

# Chemical company gives boost to museum

By SHANNON DAUGHTRY | Posted: Monday, January 9, 2012 2:00 am

**FREEPORT** — With the hope of promoting education in the fields of math and science, Gulf Chemical has made a donation to the Freeport Historical Museum.

The company's \$30,000 donation has been put toward the purchase of a planetarium for the museum. The planetarium itself cost \$27,000 with the remainder funding other programs at the museum, City Manager Jeff Pynes said.

"It's been ordered," Pynes said. "I think we'll have it in our possession (this) week."

The inflatable dome planetarium will be put in a special room in the museum with a raised ceiling, Pynes said.

Along with showing movies and images of the solar system and the view from a spaceship in outer space, Pynes said the city's hope is to showcase documentary-type videos of Freeport's history.

"We're looking to get a documentary done on the history of Freeport, the history of the East End, things like that," he said. "We're wanting to capture all aspects of the museum because you really never know what it will be that turns on that light in a child's brain."

Pynes' first experience with an inflatable planetarium was through a partnership the city had with the Houston Museum of Natural Science a few years ago, he said. The planetarium was loaned to the museum to showcase programs similar to the ones Pynes is hoping will be shown on a regular basis.

"We had more than 800 kids come out that summer to experience it," he said. "That told me we really had a need for something like that."

Supporting the area's youth is important to Gulf Chemical, Executive Vice President B.J. Stephan said.

"It's my personal belief that we need to focus on developing math and science education," Stephan said. "We saw that we need to invest in children and their future in order to do that."

Stephan, who said he can remember his first trip inside a planetarium as a child, hopes Brazosport-area children are able to benefit from the experience as much as he did.

"It influenced me so much that I decided to become a professional geologist," he said.

Stephan said he hopes the planetarium sparks interest in children and encourages them to further their education in the fields of math and science.

“Let them see the excitement behind these fields and how you can make a career out of it as well,” he said.

Pynes said once the planetarium is up and running — expected to be in the next week or two — it will be in operation every day the museum is open.

“We are also wanting it to travel to our local schools,” Pynes said. “We would like to have an archived video selection to share with the schools. ...

“It’s a great opportunity,” he said. “We really can’t wait.”

*Shannon Daughtry covers Freeport for The Facts. Contact her at 979-237-0152.*