



## BUG'S LIFE

**I**t is 8:30 a.m. at the Brazos Valley Museum of Natural History. It is time to wake-up the bugs by turning on the computers and the giant air compressor that are part of the newest exhibit — there is more to this bug show than meets the eye.

The Brazos Valley Museum of Natural History presents its newest exhibit, "Backyard Monsters 2, The World of Insects," giving an educational twist to the life of a bug.

The Museum of Natural History is a non-profit organization and a major educational resource for children and adults in the Brazos Valley region. The museum was founded in 1961.

The original goal was to provide object-and-activity oriented natural science education for children.

Today, the museum continues to work toward those same goals but strives to stimulate an understanding of the relationship between the people of Brazos Valley and their natural environment in the past and the present.

Featured at the museum are both long-term and rotating exhibits, a nature lab and a discovery room with animal observation areas. Adjoining the building is a nature trail, "wildscape" and recreational facilities.

Each year, the museum reaches 50,000 children and adults with the various science programs, exhibits, special events and various other programs.

"Backyard Monsters," the newest rotating exhibit to visit the Brazos Valley, is an informative and educational exhibit of insects, featuring them in a variety of forms. The main area of the exhibit features robotic insects, which move in a lifelike manner. Included insects in this area are beetles, a tomato hornworm, a yellowjacket, dragonflies and a tarantula.

Dr. Thomas Lynch, director of the Brazos Valley Museum of Natural History, said the "Backyard Monsters" exhibit is different than most exhibits visitors will see at the museum.

"This kind of exhibit is very complex, but also is very fun for the staff to work with," Lynch said. "Each bug is made of dozens of valves and a computer that directs the air from the air compressor to move each part of the bug."

Lynch said maintenance of the exhibit is very detailed, and working with the mechanical aspects as well as the computers can be difficult and expensive, especially when a part is not working properly.

"The staff has to turn on and shut down the exhibit everyday and it is almost like we are waking the bugs up," he said. "Sometimes I feel like

we are running a garage with all of the maintenance, upkeep and work it takes with these bugs."

Other parts of the exhibit include interactive play stations and insect displays.

The interactive devices present educational information on various insects in a game-type format. The various insect displays represent all types of insects from around the world.

Lynch said with these types of exhibits, visitors learn by accident.

"With the insect displays and interactive games, kids want to look at the bugs or play the games, and they do not realize they are learning something," he said. "The learning process is almost painless."

In correlation with the exhibit the museum will feature an insect-collecting family hour on Feb. 27. This program looks at what an individual needs to do to start and maintain their own personal collection of bugs.

The various ways to catch, identify and present the bugs will be the topics of discussion in this family hour.

Lynch said working together with other non-profit organizations and businesses is very helpful in bringing these types of exhibits to the Brazos Valley.

"We have received wonderful cooperation from all over the Brazos Valley," Lynch said. "The Texas A&M University System, the A&M Entomology department and businesses from around the Bryan-College Station area have all been very supportive in helping with this costly exhibit."

Lynch said he would like to see more Aggies in participating with the museum.

"We would like to get more of the college students out here to help with the museum," he said. "Texas A&M students could volunteer or participate in intern opportunities. Most students do not really get involved with the entire community, and we would like to encourage students to come and learn about the museum and help with exhibits like 'Backyard Monsters.'"

For more information on the "Backyard Monsters" exhibit or on the Brazos Valley Museum of Natural History, call 774-0252 or visit the internet site at <http://bvmuseum.myriad.net>.

### Brazos Valley Museum's 'Backyard Monsters' gives local children case of creepy crawlies



Story by **Beth Focht** • Photos by **JP Beato**

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