



# *The* **BACKBENDER'S GAZETTE**

**The Newsletter of the  
Houston Gem & Mineral Society  
Houston, TX**

**Volume XXXVI - No. 4**

**April 2005**

## **President's Message**

*by Norman Lenz  
HGMS President, 2004–2005*



**F**ellow HGMS Club Members,

Approximately 120 members and guests attended our private viewing of “Gold! Natural Treasure, Cultural Obsession” at the Houston Museum of Natural Science. I think everyone agrees that it was well worth our discounted admission price to see it. Not fighting the usual crowds at the special exhibits made it particularly enjoyable. We were allowed plenty of time to be impressed and to get a feel of the allure of gold, how it occurs, and how it has been used through time. It is an impressive exhibit. Thanks to Neal Immega, Dave Temple, Mark Mauthner, and Scott Singleton who made it possible.



The new roof has withstood several good rainstorms with no apparent leaks. Thanks to Dave Hawkins and Tom Wright, most of the new ceiling tiles have been replaced, and our meeting rooms are looking much better. We plan to have the carpet in the

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*Continued on page 4*

## **March General Meeting Presentation**

*by Scott Singleton  
First Vice President*

**F**ollowing closely on the heels of two months of gold talks, we have arranged to have Karen Jensen, GG, ISA, speak to us about the finer points of her profession. Karen is a professional gemologist and appraiser. She will cover two very important aspects of appraising: first, the philosophical concept of “ethical appraising,” whereby the appraiser you hire is independent (does not work for the jewelry trade) and is well-researched (does not pull figures out of a hat).



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*Copy is due for the May issue by Friday, April 8, 2005. (When the 8th falls on Saturday,, I create the BBG that same weekend.)*

## Purpose of HGMS

**T**he objectives of this Society are to promote the advancement of the knowledge and practice of the arts and sciences associated with the collecting of rocks, minerals, fossils, artifacts, and their identification and classification; the general lapidary art; the collecting and identification of gemstones; the designing and execution of jewelry or metalcraft; and to provide the opportunity to obtain, exchange, and exhibit specimens and rough or finished materials.

Membership dues are \$30 for an adult membership, \$40 for a couple, \$50 for a family (including all children aged 5-18), and \$8 for a youth membership (ages 5-18).

Advertising rates: \$70 for 2 mo, ¼ page; \$150 for 6 mo, ¼ page.

MEMBER: American Federation of Mineralogical Societies & South Central Federation of Mineral Societies.

## HGMS Officers and Section Chairs

All meetings are held at the Clubhouse located at 10805 Brooklet near the intersection of Highway 59 (Southwest Freeway) and Sam Houston Parkway (Beltway 8). See the calendar inside the back page for when the different Sections meet. The General Meeting is the fourth Tuesday of each month at 7:30. The HGMS Internet address is <http://www.hgms.org>.

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*President's Message continued from page 1*

large meeting room shampooed and will have the entire clubhouse exterminated to solve reported sightings of insects and spiders. Work is progressing on the cleanup of the storage areas. This should help eliminate some of the indoor insect habitat.

There is still time to give your input to revision of the HGMS Bylaws. Send your suggestions to Scott Singleton, Chair of the Bylaws Review Committee.

A tailgate sale and swap in the parking lot is being scheduled for April 10. It is open to all for selling, buying, and swapping. Past events have been quite successful.

As of the 6<sup>th</sup> of March, only about half of the Society members have paid their 2005 dues. Members who have not paid their dues by the end of February are considered delinquent by our Bylaws and are in danger of losing their subscription to the Newsletter.

We are a volunteer organization. We are happy to consider adding new HGMS activities. Please submit them to the Board for approval and be prepared to be the leader of these activities. It will be your job to solicit other volunteers to help you if the activity is approved.

If you have a question, ask it! If you have a suggestion, make it! If you have a talent, share it!

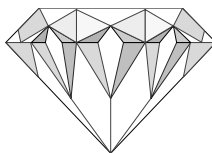
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*March General Meeting Program continued from page 1*

Second, the 4 Cs of appraising—Commitment, Confidentiality, Continuing Education, and Convenience. The first three Cs are fairly self-evident; the fourth—Convenience—refers to the fact that Karen has a portable gemological laboratory that she takes to you rather than you coming to her.

Karen will have most, if not all, of her portable lab at the presentation. Following the talk, she will be happy to inspect items that you bring to the meeting. Onsite, which includes the various gem and mineral shows she does, Karen performs identification but does not perform appraisals. The difference is that the former determines the identity and quality of an item, and the latter determines the value of an item for a specific purpose.

You may already be familiar with Karen. She forms one third of an essential triad at the annual HGMS Show. I am, of course, referring to the identification services we offer at the show. The other components of the triad are mineral identification and fossil identification.



## An Afternoon Examining Things at the International Houston Gem & Jewelry Show

by Art Smith

*Member of The Houston Gem & Mineral Society*

Even though it comes to Houston four times a year, I always look forward to spending an afternoon walking round the International Gem and Jewelry show now held in a hall at the Reliant Park complex—the same area where the Astrodome is now dwarfed by the Reliant Stadium football field on one side and the sprawling Reliant Halls complex and some parking on the other.

The January 2005 show was much like many others with a wide array of dealers selling most anything from T-shirts to diamonds. Most of the material was of marginal or no interest to us. My primary goals were to keep up and find what's new in lapidary materials, particularly beads, and to find any interesting stone carvings (especially frogs) to add to my collection and to find other carvings in the wholesale area for resale. There is always a hope of finding some mineral specimens of interest, and that was particularly true for this show because I did not think I would get to Tucson in February. My wife and I pulled into the Fannin Street entrance, hoping to cut the walking distance from the parking lot to the show. We were somewhat successful in this, but the show was not in the hall advertised, but we probably would not have been much closer coming in the Kirby entrance.

Inside, the usual array of gemstones, jewelry, and miscellaneous material was present. I usually head straight for the wholesale area first to check it out. It is my best chance to buy anything except minerals, and Wilson Lin (Oriental Crest) is usually there. I get a good idea from him what is new in bead materials. The last two years or so have brought beads back into fashion. Wholesale bead selling has boomed, and the number of bead dealers has increased many times. However many (if not most) of the dealers have no idea what the material actually is that they are selling.

The name used for each type of material may or may not be meaningful to me, and in some cases the name is very deceitful both to me and to potential customers. The general rule is, if a known mineral or gemstone name is preceded by another name, you can be pretty sure it is not the last-named material. To keep up with demand and have new materials for their customers, the Chinese bead industry has introduced many types of glass—which is fine if it is sold as glass—but much is sold as quartz.

When I questioned this, I was given a pocket knife and told to try and scratch it. Glass has a hardness of 5 that a knife which generally is harder should scratch while quartz has a hardness of 8 and cannot be scratched. The bead was so highly polished that I could not get the knife to “bite” into it. However, adjacent to the hole in the bead it was a rough area, and I easily scratched it. When this was shown to the dealer, he shrugged and said, “Well, it sells well!”

This year there was quite a bit of Russian bead material, particularly jade. Since I could not confirm any of its identity visually, I will not mention the names, but I have

doubts about some. Of particular interest to me were some pale yellow-green beads of prehnite. I did not get a source for the material except Africa. Mineral specimens of prehnite have been coming from Mali, and they have a similar color so it is a probable source, but similar prehnite is also reported to come from Australia.

The surprise in the wholesale area was that I found a frog carved out of boulder opal and matrix from Queensland, Australia. Actually I already had one in my frog collection of lapidary materials but it is small, just a little larger than a large pea and does not show much opal. Although this frog is also more ironstone (goethite) matrix than opal, it has a good size patch of opal on one side. This is typical of some of the less expensive carvings from China. They do not orient the best character of the material on a conspicuous part of the carving. Some of the boulder opal carvings that were offered were all goethite matrix and no opal that you could see.

So having done the wholesale section, I quickly went through the retail section mostly to locate Five Lions Gems. I was in luck; Wali Beekzad had recently returned from a buying trip to Peshwar, Pakistan where he purchased Afghanistan and Pakistan minerals and gem rough. Wali does not venture into Afghanistan but buys all his material in Pakistan which is safer. Since I would not be going to Tucson this year, I might be able to afford some pegmatite minerals from him. What caught my eye first was a pink morganite (beryl) crystal with a quartz crystal and minor albite. I have several small morganite crystals in my collection and this would far outshine any of them, but it was quite expensive. The main crystal is about 2.5 by 2 by 1 inch and a pleasing peach-pink color. It is not perfectly clear but has some clear spots in it. It is from Pech, Nuristan, Afghanistan. Wali also had bicolored terminated elbaite (tourmaline) specimens from three different Afghanistan localities. The Afghan tourmalines keep going up in price, which is not surprising. I usually try to pick one that is at least partly gemmy because I think they will ultimately have the highest value. Now it seems that color alone makes it more valuable which is surprising to me, because Wali is primarily a gem rough dealer, but he seems to keep the specimen value separate from the gem value. It seems when I first started buying from Wali about 10 years ago, the reverse was true. Now he seems to buy for two customers, gemstone cutters and specimen collectors, and for the latter his price is determined by the over all aesthetics of the specimen and not its gemstone value alone.

