There are so many iconic sights and venues in Houston. The Burke Baker Planetarium’s large rounded dome has been a recognizable symbol of this city's history of innovation and exploration. Once inside, guests are greeted by the Planetarium’s glowing hallways that lead to the Friedkin Theater. HMNS first brought outer space indoors in 1964 with the opening of the Planetarium. Through the years the Planetarium’s cosmic shows have inspired children and adults alike, bringing them to the very edge of the known universe.

After fifty years of service and over 7.5 million visitors, the well-worn seats of the Planetarium were not the only items that needed updating. The Planetarium had lost its sleek, modern edge. The projection system had aged and lacked quality of projection, past the point of repair. Technology had long surpassed the Planetarium. Seeing the need and potential for a complete renovation, Joel Bartsch, President of the Museum, and the Board of Trustees began a $2,500,000 campaign, An Inner Place for Outer Space.

Renovations on the Burke Baker Planetarium and Friedkin Theater began after the last film showing in late December 2015 and were complete in early March. The work was compared to a fire sale…everything must go! The iconic outside dome remained, but the interior changed, dramatically. A new inner dome, seats, and projectors were all brought in and assembled in the existing space. The dome has been tilted down, and the rake of the seating increased so that space travelers are now surrounded by what they see.

A giant NanoSeam™ dome, the Radoff Family Dome, provides a pristine backdrop for the new true 8K projection system. The new Radoff Family Dome boasts 50 million pixels, as opposed to 9 million of our old system, with an image ten times brighter and twice the contrast. Now that is a stellar presentation!

Visitors are immersed, literally and figuratively, in the new Burke Baker Planetarium experience. It provides an experience far above expectations and we are grateful to the donors who contributed to this cosmic effort:

- The Friedkin Group
- Houston Endowment, Inc.
- The Radoff Family
- The Brown Foundation, Inc.
- The Burke Baker, Jr. Family
- Kathrine G. McGovern/ McGovern Foundation
- The Hamill Foundation
- Dr. Dale Brown and Eleanor Brown
- Dr. Stephen D. Brown
- Albert and Ethel Herzstein Charitable Foundation
- Avela Corporation (Go dome)
- Patricia Reiff
- E-Planetarium
- Ann S. Thurmond

In addition to their support of the renovation, The Houston Endowment, Inc. provided an additional gift which will allow the Museum to offer Planetarium shows to the public for free, during our free hours on Thursdays from 2:00 p.m. until 5:00 p.m. We are grateful for the support and the opportunity show the wonders of space to a greater audience.

As part of our renovation initiative, the Museum is now offering naming opportunities for Planetarium seats! At $2,000 each, this gift will provide a comfy place for future explorers of all ages to be inspired. We would like to recognize the following Planetarium seat sponsors:

- Amy Chaisson
- Cora Sue and Harry Mach
- Randa and Charlie Williams

For more information or to sponsor a Burke Baker Planetarium seat, please contact Cindy Geiser at (713) 639-4778 or cgeiser@hmns.org.
HMNS Gala 2016

The Houston Museum of Natural Science 2016 Gala, held on Saturday, March 3rd, was a festive evening. Inspired by the temporary exhibit La Virgen de Guadalupe: Empress of the Americas, the Museum was transformed into an old town plaza with papel picado, string lights, mariachis and margaritas. Guests celebrated the history, culture, and tradition of our southern neighbors. Chaired by Joella and Steve Mach along with Honorary Chairmen, Randa and Charlie Williams, Gala 2016 raised over $850,000, which will support the Museum’s general operating budget.

A seated dinner of crab tostada, duck with mole, and rojo enchiladas was served to guests in Glassell Hall, the Cullen Hall of Gems and Minerals, and the Fresley/Graham Hall of African Wildlife. Dinner was followed by dancing led by the musical stylings of Memphis Train Revue. By supporting the 2016 Gala, Olé! A Night in Old Mexico, our donors helped shape the future of our community by providing an unparalleled educational experience for learners of all ages.

Harry and Cora Sue Mach, Steve and Joella Mach, Carmen and Butch Mach
The Houston Museum of Natural Science will serve as mission control for an out of this world event. We are over the moon to have Shawn Stephens, Jim Jordan, and Kelli and John Weinzierl co-chairing the HMNS Gala, The Big Bang Ball.

This past February, families and friends gathered throughout The Houston Museum of Natural Science’s Cockrell Butterfly Center and courtyard for the annual A Butterfly Flutter children’s event. Nearly 250 family members came to enjoy the butterfly center, arts and crafts activities, face painting, insect petting zoo, refreshments and fun. Thanks to the wonderful 2016 chairmen, Lane Bowden and Mary Kay Bowden, HMNS raised over $31,000.

