



# THE HISTORY OF HEADWATERS SCIENCE CENTER

Headwaters Science Center first opened its doors in July 1993 in a rented 26,900 square foot building remodeled for J.C. Penney Company in the 1930's and '40's. Its parent organization is Opportunities In Science, Inc. (OIS), a private IRS 501(c)(3) organization that had worked to promote science education in northern Minnesota since 1988. OIS acquired office equipment, procedures, and connections that were critical in HSC's development.

After doing exploratory groundwork in 1991, OIS called a public meeting of area residents interested in starting a science center in April 1992. The convened group formed a steering committee that made plans to build some exhibits and open the center in the vacant building. The group joined ASTC (Association of Science Technology Centers) and two members attended ASTC's New Centers session in Boston in 1992. The mission statement and HSC's name, reflecting its location at the headwaters of the Mississippi River and near those of two other major watersheds, were developed in 1992.

In summer of 1992, HSC submitted a successful proposal to Seattle's Pacific Science Center (PSC) for inclusion in its Science Carnival Consortium, funded by National Science Foundation (NSF). As the steering committee worked on fundraising through 1992 and into 1993, plans to rent the old building were developing, science-related merchandise was ordered for a small store, and a few exhibits were built.

The most successful fundraising events were a \$100/plate "Founders' Dinner and Auction of the Elements" in October, which grossed \$29,000 and a "Science Center Readathon" sponsored by Bemidji elementary schools, which grossed \$15,000. These events enabled HSC to rent the building and order merchandise for a store, which was envisioned as an attraction for an audience that did not yet understand the potential of science centers.

In July 1993, as the steering committee moved merchandise and exhibits into the building, others arranged for purchase and transport of furniture and scientific equipment from the closing of the University of Minnesota old zoology building in Minneapolis. Increasing local support made it possible to pay rent and meet the first matching payments for PSC's Science Carnival Consortium. Staff then consisted of one paid staff member and a volunteer director, supplemented by summer youth employment programs and adult Concentrated Employment Programs (MnCEP) which made it possible to build more exhibits, provide programs, and staff the developing store.

When HSC first opened in July of 1993, exhibits were few and Science Store offerings, though unique in this geographical area, were very meager. HSC sponsored programs for kids and adults, held a mystery festival and an "aeroprop" contest, and provided other activities for families. A large Burmese Python, an Amazon Parrot, a Peach faced Lovebird, and an assortment of other creatures became major attractions. The Center conducted teacher workshops with NW Minnesota Educational Cooperative Services Unit (NWECSU), headquartered in Thief River Falls. Staff members and volunteers developed small exhibits. HSC was accepted into the NSF sponsored Starlab consortium by New York Hall of Science.

By March 6, 1994, eleven large Science Carnival exhibits arrived from Pacific Science Center and HSC celebrated the formal opening of its exhibit hall. At that time there were two staff members paid by MnCEP, a volunteer director, and many other volunteers working to meet a variety of needs. By September of 1995 the Center had four employees. Since that time, programming and the exhibit floor have dramatically improved as a variety of funds became available and the Science Museum of Minnesota donated exhibits not used in their new facility. HSC initiated purchase of its building in 1994 and completed mortgage payments in 1999. Memberships, entrance fees, donations, grants, and store income provide funds for operations.