The lapis lazuli deposits at Sar-E-Sang, Badakhshan also produce other minerals for the collector. Wali had a one-inch crystal of blue afghanite and calcite with a price so high I did not even look closely at it. He also had two specimens of sodalite that are sold under the variety name of hackmanite. One consisted of pale, dull gray, blocky 1 to 1 1/2 inch crystals but the other that had much smaller crystals was a pleasing lustrous purple color. Nothing about their appearance would indicate that they are basically the same mineral.

The prize from Pakistan was probably about 10 inches long and 4 or 5 inches across, a deep blue, and very gemmy, but it was only a partial crystal of aquamarine. It was the bluest Pakistani aquamarine crystal that I have ever seen. However, since it was only a partial crystal, its value, in the thousands, was only as gem rough. There were other

complete and terminated crystals of paler aquamarine also from Pakistan.

I was interested in two specimens he had from the new find of brookite from the Northern area of Pakistan. One was a single, very thin, yellowish, 0.75-inch crystal without matrix. The other was a small group of clear quartz crystals with similar but much smaller and less fragile looking brookite crystals scattered between the quartz crystals. I bought it and when I looked at it under the microscope saw that some of the crystals were partly coated with something. So I gave it a bath and cleaning in the ultrasonic and got a lesson on what I already knew but did not consider. The ultrasonic cleaner "wiped-out" about half the crystals on the specimen. I use the term "wiped-out" because it not only removed them from the quartz specimen, it shattered them so much that I could not even find any partial crystals in the residue in the cleaner. I know better, but fortunately I still have enough microcrystals left to use—but now there is no room for error when it is trimmed.

With pockets full of wrapped carvings and crystals, we quickly finished our tour of the retail area. We decided then that enough had been spent for my pseudo-Tucson trip, so we headed back out to the parking lot and drove home to wait until the next show in April. Can I really afford these shows four times a year? Most of the time I find very little to buy, but looking is always interesting.

### **Competitive Exhibits at the SCFMS 2004 Show**

*by Bill Pattillo, Uniform Rules Chair  
from SCFMS Newsletter 1–2/05*

Below are the rankings earned by HGMS members for the cases they entered into competition at the September 2004 show. Congratulations to Ronald Carman and to David Gardner!

Exhibitor's Name	Class	Score and Award	AFMS Trophy No. Eligibility
David Gardner Spring, TX	B7-1	94 Blue Ribbon - Trophy	8
Ronald Carman San Marcos, TX	BF-4	100 Blue Ribbon - Trophy	12

(NOTE: The above information was given to me for the November - December issue of the SCFMS Newsletter, but I overlooked it last time. Please forgive. Paul Good)

### **Notice: Arlington Gem & Mineral Club**

*from SCFMS Newsletter 1–2/05*

**T**he Arlington Gem & Mineral Club has been renamed Texas School of Earth Sciences and is now in the process of setting up their school curriculum, etc. For more information, contact:

Terry Grisso, Texas School of Earth Sciences, P.O. Box 986, Arlington, TX

## Day Light Section

*by Frances Arrighi*

**T**welve members attended the 14 February meeting of the Day Light Section. Tom Wright was in charge of the program, which was the beginning lesson on inlay work. Tom brought some patterns for those members who did not have one. We will finish this project at the March meeting.

**Members of the Day Light Section begin work on inlay as taught by Tom Wright.**



Stuller, Inc. of Lafayette, LA (phone 1-800-877-7777) is offering argentium sterling in their catalog. The alloy contains germanium in the same percentage as copper in regular sterling; therefore it can be called argentium sterling. According to reports, the argentium sterling does not develop firescale. The price is a little higher than sterling and fine silver. Stuller offers it in casting grain, sheet (14 gauge thru 30 gauge) and round wire (8 thru 14 gauge). At the moment, regular sterling solder is used.





**Tom Wright  
demonstrates technique  
during the beginning  
lesson of inlay.**



**Photos by Mary  
Ann Mitcherling**

## Coming Attractions:      Lapidary Programs

April 18 ..... Demo: **Drilling holes** in stone.

May 16 ..... Demo: Making **Doublets**

June 20 ..... Practice **Riveting** and other cold attachments

## Mineral Section

*by Steve Blyskal, Chairperson & Dean Lagerwall, Assistant Chairperson*

### Upcoming Meeting Topics:

**April 6, Opals—Show & Tell:** Sam Norwood will host this program dedicated to the beautiful and intriguing hydrated form of silica. Come learn about the variety and uses of this mineral. Bring in some pieces from your own collection and let us drool. This meeting was rescheduled from January 19. Refreshments will be provided.

**April 20, The Titanium Oxides:** Titanium is the ninth most abundant element in the earth's crust. Industrially, titanium dioxide ( $\text{TiO}_2$ ) is mainly used as an additive to impart opacity or as a white pigment. From paints to toothpaste, we encounter  $\text{TiO}_2$  every day. From a mineralogical standpoint, titanium dioxide is interesting because it can exist in three polymorphs: rutile, anatase, and brookite. The iron-containing ilmenite is industrially important as a source of this useful material. Come learn about this unique set of minerals and be amazed at its diversity. Bring in some of your titanium oxides or just come to see the samples brought by others. Either way, it will be an educational and fun experience. Dean Lagerwall will present this talk. Refreshments will be provided.

**May 4, AUCTION:** Specimens from HGMS members will be auctioned with a portion of the proceeds going to the Mineral Section. This is the same auction format practiced the past few years; please read the accompanying announcement for further details. Refreshments will be provided.

**May 18, Fakes, Frauds, and Alterations:** Ever wonder if those specimens that looked too good to be true were authentic? Some alterations are beneficial and can allow the specimen's beauty to be better observed or can help increase the stability of the specimen. But some are outright frauds. Knowing the difference can help you avoid costly and embarrassing purchases. Now is your chance to see some examples and to hear about others. Altering the specimen from its natural condition can take many forms (heat, irradiation, acid treatment, tarnish removal, removal of a secondary mineral coating, polishing, cutting, lacquering, shellacking, oiling, reconstruction, gluing other minerals or crystals onto a specimen, etc). We are asking that examples of any specimens that may fit into these categories be brought to this meeting to be used as examples for other members. Refreshments will be provided.

**June 1, SWAP-NIGHT:** As our final meeting before our summer hiatus, we will have a Swap Night where excess material from our collections can be bought/sold/swapped. This will be an informal event and will be held inside. All are invited to participate and swap. Setup is from 7:00 to 7:30, and the formal meeting will be kept to a minimum to allow ample time for specimen exchange. Refreshments will be provided.

### **May 4—Mineral Section Auction**

*Auction Format - READ THIS*

*by Dean Lagerwall-*

**O**n Wednesday May 4 at 7:30 p.m., the Mineral Section will be having its annual auction to help raise money for the Section. Once again, we are allowing ALL HGMS members to bring specimens to the auction and to keep a portion of the proceeds. The proceeds of at least one of the specimens (your choice) must be donated to the Section; five additional specimens are allowed for each person, with a portion of each specimen (10%) going to the Section and the rest going to the donor.

This is a great way for **all** HGMS members to thin out their duplicate specimens and to benefit both yourself and the Mineral Section. You can put a minimum bid on the more expensive pieces if you desire. Since this event will draw from all Sections, expect a variety of items to be auctioned and a very interesting and entertaining event. Setup and viewing is from 7:00 to 7:30 p.m. with bidding beginning at 7:45.

If you have any questions, call Dean at (979) 480-9373.

If you have any ideas for topics to be presented or would be willing to present at our Mineral Section meetings, please contact Dean at dean\_lagerwall@yahoo.com or call him at (979) 480-9373.

### **An excerpt from “The Fisherman and His Soul”**

*by Oscar Wilde*

*Sent to the BBG by Joan Riley*

*who commented, “Doesn’t this just sound like the shop in my garage!”*

**T**hou could’st not believe how marvellous a place it was. There were huge tortoise-shells full of pearls, and hollowed moonstones of great size piled up with red rubies. The gold was stored in coffers of elephant-hide, and the gold-dust in leather bottles. There were opals and sapphires, the former in cups of crystal, and the latter in cups of jade. Round green emeralds were ranged in order upon thin plates of ivory, and in one corner were silk bags filled, some with turquoise-stones, and others with beryls. The ivory horns were heaped with purple amethysts, and the horns of brass with chalcedonies and sards. The pillars, which were of cedar, were hung with strings of yellow lynx stones. In the flat oval shields there were carbuncles, both wine-coloured and coloured like grass. And yet I have told thee but a tithe of what was there.”

