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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Governor Ivey Designates Cook Museum of Natural Science as the North Alabama STEM Center with \$9.5 Million Investment

Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey and the State have designated Cook Museum of Natural Science as the North Alabama STEM Center. To serve as a catalyst for expansion of STEM labs and educational programming spaces, the State appropriated \$9.5 million in the Education Budget.

“Alabama’s future depends on our ability to prepare students for the jobs of tomorrow, and STEM education is key to that effort,” said Gov. Ivey. “This significant State investment reflects the outstanding work the Cook Museum of Natural Science has accomplished in STEM education. This expansion will undoubtedly strengthen educational opportunities for students and support workforce development in one of the state’s fastest-growing regions.”

“We are honored and grateful to have this designation from Gov. Ivey and the Alabama Legislature,” said Cook Museum Executive Director Scott Mayo. “With this directive, we will begin developing extensive plans to expand the capacity for our STEM-based, interactive learning labs and educational curriculum for school classes.”

The Cook Museum provides classes and camps with hands-on learning experiences, aligned with the Alabama Course of Study. The Museum serves public, private, and homeschool students from 21 Alabama counties, totaling over 18,000 students annually on field trips with over 7,000 participating in classes and camps.

“This investment is to enable increased access and programming for students in the North Alabama region,” Mayo said. “Gov. Ivey’s commitment to inspiring and preparing the state’s STEM workforce of the future aligns with the mission of the Cook Museum, and we look forward to serving our North Alabama students in an increased scope and capacity.”

“Four of the fastest growing school districts are in North Alabama, and we continue to attract and grow STEM-related workforce opportunities,” said State Superintendent Dr. Eric Mackey. “The Cook Museum is in the heart of the region and is already doing an excellent job serving our educators and school systems as a resource, particularly for our elementary students.”

City of Decatur Mayor Tab Bowling said he is excited to see Cook Museum’s contributions to the region’s STEM education be recognized.

“The City of Decatur is honored to have the Cook Museum of Natural Science in our downtown, and we’re thrilled to see it receive this well-deserved STEM Center designation with strong support from our great State,” Bowling said. “This designation enhances Decatur’s reputation as a city that values education, innovation, and the future of our children. Decatur is excited to see the Cook Museum continue to serve and inspire our dynamic and expanding region.”

More about Cook Museum

The Cook Museum’s humble roots can be traced back to 1968 when John Cook Sr. opened his professional insect collection to the public by appointment. At the time, it had been used primarily for employee training at Cook’s Pest Control, but it later grew to include a wide array of mounted wildlife, touring malls throughout Alabama, Tennessee, and Georgia.

In 1980, additional collections of rocks, minerals, fossils, coral, seashells, mounted wildlife, and federally protected migratory birds were acquired, and a 5,000-square-foot building was constructed to house Cook’s Natural Science Museum. From its opening in 1980 until its closing in 2016, the Museum welcomed more than 750,000 visitors. As meaningful as the Museum had been for decades, the Cook family decided it was time to reinvent the Museum as an even more engaging, exciting, and educational experience for the next generation.

The new Cook Museum of Natural Science, a non-profit 501(c)(3), opened as a 62,000-square-foot educational institution and tourism destination in downtown Decatur, Alabama on June 7, 2019.

Hours of operation, ticket information, a calendar of upcoming events, and more can be found at cookmuseum.org.