stennis use to explore Earth's oceans, land masses and atmosphere and the interactions among them. Overlooking the Earth Gallery will be the Space Gallery where guests can study the solar system, satellites, space travel and more.

INFINITY will be on curricular with the Mississippi and Louisiana science standards, encouraging schools to bring their students. Workshops will be held to inform teachers about the INFINITY experience.

As the late Leo W. Seal, Jr., chairman of Hancock Holding Company and chairman of INFINITY Science Center, Inc., said, INFINITY will be "a special place dedicated to encouraging future scientists, mathematicians and engineers."



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INFINITY... A World-class Science Center (part 2 of 2)

Mr. Seal was one of many community leaders who shared the vision for INFINITY. INFINITY is the result of a partnership established in 2001 between NASA and a non-profit organization of business leaders, MAST, Inc. Together, their mission to create a new and unique world-class science center was on the road to becoming reality with the 2002 purchase of 199 acres, just outside the gates of Stennis Space Center.

In the years following, scientists and engineers worked with ESI Design Firm to develop the visitor experience, incorporating LEED principals into their design. Harrison Price Company, which established its expertise with Walt Disney in the selection of a site and development of Disneyland in California, conducted the feasibility study for the attraction and projected that well over 300,000 people would visit it annually.

Funding for INFINITY was included in the Governor's Call for Special Session in 2005, and the project was featured in the Governor Commission's proposed vision for the new landscape of the Coast. The following year, Governor Haley Barbour signed HB 1634, awarding INFINITY \$6 million. In 2007, funding was increased to \$10 million; and in 2009, HB 102 was introduced to increase it to \$16 million. NASA has committed funding for the project and the remainder will come from public and private sources.

INFINITY broke ground in November 2008 and anticipates the start of building in fall of 2009. Once complete, INFINITY will be an amazing destination that enlightens all who enter.

For more information on INFINITY, go to www.infinitysciencecenter.org.



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