## Education at HGMS Clubhouse

*by Mary Ann Mitscherling*

**T**he Lapidary Section purchased all available issues of Wire Artist Jeweller magazines back to when publication began—71 issues. These will be bound and placed in the HGMS library. Two issues were not available for purchase, however. If anyone has the October 1999 or January 2001 issue, please contact me at 713-957-2001 or e-mail me at maryann@hal-pc.org. The monthly magazine covered wire wrapping topics until it went out of business in the last year.

New education classes are being offered this year at HGMS. Some are so new that a “Call Waiting List” for each class has not accumulated the minimum for the class to make. This makes filling the class difficult. We will offer only those classes that have enough members who have requested to be put on a waiting list for the class. Currently we are maintaining waiting lists for the following classes: Cabochon Cutting, Jewelry Fabrication—Beginning and Intermediate Levels, Wax Modeling and Casting, Beginning Wire Wrapping, Advanced Wire Wrapping, Chasing and Repoussé, Mold Making, Rock Carving, Enameling, Other (Specify). If you are not on the Call Waiting List for the class you want, e-mail me or call me with the name of the class you would like to take.

Our new Class Reserve Policy on filling the available student slots in each class is working out for all concerned. If you wish to take any currently scheduled class, you must send a \$25 nonrefundable check or money order made out to “HGMS” with the name of the class and class start date entered on the check or money order. We will fill the class on a first-come, first-served basis. If the class is full, your deposit will be returned. If you reserve a place in class but do not show up on time at the first class, your deposit is forfeited. Send your deposit to M.A. Mitscherling, 5801 Lumberdale #234, Houston, TX 77092-1526 so that it arrives no later than seven calendar days before the class start date.

## In Our Library

*by Art Smith, Librarian*

**O**nce again spring is almost here, and field collecting for rocks, minerals, fossils, and lapidary materials will soon be in full swing. If you are planning a collecting trip or vacation trip and want to do some collecting, now is the time to start doing the library research. There are few places left with signs that say “collect here” and “pick up this,” so you need to know where to go and how to recognize what you might find. Picking up every rock that looks different or interesting is not generally the best way to collect and can be hard on your back and vehicle. With gas prices expected to be high this summer, you do not want to be loaded down with a lot of worthless stuff. We also have guidebooks and books on fee collecting areas so you will not whiz by a place and realize after you get home that you missed a great collecting opportunity.

In the library I have been working on an Illinois Mineral Locality Index which is almost finished. To do this, I have copied quite a few articles and papers from other

libraries and purchased some geological guidebooks from the Illinois State Geological Survey. They are one-day trips in special areas with road logs and five to ten stops. They are primarily geological but mention many fossil collecting sites and some mineral sites. The best mineral collecting sites are for Keokuk type geodes from the Mississippian Age Warsaw formation in the Hancock, Adams, and Brown counties areas. The field guide on the Hamilton and Warsaw areas of Hancock County is particularly nice and has a lot of background area plus localities for the geodes. So if you are headed that way, you may want to go through them and copy the significant parts. They also can be ordered from the Web site of the Illinois State Geological Survey for \$4 each, plus postage. There are a bunch of them listed, so check out what we have first so you will know what is best.

Beverly Mace has given us a nice book on dinosaurs. I am still debating where it should go. In the Youth Section it may be hard to find, but in the Paleontology section it cannot be checked out. Probably the Paleontology section will be best. It is in the second room, first aisle, and straight ahead against the wall.

If we run out of rocks, fossils, and lapidary materials for the monthly auctions, I am thinking about having a book auction with the proceeds going to the Library, but it will not be for several months if we have one.

### Web Sites of Interest

*by Brian Farberov*

*(Copy of e-mail received. The articles are too long to be included.*

*If you are interested, access them from the Web site.)*

*from Calgary Lapidary Journal 3/05*

**W**e have several articles that we would like to show the editors of different lapidary club newsletters (some of which were published in magazines such as *Rock & Gem* and a few others) articles deal with tooling, its proper selection, use, principals, art and theory. These are real articles, free of any commercial reference. See examples below:

#### **Getting the most from your Diamond Tools Guide -**

[http://www.ukam.com/diamond\\_tools.htm](http://www.ukam.com/diamond_tools.htm)

#### **Selecting the right Diamond Blade for your application -**

[http://www.ukam.com/diamond\\_blade\\_guide.htm](http://www.ukam.com/diamond_blade_guide.htm)

#### **Diamond Blade Usage Recommendations -**

[http://www.ukam.com/cutting\\_recommendations.htm](http://www.ukam.com/cutting_recommendations.htm)

#### **Selecting the right Diamond Drill for your application -**

[http://www.ukam.com/diamond\\_drill\\_guide.htm](http://www.ukam.com/diamond_drill_guide.htm)

#### **Diamond Drill Usage Recommendations -**

[http://www.ukam.com/drilling\\_recommendations.htm](http://www.ukam.com/drilling_recommendations.htm)

Brian Farberov, UKAM Industrial Superhard Tools, 25345 Avenue Stanford, Unit 211. Valencia, CA



## Paleontology Section

January 2005

By Rick Rexroad, Chairperson



**T**he 2005 Paleontology Section officers were introduced at the January 18, 2005 meeting. The 2005 officers are:

**Chairperson:** ..... Rick Rexroad  
**Vice President/Field Trips:** ... Neal Immega  
**Treasurer:** ..... Chris Peek  
**Secretary:** ..... Stan Perkins  
**Membership/Hospitality:** ..... Sunday Bennett  
**Board Representative:** ..... John Moffitt

We wish to thank our retiring chairperson, Paula Rutledge, for stepping into the void last year to fill our vacant chairperson position. Paula implemented several initiatives during her tenure to reenergize the Paleontology Section, and this year will be a great success if we can maintain the momentum that Paula provided.

We can thank Paula for recognizing the need to create and fill a Membership/Hospitality position for the Paleontology Section and for finding the perfect person for that position: Sunday Bennett. One of Sunday's responsibilities will be to identify HGMS members who are "paleo-involved," so that they can be kept abreast of Paleontology Section events and goings-on, even if they're unable to attend all of our meetings.

Another significant announcement from the Paleontology Section is that Neal Immega will be presenting a series of paleontology classes at the HGMS Clubhouse. The classes will be held from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. on six consecutive Monday evenings, starting Monday, January 24, 2005. Classes are open to all HGMS members, and The Price Is Right—FREE. Attendance at preceding classes in the lecture series is not a prerequisite, so if you have free time on a Monday evening through February 28, please feel free to Come On Down!

Rather than using a boring "This is a trilobite, this is an ammonite" approach ad nauseum, Neal will conduct the classes from an "I've picked up a load of fossils from a locality, now what are these critters that I have here?" standpoint. The first locality that we will be "visiting" will be the Eocene-aged Stone City Formation west of Bryan, Texas, also known as Whiskey Bridge. In addition to sharing his vast repertoire of paleontological knowledge, Neal will literally (figuratively?) bring the outcrop to us, rather than requiring the class to go to Bryan. Isn't modern technology wonderful?





**Paleontology Section**  
*February 2005*  
*by Rick Rexroad, Chairperson*



**D**avid Orchard of Manzanita Alliances presented an extremely interesting program concerning Pleistocene fossils in Venezuelan tar pits at the February 2005 Paleontology Section meeting. David formed and is the director of the Foundation for Quaternary Paleontology of Venezuela; this organization includes representatives from the University of Zulia (Venezuela), the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology, and the U.S. National Park Service.

The first mention of the Venezuelan tar pit deposits in scientific literature was apparently by John Moody of the Dallas Paleontological Society in the 1990s. Although similar geologically to the well-known LaBrea Tar Pits at Los Angeles, the Venezuelan tar pits differ in two important ways from the LaBrea Tar Pits:

The LaBrea Tar Pits consist of a single deposit covering an area of approximately 10 acres, whereas there are over 200 known tar pits in Venezuela, some as large as one square kilometer.

Whereas the LaBrea Tar Pits have been extensively studied, the total amount of material excavated to date from the Venezuelan tar pits is less than one cubic meter.

A total of 118 vertebrate species have been identified from the single cubic meter of material excavated to date from one of the Venezuelan tar pits. Animals that have been recovered from this location and at surface locations include Pleistocene birds, armadillos, rodents (some as large as 1500 pounds in life), horses, camels, large and small snakes, insects, sabertooth tigers, and dire wolves. The collection of recovered fossils resides at the University of Zulia in Venezuela. The paleontological record known to be represented at the Venezuelan tar pits covers the last 56,000 years.

The tar pits are located across a wide expanse of Venezuela. The Inciarte deposits are located in northwestern Venezuela (near Columbia); the Guanoco deposits are located in northeastern Venezuela and are associated with similar deposits offshore in Trinidad. Other South American tar pits are present in Ecuador and Peru (Tulara deposits).

Upcoming work planned by the Foundation for Quaternary Paleontology of Venezuela includes an attempt to use ground penetrating radar (GPR) to distinguish, characterize, and map hydrocarbon layers within the tar pits. A field conference is planned for April 2–10, 2005 at Maricao, Venezuela.