Come spread your wings and fly to HMNS on Saturday, February 25, 2017 for the next annual A Butterfly Flutter. This children’s event promises a fun-filled morning of papilio activities for your little “caterpillar”. Funds from A Butterfly Flutter benefit the operating budget of the Cockrell Butterfly Center and education programs at HMNS.

The 2017 A Butterfly Flutter Chairmen, Katie Forney and Heidi O’Donnell, hope you will migrate to the Museum to support the best butterfly center in the Southwest!

To be a part of the excitement please contact Emily Brents at (713) 639-4729 or ebrents@hmns.org.

This year’s Gala honors our newly renovated Burke Baker Planetarium. We plan to transport our guests to neighboring planets, distant galaxies, and even back to the Big Bang. Set your calendars and prepare for lift-off on Saturday, March 4, 2017.

You won’t need the Hubble Telescope to see the impact HMNS makes in our community. The Museum’s exhibits enable nearly 600,000 school children annually to interact and learn about dinosaurs, butterflies, cultures, gems, energy, and space. By supporting the 2017 Gala, The Big Bang Ball, you help educate and inspire the next generation of explorers.

We are grateful for your stellar support, and look forward to spending this evening unraveling the mystery, that all started with the Big Bang!

Should you have any questions, contact Emily Brents at (713) 639-4729 or ebrents@hmns.org.

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The Museum was thrilled to have astronaut Captain Scott Kelly—back from his historic Year in Space—as the keynote speaker for the 2016 Excellence in Science Luncheon. This annual event honors local students and educators who have demonstrated a passion for science and mathematics. This year’s Excellence in Science Luncheon was held on Wednesday, November 9, at The Briar Club.

2016 Excellence in Science Luncheon

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WHAT IS NEW?
In June of 2016, The Houston Museum of Natural Science’s Membership department announced major upgrades and benefits for members. Three new membership levels allow you to do more and with more of your friends and family at the Museum. HMNS has added three exclusive new membership events 2nd Saturdays, Members First, and World Trekkers.

MEMBERSHIP LEVELS
This past June, HMNS was proud to introduce three new levels of membership. Family Plus-level, which includes Family-level member benefits with an additional guest. Family Flex-level, previously known as a Voyager membership, now will allow up to ten guests.

Lastly, in addition to invitations to exclusive Catalysts events, the new HMNS Catalysts Family-level provides the benefits of a family level membership as well. HMNS is thrilled to offer more opportunities and discounts for everyone hoping to join a membership.

• Family Plus includes Family-level member benefits for two adults and four children, PLUS one additional adult or child.

• Voyager level membership is now called Family Flex and allows membership benefits for ten people.

• Discoverer and Benefactor level memberships now allow member benefits for ten people.

• HMNS Catalysts Family (Young Professionals) includes Family-level membership benefits for two adults and four children, plus an invitation for two to exclusive HMNS Catalysts social events (once per quarter, ages 21 and up) and two free tickets to all summer-series Mixers & Elixirs.

MEMBERS FIRST!
A brand new benefit just for HMNS’ members! Members get exclusive access to special exhibitions before they open to the public. In September, members enjoy viewings of HMNS' new exhibitions Bill of Rights: Amending America and Mummies of the World.

WORLD TREKKERS
Another Members Only event, World Trekkers, invites HMNS members to “see the world, skip the jet lag!” Launched this past February, these exploratory family events hope to highlight a diverse set of cultures from around the world. Guests enjoy food samplings, entertainment, arts and crafts, live animals and more.

In 2016 Members were able to dive into the four diverse cultures around the world. Earlier this year members “traveled” to Peru and Australia. In August, members experienced a hint of South Korea by viewing Taekwondo demonstrations. Finally, at the Ireland November event guests enjoyed a dance performance from the Drake School of Irish Dance-Houston while sampling Irish candies. These events have been a wild success with an average of 500 regular attendees. The Museum hopes to bring the world to you through these cultural festivals.

For more information on Membership, please call (713) 639-4629.
Since its establishment in 2012, the Curator’s Circle strives to give major donors contributing to the Museum’s exhibition program, opportunities far beyond standard receptions and dinners. The Curator’s Circle was designed to offer unique and memorable experiences for those donors who contribute $10,000, or more, to support the Museum’s exhibition agenda, recognizing that travelling exhibitions complement the Museum’s permanent collections and help drive attendance, membership sales and expand Museum programming.

