

Area scientific scene to be magnified

Science Chicago project to be a yearlong celebration of education and awareness

By **Tim De Chant**
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Chicago hosted the world's first controlled nuclear reaction and built the world's first skyscraper, and soon it will be home to what organizers bill as "the world's largest science celebration."

A collaboration of more than 120 Chicago-area institutions, the yearlong Science Chicago initiative will encompass new and existing programs that promote science education and awareness in the city and suburbs. Announced Tuesday in Millennium Park, the celebration will begin in September.

Among the events planned will be Science Saturdays that offer behind-the-scenes

tours of universities, laboratories and industries, said Cheryl Hughes, executive director of Science Chicago.

Ten Science Saturdays are planned, each including at least 10 different tours. The tours will cost \$7 to \$25, including transportation, but Hughes said Science Chicago will work with various community groups and organizations to accommodate those who may not be able to afford it.

Ten free Lab Fests at various parks, libraries and schools in spring and summer 2009 also will be featured. Based on Chicago's many neighborhood festivals, these events will include hands-on exhibits and demonstrations.

Science Chicago is the brainchild of Jonathan Fanton, president of the Chicago-based MacArthur Foundation. Two years ago, "I said, why not take a year and try and focus . . . on science and technology and engineering," he said.

Fanton and the foundation began looking for partners in Chicago to bring the idea to fruition. The Museum of Science and Industry agreed to coordinate efforts, and other institutions soon joined the



Tribune photo by Candice C. Cusick

Edna Angeles, 20, describes dinosaur bone fragments and how they relate to the human form at a news conference for "Science Chicago: Life's A Lab" Tuesday in Millennium Park.

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ranks.

Science Chicago's Web site, www.sciencechicago.com, includes a blog hosted by science director Rabiah Mayas, a biochemist. The blog will provide quirky science-related facts and encourage children and teenagers to explore science out-

side of school. "Challenges" for readers will span various topics from tracking household water use to investigating the principles of diffusion.

Contributing institutions also will post activities, experiments and demonstrations to the site for teachers

to use in the classroom.

While initial efforts will focus on science education, Fanton said he hopes the initiative also will spur debate about topics like climate change and stem cells in all age groups.

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