The aims of the Foundation for Quaternary Paleontology of Venezuela include the following:

- Promote scientific inquiry
- Provide social benefits to local people
- Provide publicity for donor companies and funding partners

Contributing organizations and advisors include Conoco/Phillips, Dr. John Harris of



the Page Museum at LaBrea Tar Pits, the American Museum of Natural History, the University of Northern Arizona, and the Florida Museum of Natural Science. HGMS may wish to consider financial support for this groundbreaking study that will undoubtedly enhance the future body of paleontological and geological knowledge.

Contact information for David Orchard is as follows:

Phone 281-560-3010

Dorchard@manzanitaalliances.com

www.manzanitaalliance.com

www.cuatervariovenezolana.org

### **Donation from Long-Time Member**

*by Gary Anderson*

I would like to thank long-time member Hugh Parker for the donation of his rocks and equipment to the club on Saturday, February 12, 2005. Among the items given to the club was a Genie® in good condition, a 10" trim saw, eight buckets of rocks that include some great palm wood, Arizona wood, book ends, lapis, West Texas moss agate, some jars of fantastic opal rough, and so forth. A piece of the moss has already been trimmed off and given to two youngsters for their second ever cabochon attempts. An aluminum template also has been put into service. The club proposes auctioning off the two pieces of equipment as well as the rocks.

### **Home Diamond Synthesis**

*Secret process revealed for the first time!*

*by Steve Russell, Member of Colorado Springs Mineralogical Society*

*sprussell@worldnet.att.net*

*from Pick & Pack 4/04*

A fascinating event happened while I was attending the Tucson Show last year. I was in the room of Brazilian mineral dealer Joaquin Stick, and noticed a number of very nice, rather large diamond crystals for sale. When I inquired about them, I was introduced to an elderly gentleman sitting in the corner. This fascinating man was Professor Ilmeno Rutile, originally a professor of chemistry at the University of Bologna in Italy, but who had spent most of his professional career working for General Electric in their Diamond Synthesis Lab. Professor Rutile had synthesized all the diamond specimens I had seen in a laboratory in his home!

I spent a very pleasant hour talking to this amazing man, and when I returned home, I began an e-mail correspondence with him. I'm afraid I pestered him for several months with questions about how these diamond crystals were grown, and finally he relented, saying he would show me the process if I would travel to his home laboratory in the mountains near Oakley, Kansas.

It was late May when I arrived at Professor Rutile's home, and after introducing me to his wife, he took me to his laboratory located behind his garage. I was immediately struck by the lack of large, sophisticated equipment one would expect to find in a lab capable of synthesizing diamonds.

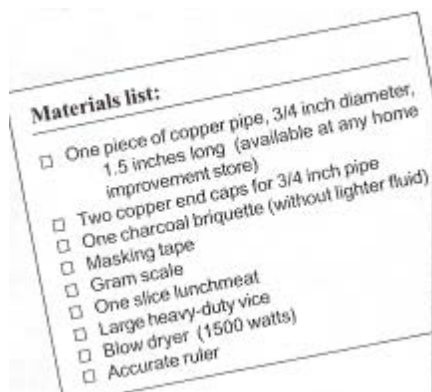


I asked Prof. Rutille where he made his diamonds, as there was not a single piece of technical equipment in the place. "That is exactly why I asked you here," he replied, "Please sit down," and he pointed to two chairs against the wall. We sat down, and he handed me some papers. "It's all explained here," he said. While I looked at the papers, Prof. Rutille told a fascinating story.

The early attempts to synthesize diamonds at the GE labs were a trial and error effort that did not succeed until it was discovered that with existing equipment, a catalyst was necessary to lower the temperature and pressure at which diamonds form. An amino acid present in animal muscle and fat tissue turned out to be the key. This was discovered when a technician was preparing samples to go into the furnace while eating a ham sandwich. A bit of ham contaminated the sample, but the technician went ahead with the test. The result was a diamond—small and very poor quality—but a diamond. This amino acid catalyst has been kept a secret ever since.

The story continues in the 1980s when Prof. Rutille began work on a project in the GE Synthetic Stones Lab to synthesize elbaite tourmaline. The scientists added various metals to the chemical structure to change the color of the crystals. The results were disappointing, except in the case of copper. Adding copper produced a "cuprian elbaite" of a beautiful, but rather unbelievable, teal blue color. Further research was discontinued because his superiors felt that gems cut from this material looked "fake." Prof. Rutille kept about half of the few hundred crystals produced, sending the rest to a mineral dealer friend in Paraiba, Brazil.

Prof. Rutille wondered if copper might also produce a blue color in diamonds, and began a series of tests. The attempt to produce blue diamonds failed, but he found that the copper even more drastically reduced the temperature and pressure necessary to produce a diamond. In fact, a pressure of 650 pounds per square inch and a temperature of 112 degrees Fahrenheit were all that was necessary. This could be produced in a home laboratory! Prof. Rutille began to produce his own diamonds in his home lab, and those were the crystals I saw in Tucson.



Prof. Rutile assured me that he would have grown rich selling diamond and never would have told me the details of how these diamonds were made if he had not been threatened by agents from GE and the De Beers Corporation a few weeks before my visit. He was so angry with his former employer that he asked me to publish his findings so that people everywhere could reproduce his results. I agreed, and below are instructions for synthesizing diamonds in your home or garage!

### Preparing the Sample

Begin by placing one end cap on one end of the 1.5 inch copper pipe (the pipe and end caps are available at any home improvement center). Into the open end of the pipe, place 1.75 grams of the lunchmeat. This will provide the amino acid catalyst. Using a hammer or other tool, crumble the charcoal briquette into pieces small enough to fit into the copper pipe. Add exactly 4.2 grams of charcoal briquette, packing lightly with your finger (Photo 2). Note: DO NOT use briquettes with lighter fluid in them as this will contaminate the sample and cause a risk of fire or explosion! Add another 1.75 grams of lunchmeat on top of the packed charcoal briquette. Place the other end cap on the open end of the copper pipe, creating an enclosed container. Cut two round pieces of masking tape to fit the ends of the end caps, and place one piece of tape on each end cap (this will insulate the copper container from the jaws of the vice) (Photo 3).

### Creating the Diamond

**Note:** Gloves and safety glasses should be worn during this step of the procedure!

Place the copper container in the jaws of a large, heavy duty vice, one end cap against each jaw of the vice, and tighten enough to hold the container in place (Photo 4).

Lay an accurate ruler across the top of the vice. It is necessary to close the vice one eighth of an inch to produce the necessary pressure. First, the container must be heated. Using the blow dryer on "high" setting, heat the container for a minimum of two minutes. Now, while continuing to heat the container, begin to close the vice, slowly. Some effort will be required, but continue closing the vice until you have collapsed the container one eighth of an inch. Continue to heat the container with the blow dryer for a minimum of four more minutes. Don't be surprised if you feel yourself getting



Photo 2



Photo 3



Photo 4



Photo 5  
Rough Diamond. Measures about  
5/8" (0.625") wide.

hungry—it does smell like barbeque! After four minutes, the blow dryer may be turned off. Allow the container to cool for 30 minutes. Using a hacksaw, cut the container in half and remove your diamond! (See Photo 5)

I know this leaves one question: What type of lunch-meat to use? I have experimented with several types, and I achieved my best results using pure baloney.

*Editor's note: If you are excited by the potential that the above article details, I recommend that you reevaluate the article. It is April, after all.*

## Creating Mini-Flats

by Dean Lagerwall

Member of The Houston Gem & Mineral Society

**S**torage issues will invariably occur to anyone with a collection. One common organization medium favored by rockhounds is the use of soda or beer flats as storage trays. The benefits include their inexpensive nature and ease of storage and handling. Some of their drawbacks include their one-size-fits-all tendency and the difficulty in finding tops and bottoms that fit together without doing irreversible, dimensional modification to the cardboard.

Using a single flat as both a top and bottom solves both of these issues when smaller, incremental storage requirements are needed. Not only is a smaller flat created for those mini-storage needs, but matching a top and bottom is avoided. Preparing mini-flats is simple: Measure, make two cuts, and secure with some tape or a stapler. As a bonus because most flats are of similar size, flats from identical sources can use the same measurements—minimizing the preparation time. Below are the instructions and some helpful hints for creating this useful storage device.

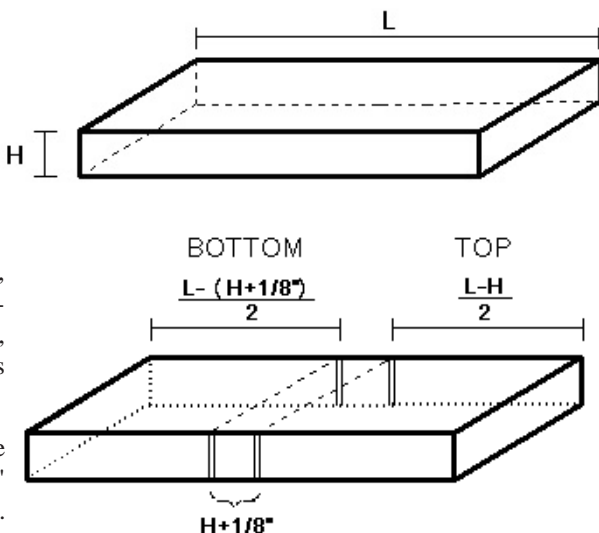
**Step 1:** Measure the length (L) and height (H) of the flat. Turn it so the cardboard is on the top.

