

All About Dinosaurs

New Mexico Author Shares Thoughts and Signs Books in Visit to Discovery Museum

By **STEPHANIE M. MANGINO**
The Winchester Star

Only a certain kind of conversation begins with the question, "So, do you have a favorite dinosaur?"

And it is one that children and author/chemist Geoff Habiger love to have.

Habiger, of Albuquerque, N.M., smiled brightly as he signed books at the Shenandoah Valley Discovery Museum and repeated the answer of 7-year-old Pearl Moore of Linden — "Any one with a long neck."

Long-necked ones, tiny-armed Tricerats, and the perennial favorite Triceratops are all part of Habiger's "Dinosaur Learning Activity Book," published in the summer of 2005.

His Saturday visit to the museum on the Loudoun Street Mall was his first for the book Habiger began work on five years ago.

"I really wanted something to grab kids' attention — grab their imagination," said Habiger, who truly enjoys watching children learn.

Back when he was a geology student at Kansas State University, he would take items into public school geology classes to help teachers illustrate their points, he said.

He said he hopes his book, which he wrote and illustrated, will be used by teachers as an educational tool, he

"I really wanted something to grab kids' attention — grab their imagination."

—Geoff Habiger
Author of

"Dinosaur Learning Activity Book"

said.

Perhaps it will even spark a lifelong interest. Habiger still has a copy of the first dinosaur book he ever read: "Dinosaurs and Other Prehistoric Animals" by Tom McGowen. "I went to bed reading that one," he said.

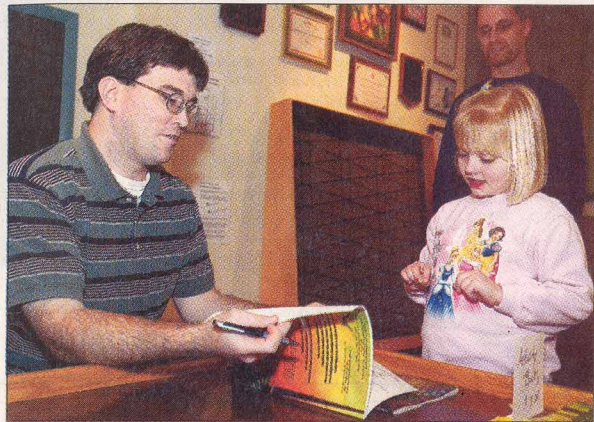
Discovery Museum Fossil Preparator and Collection Manager Geb Bennett said he recalls one of the first books he read on the subject, too. It was called "All About Dinosaurs."

Bennett and Habiger know each other from stints at Montana State University, where both, at different times, prepared fossil casts for museums.

Both felt the same fascination evident in the eyes of children like Pearl, who colored in two dinosaurs — one blue and another, green — with crayons Saturday.

Pearl, who sat next to mom Kelley as she worked, said she likes dinosaurs because they're big.

Rachel Makley, 9, and her mother Natasha came to the Discovery Museum from their Cross Junction home



Star Photo by Rick Foster

Geoff Habiger (left) prepares to sign a copy of his dinosaur activity book for Sydney Barbour, 6. Standing in the background is Geb Bennett, a fossil preparator and collection manager at the Shenandoah Valley Discovery Museum where the signing was held. Since the two men were friends in college, Bennett arranged for Habiger's visit.

just to pick up copies of the book. Rachel said she is a particular fan of the Triceratops.

Habiger and Bennett have some ideas about why children love dinosaurs so much. "They're dangerous, but they're safe at the same time," because they existed so long ago, Bennett said.

But Habiger echoed Pearl's comment when he admitted their size was a draw when he was a child. Also, they're somewhat mythical in scale, much like dragons, said Habiger, who is a longtime role playing gamer and

co-creator of the Tangent Games campaign *Ados: Land of Strife*.

Dinosaur exhibits are growing more and more popular, and the museum plans to have a greater number of them when the museum builds its new home in Jim Barnett Park, Bennett said.

They even hope to have a full Triceratops skeleton model there, he said.

If they do, maybe Habiger can make the trip again, with his son. He and his wife are expecting their first child in February, Habiger said.