



Perot family gives \$50 million to Dallas science museum

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By MICHAEL GRANBERRY / The Dallas Morning News
mgranberry@dallasnews.com

Ross Perot Jr. conceded the point: It's hardly the best of times for the national economy. But, he added, charitable giving in Dallas has never been more robust.

He and his sisters then added their own punctuation, giving \$50 million Friday to the Museum of Nature & Science.

The new facility, to be built on 4.7 acres at the northwest corner of Woodall Rodgers Freeway and Field Street at Victory Park, will be known as the Perot Museum of Nature & Science, in honor of Ross Perot Sr. and his wife, Margot.

Museum officials say the Perot family gift, the largest in its \$155 million capital campaign, assures groundbreaking in 2009.

Despite the economic downturn, the younger Perot said Dallas' philanthropic giving continues to scale new heights. He cited recent large donations to UT Southwestern Medical Center, the Dallas Center for the Performing Arts and the George W. Bush presidential library at Southern Methodist University.

"You look at all of these projects," he said, "and a couple of billion dollars in private funds are being raised, and it's showing up in this community, which is a very special place."

Site of the new Museum of Nature & Science

Officials for the Museum of Nature & Science said Friday that the Perot gift has allowed them to reach \$106 million in private donations. Nicole G. Small, chief executive officer of the Museum of Nature & Science, whose new facility will supplement its existing Fair Park facility, said the gift means construction can start next year.

The Perot gift follows several recent \$10 million donations to the museum, whose designer is Pritzker Award-winning architect Thom Mayne of Los Angeles.

The list of \$10 million givers includes Hunt Petroleum, the Hoglund Foundation and Family, the Rees-Jones Foundation and T. Boone Pickens. The Corrigan family gave \$2.5 million.

The Perots' \$50 million, from developer Ross Perot Jr. and his sisters Katherine Perot, Carolyn Rathjen, Suzanne McGee and Nancy Mulford, is the latest in a succession of large individual gifts to Dallas institutions.

Philanthropist Nancy Hamon recently donated \$25 million to UT Southwestern Medical Center for biomedical research and \$10 million to the Margot and Bill Winspear Opera House at the Dallas Center for Performing Arts for a new rehearsal, education and recital space.

In 2004, Ms. Hamon gave \$10 million to the Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts, and in 1988, she gave \$20 million to the Dallas Museum of Art.

Oilman Ray Hunt recently gave \$35 million to SMU so the university could buy a shopping center whose land could be used for the soon-to-be-built Bush library.

Ross Perot Jr. said officials for the Museum of Nature & Science approached the family "about a year ago. My mother started to get real excited. She took a couple of trips to Houston, got all the girls onboard and then talked to Dad. Dad got excited about it, and the momentum built. But it was my mother. She really gets the credit."

At one point during Friday's press conference at the W Hotel, Ross Perot Jr. fought back tears. Later, he said, "I just thought of my parents coming here 50 years ago. They drove into Dallas from Texarkana, didn't know anybody and went to work. Dallas embraced them, and look at how far they've come. It's an amazing community."

Ms. Mulford said she and her siblings had "looked for a long time" for a way to honor their parents, "who have given so much to us and so much to the city. They're both very modest and reluctant to have anything like this named for them ... but I think it's important for their legacy to be memorialized in the city."

When the museum opportunity came along, it "felt perfect," she said, "because it covers education and research and engineering."

The room grew still when the elder Perot took the lectern, where, for a moment, he sounded like the presidential candidate he became in 1992.

"We know we need more engineers in our country," he said. "I want to make one clear point: Go to any of our most advanced engineering universities and check to see who's getting the Ph.D.s in engineering. I'm glad you're sitting down. Eighty percent come from India and China, 18 percent come from all over the world – I'm up to 98 percent – and 2 percent come from the good ol' USA. Now *that* is a recipe for disaster."

He said he hoped the new museum would help to reverse the trend by inspiring a new generation of engineers and scientists.

"This will get them to dream," he said. "In our country, you can dream the dream and make the dream come true."

He said he was "honored that my children and grandchildren wanted to do this. And I hope it will inspire young people to reach for the stars, as I was able to do."