**Step 2:** Calculate and mark the location of the cuts.

For the top of the mini-flat, the height of the flat is subtracted from the length, and the resulting number is divided by two.

For the newly-created side (the middle section), 1/8" is added to the flat's height.

For the bottom, the height



and 1/8" is subtracted from the length and again divided by 2 (note that the shorter bottom and higher new side will make the lid fit better by accounting for the thickness of the cardboard).

Mark/score the top (dashed lines on top) and mark the sides (double lines on drawing)

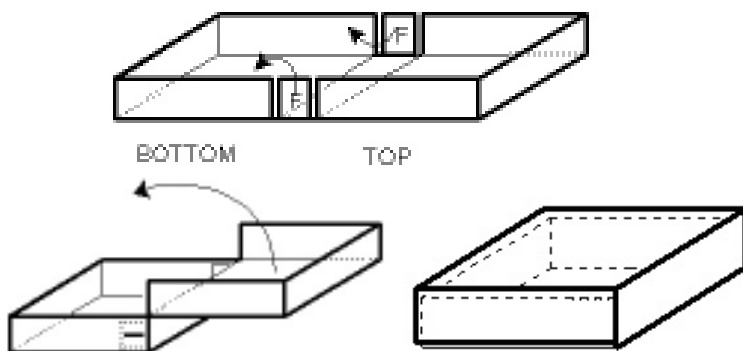
**Step 3:** Generate the flaps and assemble.

Cut the marks created on the side to create the flaps (F); Turn box over.

Bend the marked/scored line and fold the flaps inward (note that if the line is scored, it is easier to fold. Also, if the manufacturer of the flat uses corrugation that runs perpendicular to the length of the flat, folding will be easier and you may not have to score the flat).

Check that the mini-flat's lid fits okay; if not, recalculate and improve on the next one you make. You may want to increase the 1/8" to 1/4" if a looser fitting lid is desired.

Secure the flaps to the inside of the mini-flat with tape or staples.



### HGMS General Meeting

*February 22, 2005*

*by Sunday Bennett, HGMS Secretary*

**T**he meeting was called to order at 7:30 p.m., and a volunteer was requested to supply refreshments for March meeting: Nancy Fisher volunteered

**Guests:** From a larger than normal number of members in attendance the club recognized several guests.

- Rus Hawkins, an avid rockhound who has visited our annual show came to see what the General meeting was like. He is planning to join the HGMS.
- Larry Summers was invited by a member and is a docent at the HMNS.
- Bob Wolf's mother from Florida was in attendance.

### **Announcements:**

The 2005 dues are needed in order to stay current with all the privileges that come

with being an active member.

### Meeting Photos by Mary Ann Mitcherling

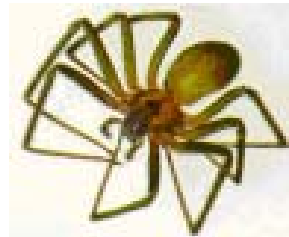
Matt Dillon asked if a swap meet could be arranged for April 10.

Karen Burns says the demos on Sunday afternoons at the Houston Museum of Natural Science (HMNS) are going well, but she is interested in having someone volunteer to demonstrate wire wrapping techniques.

The idea is to show the complete process from uncut stone to a polished and finished piece of jewelry. Thus far they lack someone who can add this final step. Karen also added that there is a Genie® machine at the museum.



A brown recluse spider was seen in the area of the school mineral collections. Members are urged to be aware that the bite of this spider is considered dangerous, but the species is not known to be aggressive. Most bites occur when the spider is handled or when bumped against. Members should always check before putting their unprotected hands into dark areas where visibility is low. Prime habitats for this species include any area that is dark, quiet, and undisturbed. An inquiry with a pest control specialist will be made on how best to deal with this eight-legged menace.



A special tour of the new HMNS exhibit, "Gold: Natural Treasure, Cultural Obsession," is arranged for March 1. The tour was a great success with many members and guests in attendance.

### Reports:

**Daylight Section,** Tom Wright: Last month's program featured inlay work.

The March program will progress to the next step, bezel setting. Tom Wright will be the instructor.



**Lapidary Section,** David Hawkins: Three sets of diamond points were recently purchased, and members will be shown how to use them properly.

In a continuing effort to help members learn hands-on lapidary techniques, the March Lapidary Section meeting will focus on bezel setting.

Five hundred dollars is allocated to purchasing back issues of *The Wire Artist Jeweller* magazine. The company is no longer publishing the magazine. To help defray the cost of purchasing, Margaret Hardman-Muye will be donating *the unused part of her subscription to obtain past issues for the club, hopefully at no charge from the magazine*. She asks that members who also have unused months in their subscription do likewise. All back issues will be bound and placed in the library.

**Mineral Section**, Art Smith: Last month's meeting featured a talk on the Tucson Mineral Show. The two meetings scheduled for this month will cover discoveries made at the Clear Lake Gem and Mineral Show, and also Fluorite.

**Education Committee Report**: Mary Ann Mitscherling: Three classes—Cabochons, Mold Making, and Beginning Wire Wrapping—are open but not yet filled. Please remember to preregister to reserve a space.

The March program will be conducted by a professional gemologist who will speak about gem appraisal and will give appraisals after the speech.

#### **Standing Committees:**

**Clubhouse Committee**, Dave Hawkins: Ceiling tiles are due to be replaced, and inspection of the entire ceiling area is continuing.

**Field Trip Committee**, Neal Immega: March 12 and 13 are set for a field trip to Mineral Wells, Texas. The trip will be to collect Pennsylvanian fossils. Contact Neal Immega ASAP by e-mail at [n\\_immega@swbell.net](mailto:n_immega@swbell.net) for more information, to share a ride, or to get a ride.

#### **Special Committee Reports:**

**By-Law Review Committee**, Scott Singleton / John Moffitt: Currently a review of the by-laws is commencing. Members are asked to submit any changes they think are necessary to Scott Singleton at [ssingle@airmail.net](mailto:ssingle@airmail.net).

**Show & Tell**: Dean Lagerwall displayed an interesting Bulgarian quartz and an equally unique Chinese crystal he purchased at the Tucson, AZ show. He promised to bring the full measure of his finds from the show to the next Mineral Section meeting.

Don Laird brought several wonderful sculptures he purchased at the Tucson show.

**Door Prize**: A rainbow obsidian wire wrapped pendant was brought by Dean Lagerwall, and it was won by HGMS member, Joan Riley.

#### **Program Introduction:**

A special introduction for the evening's speaker, Assistant Curator, Mark Mauthner, was given by the Program Committee Chair Scott Singleton and by Past President Dave Temple. The program, entitled "Gold: Natural Treasure, Cultural Obsession," highlighted the HMNS's newest exhibit and included a slideshow of various gold objects within the collection.

## February General Meeting Presentation Recap

*by Scott Singleton*

*HGMS First Vice President*

**I**t appears most of the club is aware of what the February General Meeting presentation was because I think most of you were there. At least it seemed that way. Actually, the attendance count was 60. This is a very good turnout for a club meeting. In fact, it is more than we have had for some time. My hat goes off to all of you who came out. We are who make this club what it is.

The presentation was given by the Houston Museum of Natural Science (HMNS) Associate Curator for Gems and Minerals Mark Mauthner. Also present was HMNS Volunteer Coordinator and Past HGMS President David Temple to go over the logistics of the HGMS night at the HMNS Gold! exhibit.

Speak of successes! Can you believe that 120 HGMS members and friends turned out at the museum for our special night in the Gold! exhibit? I'd say that is phenomenal. I think we need to do that more often. What do you think?

Since Neal Immega has so eloquently described the Gold! exhibit in his article (below), I think I can dispense with the blow-by-blow description of each of the eight rooms in the Gold! exhibit as described by Mark in his presentation. Suffice it to say that this exhibit was the brainchild of Mark who has worked for several years to bring together all of its components. The exhibit is one-of-a-kind, and its home is here in Houston at the Museum of Natural Science.

Mark has also put together a nice little booklet on Gold, and it is given out to each visitor to the exhibit. This is a very informative booklet, and it summarizes the historical and cultural aspects of this precious metal.

I think we're very fortunate to have this kind of knowledge and experience here in Houston. Judging from the reaction to Mark's presentation, I'd say I'm not the only one who feels this way.

### **Big Time at the Science Museum**

*by Neal "Solid Gold" Immega*

**Y**ou know you have a winner when people you have never seen before crash your party. So, when the HGMS Program Director, Scott Singleton, announced a special arrangement to visit the HMNS Gold exhibit, and that it was open to "all your sisters and cousins and aunts," people came from everywhere. In fact by the time it was all said and done, 120 of them made the rounds through the exhibit. My email list got updated as never before because people finally had a reason to respond to my electronic request to "tell me if you are coming."

