ALL THAT GLITTERS: The Splendor and Science of Gems and Minerals

New Exhibition Designed by Museum Staff Will Dazzle and Educate Visitors

February 25, 2010; San Diego—The San Diego Natural History Museum is pleased to announce a new exhibition, developed and designed by Museum staff, entitled ALL THAT GLITTERS: The Splendor and Science of Gems and Minerals. The exhibition, which opens May 15, 2010, and is scheduled to remain on display at the Museum through April 2012, will take visitors beyond the “bling” to see gems as very rare and ancient by-products of the forces that have created our landscape, including right here in San Diego County.

In conjunction with highlights from the Museum’s own collection, the exhibition will include a unique assemblage of extraordinary gem specimens and superlative jewelry designed by such renowned jewelry houses as Tiffany & Co., Cartier and Van Cleef & Arpels on loan from private collectors, and such notable institutions as the American Museum of Natural History, Gemological Institute of America (GIA), Harvard University Mineralogical Museum, Newark Museum, and the Smithsonian.

The displays will showcase classic workmanship and signature elements related to specific styles and time periods. Exquisite gem carvings include a Faberge grey chalcedony pig with diamond eyes, a jelly fish opal brooch by Mauboussin, Cartier diamond panthers and tigers, and a never-before-seen collection of 13 butterfly brooches set with rare gems such as alexandrite, flame spinel, sphene, rhodochrosite, Mexican fire opal, pearls from Baja California, topaz, rainbow moonstone (transparent labradorite), and sapphire from Montana.

“In addition to demonstrating the ‘splendor and science of gems and minerals,’ ALL THAT GLITTERS will have a playful side, says Exhibition Curator and Graduate Gemologist Elise B. Misiorowski. “Jewels and carvings incorporating natural-history themes will give children as well as adults delightful surprises to hunt for. How many jeweled butterflies, birds, and flowers can you find? Which case contains the Faberge carved pig with diamond eyes? What gems are set in the little bee brooch? How many jewels represent sea life?”

The core of ALL THAT GLITTERS is gems and minerals of California, including tourmaline, spessartite (orange garnet), kunzite, topaz, Morganite, aquamarine, quartz, opal, scheelite, colemanite, covellite, sphene, herderite, and jade. A special case will spotlight benitoite, the California State Gemstone. This dark blue gem is extremely rare, found only in San Benito County, California—nowhere else in the world. “San Diego County is known among collectors throughout the world for its gems and minerals, and yet, few of our residents are aware of our rich mineral legacy,” says Michael W. Hager, Ph.D., Museum President and CEO. “ALL THAT GLITTERS is intended to inspire, educate, and dazzle residents and visitors alike with our local treasure.”

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A giant periodic table will teach visitors what elements comprise which gems, and that the diamond—perhaps the most coveted gem of all—is the only one made from a single element (carbon). In addition, gems made from minerals will not be the only stars of the exhibit. Organic beauties, such as pearls, jet, ivory and coral will also be featured, including a piece of amber (fossilized tree sap) containing an ancient cricket suspended in time.

One of the highlights of ALL THAT GLITTERS is the expanded Gem Pocket exhibit. Gem pockets are natural occurrences caused when fiery fluid from inside the Earth rises and penetrates the Earth’s crust, melting the rock and reforming as gem crystals and important economic minerals. Installed to look like a rocky outcropping in the local hills, the “Fantasy Gem Pocket” exhibit will be a dramatic cave-like space where visitors will explore the 4’ x 4’ Gem Pocket embedded with gems native to San Diego County, including quartz, tourmaline, blue topaz and pink kunzite, and orange garnet.

Misiorowski says, “During the two years this exhibition will be in place, there will be occasional changes in several of the displays which will keep the exhibition fresh. Visitors will want to return and see the new additions!” Misiorowski, an internationally respected jewelry historian, previously served as the Museum Director at the Gemological Institute of America (GIA) world headquarters in Carlsbad, California before coming to the Museum to curate ALL THAT GLITTERS. She lectures and publishes extensively to both professional and lay audiences, and has mounted numerous exhibits at GIA and at national trade shows.

The exhibition is funded by the San Diego County Board of Supervisors at the recommendation of Chairwoman Pam Slater-Price, with additional sponsorship by Bank of America Charitable Foundation and Jerome’s Furniture.

The San Diego Natural History Museum is the second oldest scientific institution in California and the third oldest west of the Mississippi. Founded in 1874 by a small group of citizen scientists, the Museum’s mission is to interpret the natural world through research, education and exhibits; to promote understanding of the evolution and diversity of Southern California and the peninsula of Baja California, Mexico; and to inspire in all people respect for the environment. Website: www.sdnhm.org.