

Spark a new hobby at Flagg Gem and Mineral Show

Laura Latzko, Special for the Republic | azcentral.com 8:04 a.m. MT Jan. 4, 2017



(Photo: Photo by Genie Howell)

More people have need for minerals and gems than you might think.

Home decorating projects, an interest in the scientific properties or histories of minerals, a love for beautiful jewelry or a passion for outdoor adventures leads to the pursuit of rocks, minerals, jewelry and lapidary (engraved) pieces.

The 45th annual Flagg Gem and Mineral Show at Mesa Community College from Jan. 6 to 8 offers interactive activities for families; onsite food trucks; informational booths on local lapidary, earth science and mineral organizations; and specimens, equipment, decorative items and historical pieces from local field collectors and dealers.

Chairman Phil Richardson said the show helps to further the mission of the Flagg Mineral Foundation, an organization dedicated to earth science education and the promotion of the hobby of mineral and rock collecting.

There are so many different aspects to the hobby. You could be into mining history, or you could be into mineral or fossil collecting, or you could love jewelry or be a lapidary artist, Richardson said. We try to show the huge range of the earth sciences.

Founded by local mining engineer, mineralogist and collector Arthur L. Flagg, the foundation puts on two major events each year, including a mineral symposium in the spring.

The gem and mineral show is the largest fundraiser of the year for the organization and a kickoff to the gem and mineral show season in Arizona.

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Richardson said the history of mineral and fossil collecting and displaying in Arizona is tied to the mining industry, and people started showing mineral specimens as early as the 1880s at territorial fairs.

Many of the individuals who volunteer with local mineral organizations and clubs have a passion for rock and mineral collecting and want to share it with others.

Richardson encouraged his own daughters to take an interest in collecting as children and has worked for years to get members of the general public more interested in the hobby.

I got involved just to give back to the hobby because of all of the enjoyment I've received from it myself, Richardson said.

During the gem and mineral show, dealers and field collectors will sell decorator specimens such as amethyst geodes or quartz crystals, rare and more common mineral specimens, mining artifacts, lapidary equipment, artwork and gemstones and jewelry.

At booth spaces for local clubs, organizations and museums, show attendees can learn about different events and opportunities to get involved on a local level. A number of local organizations and clubs will offer interactive activities for children.

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The Flagg Gem and Mineral Show offers interactive rock and fossil collecting activities for children. During the Flagg Gem and Mineral Show, families can learn more about rocks, minerals and fossils. (Photo: Photo by Genie Howell)

During the show, young people and their families can build their own rock collections using donated egg cartons; dig for crinoid, ammonite and brachiopod fossils; explore a fluorescent mineral exhibition; look at small mineral specimens through microscopes; and spin a wheel for minerals.

Many of the activities are free, but some have small costs.

Young people will also have a chance to display and get feedback on collections of miniature thumbnail minerals, or specimens that fit within 1-inch cubes.

Richardson said displaying thumbnails helps prepare children for larger shows such as the Tucson Gem and Mineral Show, an international show held at the end of January and beginning of February.

Throughout its history, the Mesa show has helped to educate the public and encourage adults and children to explore mineral and fossil collecting in Arizona.

It's become even more important nowadays, when there are so many things to get children's interest, from video games to computer programs, to get them interested in a hobby where hopefully they will want to go out and explore in the wilderness and look for their own specimens, Richardson said.

During the show, local clubs from throughout Arizona take part in educational and outreach efforts.

The Mesa Community College's geology club, one of the show's longtime participants, will assist with the fossil dig and share information on mineral and rock collecting with the public.

Kelli Wakefield, one of the club's advisors, said the show offers college students a chance to share their knowledge with young people.

Kids love rocks. I loved rocks. I still love rocks. I just never grew out of it, but kids in general love the rocks. We show them different properties. We tell them about how the minerals are used, Wakefield said. It's fun because the kids enjoy it, and the parents are playing along, listening and learning.

During the gem and mineral show, the club sells specimens such as pink halite and petrified wood, collected by the group or individual students during excursions. The money raised helps to fund the club's monthly and annual trips.

Wakefield said many people pursue the hobby because of the adventures and experiences involved in collecting rocks and minerals.

Part of it is the stories of collecting. That's half of the fun of collecting minerals in the first place. It's why a lot of people are out there [at the show], to learn that story on where they came from, Wakefield said.

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Flagg Gem and Mineral Show

When: 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Friday-Sunday, January 6-8.

Where: Mesa Community College, 1833 W. Southern Ave., Southwest parking lot, NE Corner of US 60 and Dobson Rd., Mesa.

Admission: Free admission and parking, 25 cents to \$1 for family activities.

Details: flaggmineralfoundation.org.

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