For a teaser, we had a lecture at the clubhouse by Mark Mathner, Minerals Curator and Prime Mover in the great gathering in of treasures from all over the globe. He spun stories of gold records from Graceland, gold bars from Florida wrecks, and having the phone hung up on him by the Federal Reserve. There were pictures of the *Ten*



*Commandments* movie throne (see photo) and of mummy masks—and this was just the warm up. The crystalline gold even got Art Smith to come out of the library to look at the pictures.

Our Museum evening went off better than anyone could expect. Most of the crowd arrived for the 6 p.m. tour. The museum was most obliging in that they allowed us (HGMS members) to handle the money, tour guides, and entrance. I do think I have found the way to get rich—stand in front of closed doors to the museum and take \$5 from every passerby. You would have thought we were giving away free samples rather than taking money. I felt like a bagman, filling up a satchel with money and having my heavies (Art “the Smart” Smith and “Mean” Dean Lagerwall) handing out betting slips (IMAX tickets) and putting the mark (HMNS entry sticker) on each mark. It was great. I highly recommend this. When we got upstairs, the staff were most obliging, to the point where I wanted to get out a screwdriver, take out the 400 oz London Good Delivery Bar, and take it home with me. The only problem would have been deciding on the ways I would have to have split it. I am sure that Norm would have demanded a club cut.



Let's start at the beginning—gold in all its forms from lumps to crystals to sheets. Everyone liked the crystalline gold specimens called the “Easter Egg” and the “Dragon” (shown) but Art Smith and Dean Lagerwall were fogging the glass of the case of unlovely rare black gold minerals. Steve Blyskal was taken by the potato patch: a display of worn gold nuggets the size and shape but not the color of potatoes. I guess he wants to do some gardening. Lots of the women liked the display of specimens with red and green gold colors.



The second room was all Sunday Bennett's. She was wound up and spouting off stories about placer mining and sluice boxes and the various gold rushes. Ask her what it *really* means to “get shafted.” This room has the biggest nugget, the 32 lb “Boot” that was found by a metal detector. I predicted that the nugget was so big that it would look like a pipeline and be ignored. Brian Honsinger and “Mitch” Mitscherling both assured me that they would do no such thing and that they could figure out how to carry it off undetectably given the chance. Mitch wanted sheer mass and not some puny gold crystal.

The sunken treasure room was a real attraction to the treasure hunter crowd. Tom Lammers' family could not pry him from this room, and they figured that they would come back in a week to collect him. I guess they were getting hungry for dinner. He looks rather nice in a glass case.

The room with the bars has a theme of gold as money, mostly. When I suggested that



the Wells Fargo strong box filled with the 999 twenty dollar gold pieces was much more impressive than the case containing one of three 1933 St. Gaudens double eagles, David Temple said that I was hopeless. Stewart Murphy was observed planning how to mill a special screwdriver that could remove the screws on the cage for the 400 ounce touch bar. I tried to give a geochemical explanation of a homely ore specimen from the famous Witwaterstrand mines, and Norm allowed that I could spin just about any yarn I wanted about it.

The room with the Indian Wedding sari drew many admiring glances from everyone, particularly First Lady Lenz, but they were not sure they could live with the restrictions of a nonadjustable gold belt. Someone speculated that the women in the family must be married off when they get to the right size to keep the belt on rather than when they have a bridegroom!

"All that Glitters" really divided the group. It wasn't just that there was a little age differential in the group drawn to the Beyoncé and Solange awards vs. Buddy Holly and Elvis. There was a distinct polarization in the group gazing at ol' George's belt, the Rockets' trophy, and all those gold medals vs. those mesmerized by the Fabergé and Van Cleef & Arpel. Oh, were *you* the one who said you were going to have to talk to someone about getting that chair for your throne room?

The final room is a pretend trip to the Klondike. Our own Mike Reves looked the part as he got his hands dirty (clean?) in the gold panning trough. Diane Sisson and her little grandson spent the whole evening playing in the water, but at least he was happy. What is a grandmother to do? Our only real problem was that they wanted us to leave when the Museum closed, without taking any specimens home for further research.

### HGMS Board Meeting

*7 March 2005 (alternative date)*

*Sunday Bennett, HGMS Secretary, was out with a virus.*

*These minutes were drafted by Paula Rutledge.*

#### **B**oard members present:

Norm Lenz; President and Past President; Paula Rutledge Faceting Representative; Scott Singleton, 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President; Dave Hawkins, Lapidary Representative; Beverly Mace, 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President; Art Smith, Mineral Representative; Paul McGarry, Treasurer; John Moffitt, Paleontology Representative; Tom Wright, Day Light Representative

Call to order at 7:30 p.m. Per the Bylaws, there will be a change in the way meeting minutes are handled. The meeting minutes will be sent to the Board first. The Board will approve the minutes at the following Board Meeting. Do not send copy to BBG until approved.

#### **Reports**

**Treasurer:** Paul McGarry spoke about the Budget later in the meeting.

**Education Committee:** Mary Ann Mitscherling was not present. Report given by Tom Wright: Patti Scott will teach a new enameling class beginning in early June. Two

classes are already filled. The enamel kiln may need a new controller (cost estimate \$300).

**Program for next month:** Scott Singleton announced that Karen Jensen, a registered gemologist and appraiser, will present a program on The Art, Ethics, and Principles of Appraising. She will do identifications after her presentation.

### **Standing Committee Reports:**

**Shop and Clubhouse:** Dave Hawkins/Neal Immega

Dave Hawkins and Tom Wright are in the process of changing out water-stained ceiling tiles. The carpet needs to be steam cleaned. The Paleo fossil cleaning and assembly area needs to be cleaned up.

**Membership:** Beverly Mace said that half of our membership have renewed their HGMS dues.

**Nominating Committee:** Art Smith announced that he, Tom Wright, and Matt Dillon have given Norm a list of nominees to be Assistant Show Chair.

**Refreshments:** Norm Lenz: As assigned by the President

### **Old Business**

- Members who have not paid their Year 2005 dues are considered delinquent by the HGMS Bylaws after February.
- Search for an Assistant Show Chair (a list has been presented to Carolyn Thompson).
- Exchanging guest lists with the HMNS

### **Review of Action Items from last Board Meeting:**

#### **Norm Lenz:**

- Notified contractor Jimmy Spears about extra payment for materials, \$402.06. Jimmy has picked up the check.
- Contacted Al Mowery about sale of gold dredge. Dredge has been paid for, picked up, and taken away.
- Pursued the exchange of attendee list information with HMNS. Norm Lenz suggested we trade our 3,000 name list for 10,000 of their 30,000 name list (to be prepared by zip code or most recent). HMNS has not yet responded.

**Dave Hawkins:** Change stained ceiling tiles and check all areas for leaks. In process of being completed. So far, no leaks!

**Paul McGarry:** Budget discussion later in meeting.

**John Moffitt:** Get a copy of AFMS insurance policy and supply to Paul McGarry. John reports that Keith Harmon, past president of South Central Federation, purchases the insurance and has the only copy. We should get a copy soon. Insurance is actually carried by Insurance Associates of Tyler. This is supposed to be a general liability policy covering clubs at shows and field trips. This may be an umbrella policy.

**Paula Rutledge:** Had extra Paleo Library keys made and given to David Hawkins.

One will be left in the clubhouse.

### Scott Singleton:

- Made a count of attendees for the museum tour and gave that count to the HMNS. Eighty-nine people signed up; 120 people showed up!
- Brought a show budget for Paul McGarry. Done.

### New Business

- **Tsunami donation:** HGMS donation to the tsunami relief cause—suggested by Member Lilli Arnone. President asked for a motion. No motion was made. No action taken.
- **Summer camp:** Educational “Summer Camp” for children—suggested by Member Karen Burns. Norm will contact Karen and ask her if she would like to organize this and make an official proposal to the Board.
- **Educational special event:** Educational special events (such as birthdays) for children to raise funds. Could raise \$12/child with cake and ice cream supplied by parents—suggested by Member Karen Burns. This motion died on the table due to concerns about liability and housekeeping.
- **Partition walls for bathrooms:** A partition wall to be added in both restrooms to accommodate two occupants and add privacy—suggested by Member Tom Lammers. John Moffitt moved to let him do it; Dave Hawkins seconded the motion. Approved unanimously. Norm will contact Tom.
- **Spider Extermination:** Exterminating for spiders—suggested by several members. One member reported seeing a Brown Recluse spider. Scott Singleton moved that extermination be performed in the building for spiders and also for cockroaches and silverfish. John Moffitt seconded. Approved unanimously. Norm will contact the chosen exterminator. The expected cost is \$250
- **Nomination of members for Honorary Lifetime Membership:** Tabled until future Board meeting so more information can be presented about members in question.
- **HGMS 2005 Budget:** Paul McGarry presented the new budget. Neal Immega wanted more shop budget, but he failed to disclose what the additional expenditures would cover. Board decided to leave shop budget as it was and to have Neal come for more money when he needs it. Beverly Mace noted that the allowance in the budget for postage (for mailing BBGs) should be more than adequate even allowing for proposed postal increases. Tom Wright moved that we accept the 2005 HGMS Budget as presented by Paul; Dave Hawkins seconded the motion. The motion passed.
- **Bylaws:** Discussion of the Bylaws Changes is postponed to the next Board meeting due to the lateness of the hour. Scott Singleton requested that during the next meeting the Bylaws discussion be given greater priority. Tom Wright presented some changes that he would like incorporated into the Bylaws.
- **Rock Swap meet:** Matt Dillon asked Board approval for Ed Tindell’s Rock Swap Meet in the HGMS parking lot Sunday, April 10. John Moffitt moved that the swap meet be approved; Art Smith seconded. Scott Singleton objected and amended the motion to say that approval must be requested before such occasions are announced to the membership. John Moffitt seconded and the amend-

ment passed. Dave Hawkins moved we let them have the swap meet April 10, and Tom Wright seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