Events offered to the Curator’s Circle generally revolve around current happenings at the Museum, in an effort to emphasize the results of their support. They range from special speakers, intimate dinners (both at the Museum and in private homes), magic shows, viewings in portable planetariums, and pop-up events that provide for activities such as star-gazing and shark-petting. And of course, the opportunity to be the first-of-the-first to preview special exhibitions. The list of activities grows each year, and the Museum is investigating travel opportunities for the near future!

Events throughout 2016 included exploratory nights visiting and dining to preview exhibitions such as The Virgin de Guadalupe, Cabinet of Curiosities and Mummies of the World. Additionally, there was a private screening and dinner for the newly renovated Burke Baker Planetarium with the Friedkin Theater and Radoff Family Dome. Dark Universe was the opening presentation, followed by a Q&A session with Dr. Carolyn Summers, VP of Astronomy and Physics. Finally, a casual dinner and evening with Museum friend Glen Rosenbaum, to view his amazing model train layout, as a sneak peak of the Museum’s own train exhibition Trains Over Texas, which opened November 16. Layout designer and builder Roger Farkash was also in attendance to further enhance the experience.

Curator Circle members’ influence on the Museum is enormous, and valued. For more information on joining the Museum’s Curator’s Circle, please contact Sveta Darnell at (713) 639-4618 or sdarnell@hmns.org.

Gifting received as of November 9, 2016. We have taken care to ensure the accurate recognition of our donors. If an error or omission does occur, we apologize and hope you will bring it to our attention by contacting Margaret Schuster at (713) 639-4618.
President’s Circle

The President’s Circle is a dedicated donor group that sustains the museum through gifts to the Annual Fund. Members receive invitations to private exhibition previews, tickets to special exhibits, and Family Flex benefits.

In 2016, our President’s Circle members enjoyed preview receptions for the newly renovated Burke Baker Planetarium, Amending America: The Bill of Rights, and Mummies of the World. A gift today would ensure your invitation to next year’s events.

Receptions for 2017 include: the touring exhibit, Gladiators: Heroes of the Colosseum; our own thrilling special exhibit, Death by Natural Causes; and our ground-breaking Wiess Energy Hall 3.0.

Gifts of $2,000 and above the Annual Fund qualify a donor for a President’s Circle membership. For more information or to join the President’s Circle, please contact Emily Brents at (713)-639-4729 or ebrents@hmns.org.

Create a Legacy at HMNS

Members of the HMNS Legacy Society receive exclusive benefits for their visionary gifts including invitations to exclusive, behind-the-scenes events, recognition in Museum publications, a commemorative item and an invitation to an annual event that honors all Legacy Society Members.

Individuals who provide for the Museum in the following ways are welcome to the Legacy Society and eligible for HMNS Legacy Society membership:

- Name the Museum as a beneficiary in their will.
- Designate the Museum as a beneficiary of retirement assets including an IRA, 401(k), 403-b or other pension plans.
- Donate a life insurance policy to the Museum or simply name them as a beneficiary.
- Create a charitable trust with the Museum.
- Establish a charitable gift annuity through the Museum.
- Promise a gift of an artifact(s) that the Museum has agreed to accept.
- Provide a future gift from a private foundation that honors an individual as a lifelong supporter.

To enroll in HMNS Legacy Society, simply contact Amy Chaisson, Director of Donor Development at (713) 639-4746 or achaisson@hmns.org. Details of your gift are not required; however any information that you wish to share will be held in strictest confidence.

Board member Ann Brinkerhoff announced in 2012 the HMNS Legacy Society designed to honor individuals who provide for the Museum in their estate plans. “We are pleased to provide this opportunity to recognize the thoughtful individuals who make the type of gift that many times is reserved for family and close friends,” said Ann.

Mrs. Brinkerhoff was instrumental in recruiting current and former Board and Guild members to the Legacy Society Committee to set guidelines for membership, define benefits and encourage their peers to join. “I was so honored to lead a group of like-minded individuals who share a love of and commitment to the Museum,” said Ann.

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"We are pleased to provide this opportunity to recognize the thoughtful individuals who make the type of gift that many times is reserved for family and close friends,” said Ann.
The Wiess Energy Hall expansion and renovation project is going at full speed and the anticipated opening to the public is less than a year away – the last quarter of 2017. The Hall will truly be a destination point for visitors from around the world, as it will educate guests about all aspects of the industry – from the formation of hydrocarbons to the rise of unconventional resources to alternative forms of energy and ending with an examination of future energy challenges.

Bigger than a football field, the new Wiess Energy Hall will be an unparalleled education experience, as well as a beautiful space for special functions and dinners. For more information on how you or your company can be a part if this new project, contact Amy Chaisson 713-639-4746.