### March Board Meeting Action Items

#### Norm Lenz:

- Follow up on exchange of names list with HMNS
- Contact Lilli Arnoni. Her tsunami relief cause idea was presented to the Board. It was discussed briefly, but the board chose not to act.
- Contact Karen Burns. Ask her if she would like to run an education "Summer Camp" for children, and if so, to please bring us a proposal.
- Contact Karen Burns and tell her the idea of special events (i.e. birthday parties) was allowed to die due to liability concerns, clean up concerns, and membership issues.
- Contact Tom Lammers about modifying the men's room
- Contact an exterminator to exterminate for spiders and bugs from the HGMS building
- Notify Matt Dillon and Ed Tindell that the Board approved the April 10 swap meet, but to please obtain permission in advance for future meets.

#### John Moffitt:

Follow up on getting a copy of insurance policy for Paul McGarry

#### Paula Rutledge:

Try to get a copy of the insurance policy. John Moffitt said he would assist.

#### Tom Wright:

Get professional carpet cleaning scheduled for the clubhouse.

Adjourn 9:45pm

### In Our Library

*by Art Smith, Librarian*

Once again spring is almost here, and field collecting for rocks, minerals, fossils, and lapidary materials will soon be in full swing. If you are planning a collecting trip or vacation trip and want to do some collecting, now is the time to start doing the library research. There are few places left with signs that say "collect here" and "pick up this," so you need to know where to go and how to recognize what you might find. Picking up every rock that looks different or interesting is not generally the best way to collect and can be hard on your back and vehicle. With gas prices expected to be high this summer, you do not want to be loaded down with a lot of worthless stuff. We also have guidebooks and books on fee collecting areas so you will not whiz by a place and realize after you get home that you missed a great collecting opportunity.

In the library I have been working on an Illinois Mineral Locality Index which is almost finished. To do this, I have copied quite a few articles and papers from other libraries and purchased some geological guidebooks from the Illinois State Geological Survey. They are one-day trips in special areas with road logs and five to ten stops. They are primarily geological but mention many fossil collecting sites and some min-

eral sites. The best mineral collecting sites are for Keokuk type geodes from the Mississippian Age Warsaw formation in the Hancock, Adams, and Brown counties areas. The field guide on the Hamilton and Warsaw areas of Hancock County is particularly nice and has a lot of background area plus localities for the geodes. So if you are headed that way, you may want to go through them and copy the significant parts. They also can be ordered from the Web site of the Illinois State Geological Survey for \$4 each, plus postage. There are a bunch of them listed, so check out what we have first so you will know what is best.

Beverly Mace has given us a nice book on dinosaurs. I am still debating where it should go. In the Youth Section it may be hard to find, but in the Paleontology section it cannot be checked out. Probably the Paleontology section will be best. It is in the second room, first aisle, and straight ahead against the wall.

If we run out of rocks, fossils, and lapidary materials for the monthly auctions, I am thinking about having a book auction with the proceeds going to the Library, but it will not be for several months if we have one.

### **Having Fun—Junior Activities**

*First Merit Badges Awarded—And Our First FRA Rockhound*

*by Jim Brace-Thompson, Junior Activities Chair*

*from AFMS Newsletter 3/05*

**I**t gives me much pleasure to introduce you to two young people who hold distinct positions of honor in our new AFMS/FRA Merit Badge Program: Rhena A.V. South and Kristopher J. Helms of the Memphis Archaeology & Geology Society (MAGS). Rhena and Kristopher are the very first juniors in the U.S. to earn FRA Merit Badges! And not just one badge—Kristopher has earned four and Rhena six. Thus, Rhena also becomes our first junior member to be awarded the FRA Rockhound badge! My congratulations to both Rhena and Kristopher. This month's column is dedicated to them.



Rhena, age nine, started picking up pretty rocks when she was three and enjoys sharing what she finds and learns. For instance, at a recent club meeting, she made toothpaste from minerals, displayed obsidian, and demonstrated a volcanic eruption. An active Junior Girl Scout, she earned 20 Girl Scout badges and 10 Girl Scout program patches in 2004 alone. She also earned a Lewis & Clark Patch, Earth Science Week Badge, and a Junior Arkansas Naturalist Badge. She won the 2004 Southeast Federation Junior Youth of the Year Award. She was also a finalist in the Earth Science Week Visual Arts Contest for October 2004. Rhena loves the outdoors, reading, animals, sci-fi movies, and playing on the PS2. In addition to her rock collection, she has a collection of 100 purses including a number of unique antique purses. She likes to go on field trips, to museums, flea markets, antique stores, and the movies, and keeps a journal of her varied activities.

Kristopher, age 12, is Rhena's step-brother, and he loves music as well as rocks. He's played the piano since he was six and the flute since age nine. He loves animals, especially his cat and dog, and also enjoys doing experiments and building things and always has a project going with one kit or another. He started collecting rocks when he was eight. He doesn't get to go on as many field trips as he would like, but still manages to find time for field trips, visits to museums, PS2 games, travel, and the movies. In addition to earning four FRA Merit Badges, he has earned a Lewis & Clark Patch and an Earth Science Week Badge, and has joined Rhena in demonstrating how to make toothpaste and with a volcano demonstration to his fellow club members. He wrote his first article about the hobby on dolomite, which will appear in the February issue of the MAGS newsletter. He doesn't want to be called a "pebble pup" by Rhena anymore, so we hope to award him with two more FRA Merit Badges in order to see him graduate to official Rockhound very soon!

MAGS Youth Director Raynee Randolph and Assistant Youth Director Sherida Helms have planned their activities for 2005 around the FRA Merit Badge Program and spent many hours working out a teaching guide to implement the program with the 10 to 15 kids who normally attend their monthly meetings. They've set the ambitious goal of having a third of their registered junior members as FRA Rockhounds by year's end and to get their older members more active as mentors to the younger kids. My thanks and congratulations to them. As you can see by their success with Rhena and Kristopher, they are well on their way, helping their club's kids learn while—as always—having fun.

### **AFMS President's Message**

*by Bill Smith, AFMS President  
from AFMS Newsletter 3/05*

**I**n the November AFMS Newsletter, I read the Scholarship Challenge letter written by Keith Harmon. He challenged all Regional Federations to raise and donate to the AFMS Scholarship fund the equivalent of \$1.00 per member in order to maintain the two scholarships to each participating Regional federation.

I read in one of the Regional newsletters a note from the President that said their Endowment Fund needs the help of members and clubs. He also said we had to draw money from the fund several times in 2004 to help overcome budget shortages. He went on to say, if we expect our Federation to retain stability in the future, we need to be able to utilize excess Endowment funds for our programs.

Many of our clubs have Endowment funds to cover extra expenses and/or scholarships. My local club has a Scholarship Endowment fund to help High School graduates entering the field of Geology in college.



As we all know, our Federation budgets, Regional and AFMS, depend primarily on membership income and we are continuing to decline in membership as expenses continue to climb. Endowment Funds could very well become the financial lively hood of the federations.

There are also numerous charitable organizations very deserving of being funded as well as our church. Then nature gave us the largest disaster known to modern man with hundreds of thousands of people without shelter, food, water, and medical assistance unless people like us provide help.

How important are our donations? Probably more than any of us will ever realize. Until next month, Bill

### **SCFMS President's Message**

*by William Medford*

*SCFMS President*

*from SCFMS Newsletter 1-2/05*

**A**s we go into this New Year, many of our clubs will have new officers. The same is true of your Federation and especially in the area of Regional Vice Presidents. These Vice Presidents are your direct link to the Federation, and they are responsible for assisting clubs within their region. If you have not contacted your new Vice President, please do so. Find out what they plan to do for their respective clubs during the forthcoming year. Ask that they visit your club some time during the year to give a presentation to your membership regarding the Federation.

During my visits to clubs when I was Regional Vice President, I found that only a few of the club officers were informed as to the operation of the Federation. The Federation scholarship fund, slide and video lending library, American Federation programs, and other activities were a surprise to the general membership of the clubs. The Federation does a lot. It just seems we are unable to get information about our activities to the individual club membership. I ask that each club president, who serves as your club delegate, take some time during each meeting to inform its membership about what is happening within the Federation. Make copies of the Federation newsletter and have these copies available to the membership. In this way the membership can become more aware of Federation activities.

We also need much more individual club member participation in our annual meetings. This is your organization, and its primary function is to serve the member clubs. The annual meeting is your opportunity to voice to all the Federation officers and individual club officers your views and concerns. Make plans to come to the next annual meeting. Put together a group of your members and enjoy the show while being part of the meeting.

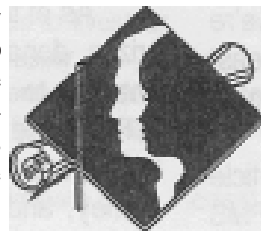
The Winter/Spring show season has started with many shows being conducted between now and summer. Check your show calendar in the Federation newsletter for dates and locations. What a great way to support the efforts of other clubs while making new friends and enjoying the hobby we all enjoy. Until next time.



## Scholarship Challenge

by Keith Harmon  
Past President SCFMS  
SCFMS Newsletter 1-2/05

**A**t the AFMS July 2004 meeting in Syracuse, New York, the Directors of the AFMS Scholarship Foundation were informed of a shortage in the funds available for scholarships for 2005. A number of expenses reduced the interest available for scholarship awards use according to the audit and bonding requirements we had. The end result is that we had to eliminate one scholarship from each regional federation for one year, thus giving one scholarship instead of the normal two. The rules in place for the Scholarship fund require that all money donated to the fund be restricted—only the interest earned by the fund is available for use. At the meeting, the Directors voted to allow money to be donated to the fund as unrestricted funds and therefore available for immediate use in scholarship funding. In this way if enough money is donated, we will not have to eliminate the second scholarship.



The South Central Federation of Mineral Societies challenges all the Regional Federations to make up the difference in the available funds for the 2005 AFMS Scholarship awards. We propose that each Regional Federation raise and donate to the AFMS Scholarship fund the equivalent of \$1.00 per member. This can be accomplished in any manner each Federation chooses. The only thing you must do when you send it in is state that the money is for unrestricted use so it can go directly to fund the second scholarship. The total we need to raise is \$12,000 (twelve thousand dollars). I believe we can do this and more because it is a worthy cause and is one of the most important things that we as members of the American Federation of Mineral Societies can do. Remember that the nominating process is already underway, so this is a time-constricted effort.

This is a Challenge!! Are you up to meeting it???

### Tips & Hints

*Please note that none of the tips and hints have been tried by this editor,  
so I cannot attest to the accuracy of the hints.*

**C**lear Up Your Safety Goggles: from Gem City Rock News 4/04, via Breccia 3/05 and others  
If your soft plastic safety goggles are scratched or foggy, try toothpaste and only a little elbow grease. It really works.

**Lapidary Tip:** Source: *The Petrified Digest* 1/99

To identify and grind out pits in the cabochon, spray the rough cab with red enamel from an aerosol can, then grind the paint off with a light touch. Pits and lines will stand out as bright spots, making it unnecessary to wipe the cab so see if the pits are



out. This is especially helpful when grinding freeform cabs from fire agate.

**Rock Tip of Monumental Proportions:** *from Quarry Quips, via Pick&Shovel 2/05 and others*

A monument maker uses a weak solution of oxalic acid to acquire the glassy shine on granite. It is used as a polishing aid. Dissolve a little oxalic acid in water, then work it into your felt buff or add to your polishing paste. Try it on agates for it really works wonders. A piece of corduroy glued to soft rubber makes a fine, inexpensive polishing material.

**Stabilizing Porous Stones:** *from Pegmatite, via Pick&Shovel 2/05 and others*

If you would like to try your luck at stabilizing porous stones such as turquoise so that they can be cut and polished, the Silvery Colorado Rock Club offers the following advice: Take a jar with a lid and add one pint of acetone. To this, add the complete contents of both the resin and hardener tubes of epoxy glue. Mix well, and add well-dried stones. Cover the jar, and let it sit for at least four days. Remove the stones and allow a week for them to dry. They should now be ready to work. Please note that the acetone is highly flammable, so use caution.

**Aluminum scriber tip:** *by Dug Dugger, from Ft Lewis Rock Club News, via The Pineywoods Rooter 3/05*

An aluminum scriber is often used with a template to outline stones. This same scriber can give you an idea as to the hardness of a particular stone. If you can see the mark but have to look carefully, the stone is about 7 Mohs. If the mark is very bold, the stone is about 5 Mohs. If the mark cannot be seen, the stone is more than 7 Mohs.

### **“RockHounds: The Movie”**

#### **Coming to a Gem and Mineral Show near You!**

**P**ress Release: Dallas, TX - Explorer Multimedia Inc. has just finished the new documentary film “RockHounds: The Movie.” While following the exploits of rockhounds, the documentary showcases the fun, adventure, and even the wackiness of the hobby of gem and mineral collecting. The independent film will now begin to tour on the film festival circuit throughout the country.

In addition, the producers are also hoping to distribute the film to Gem & Mineral Shows that are interested in screening it. “A wide range of diggers appear in the movie,” said producer and geologist Devin Dennie, who also appears in the film, “from young children, to college students, to adults, rock hounds are a diverse group.” Shot in three states, the film covers digs of fossils, crystals, and more with an emphasis on the people who share this great adventure.

Any gem and mineral societies that are interested in screening the documentary can contact the producers through the film’s Web site <http://www.rockhoundsmovie.com>.

Explorer Multimedia Inc. is a non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation responsible for the TV series “North Texas Explorer” and for the upcoming “GeoAmerica.” For more information, consult their Web sites: <http://www.explorermultimedia.org> and <http://www.rockhoundsmovie.com>.

**ShowTime 2005**

March 26-27	Odessa, TX	West Texas Gem & Mineral Society 3555 W. 16th St. Robert Thompson (432) 337-3662
April 1-3	New Orleans, LA	Gem & Mineral Society of Louisiana Alario Center, 2000 Segnette Blvd. Sylvia Dabdoub (504) 469-5994
April 1-3	San Antonio, TX	Southwest Gem & Mineral Society Morris Activity Center, Freeman Coliseum SBC Center parkway, Gate E Bobby Schultz, 210-337-8908
April 9-10	Abilene, TX	Central Texas Gum & Mineral Society Abilene Civic Center, N. 6th & Pine St. Sallie Lightfoot (325) 692-4642
April 15-17	Fort Davis, TX	Big Bend Gem & Mineral Show CDRI Facility, Hwy. 118 Donna Trammell (432) 426-2924
April 15-17	Gulfport, MS	Harrison County Gem & Mineral Society Rice Pavilion, Hwy. 49 & Hwy. 90 Billy E. Wood (228) 863-6312
April 23-24	Memphis, TN	Memphis Archaeological & Geological Soc. Pipkin Building Midsouth Fairgrounds W.C. McDaniel (901) 274-7706
April 29-May 1	Rogers, AR	Northwest Arkansas Gem & Mineral Society Rogers Expo Center, 2223 Walnut DeLane Cox (479) 254-0894
April 30-May 1	Lubbock, TX	Lubbock Gem & Mineral Society Lubbock Civic Center Archie Scott (806) 894-1584
May 6-8	Marietta, GA	Georgia mineral Society Cobb Cnty. Civic Cntr, 548 S. Marietta Pkwy Jay Gorday (770) 986-0822
May 14-15	Waco, TX	Waco Gem & Mineral Club Fine Arts Bldg, Heart of Texas Fair Complex 4601 Bosque Blvd. Ruby Lois Jones 254-666-4077
June 4-5	Birmingham, AL	Alabama Mineral & Lapidary Society Tannehill Ironworks Historical State Park I-20/59 S Ext 100 rickkittinger@bellsouth.com

2005		APRIL				2005
Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
					1	2 10-12 Youth Section 11-3 Shop Open
3	4	5 7:30 Board Meeting	6 7:30 Mineral Section	7	8	9 11-3 Shop Open
10	11 1:00 Day Light Section	12 7:30 Show Comm	13 7:30 Faceting Section	14	15	16 10-12 Youth Section 11-3 Shop Open
17	18 7:30 Lapidary Section	19 7:30 Paleo Section	20 7:30 Mineral Section	21	22	23 11-3 Shop Open
24	25	26 7:30 General Meeting	27	28	29	30 11-3 Shop Open

2005		MAY				2005
Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
1	2	3 7:30 Board Meeting	4 7:30 Mineral Section	5	6	7 10-12 Youth Section 11-3 Shop Open
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22	23	24 7:30 General Meeting	25	26	27	28 11-3 Shop Open
29	30	31				

# **The BACKBENDER'S GAZETTE**

**The Newsletter of the Houston  
Gem & Mineral Society**

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(281) 530-0942



## **SCFMS**

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1998 - 2nd (Large)  
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