

For some time, I've been planning to tell you about the "hidden gem" of the museum. This idiom means something of outstanding value that only few people know about. I'm sure, given that this writing comes from a mineral museum, you expect me to tell you about a mineral of one sort or another. But the "hidden gem" I'll describe in this issue of **Showcase** is a person, Pat Reagan, whose picture is below. Pat Reagan, sole proprietor of Reagan Woodworking, has made a lasting contribution to the museum. Without request he has recognized issues and proposed creative and innovative solutions. On many occasions, I've presented him with a specified project only for him to subsequently propose a whole new design much better than mine. Over the years, I've learned just to tell Pat what outcome I'd like and let him propose a solution. As a result, Pat has spent countless unpaid hours improving the museum. I started this issue by compiling a list of Pat's contributions which quickly exploded to more than 100 entries. I reviewed the list with Pat and boiled it down to the variety to be touched upon here although I hated to leave out so much. Past issues of **Showcase** have typically been limited to one page but, this issue will include an additional page of pictures, keyed to the text with e.g., (1) to highlight and celebrate Pat's contributions.

Some 15 years ago among Pat's first projects for the museum was the making of custom furniture for the gift shop when the museum was still located on the main campus. Soon after he made a stand-alone highlight exhibit case for some of the museum's finest Keweenaw mineral specimens (1). I wanted a copper lower door panel and through experimentation Pat came up with treatment of a sheet of copper to get a tarnished-copper finish that he has subsequently used for other clients. In 2010, Pat reluctantly agreed to lead the effort to disassemble all of the wall cases in our previous home on the main campus (2). The wall cases were custom designed in the mid-1970s, for the main campus space. While taking them down in 2010 may not seem significant, putting them back up in a new building in 2011 required multiple innovations to get them to fit. In reconstructing exhibits in the new building, multiple custom inserts were designed, fabricated, and installed by Pat for the wall-style exhibit cases (3). Then, when the floor cases were put back into the new museum and placed side by side they did not fit together as they did in the old space, no matter how much leveling Pat tried. Pat proposed a simple solution, a black painted strip of wood to cover the space between cases and a top strip to make the black strips look normal (4). As part of moving the museum, Pat devised a plan to safely move and store the invaluable life-sized portrait of Douglass Houghton (5) and it worked perfectly. Using the recycled wall-case doors, Pat designed and fabricated new exhibit cases for the Mineral Treasures gallery (6). He found a thin real rock veneer to use on the door panels. The veneer (shown in inset) is a garnet schist; if you rub the door panel you can feel the tiny garnet crystals. Pat designed and fabricated all of the wood displays and counters in the gift shop which provide a seamless transition to the exhibit hall cases (7). Pat has also made significant contributions for museum exhibits at mineral shows. Before landing in its present home, the large native copper specimen in the museum's entrance was exhibited in Denver, Tucson, and Detroit. Pat's innovative design made this exhibit possible. The outer 4-sided wood box lifts up vertically revealing a unique method to move this 100+ lb. specimen (8). The specimen is anchored to a base with wheels, which in turn is anchored to a wheeled platform allowing the specimen to be rolled by one person to the edge of Pat's custom-built pallet box and, after unlocking the base, rolled into and anchored to the box. Pat has done many much less interesting, but nevertheless important projects. Throughout the past 15 years Pat has also fabricated all of the plinths (wood blocks) used to make exhibits attractive by elevating the specimens (9). Pat's contribution extends to many simple functional things such as shelving in the Annex (10) for gift shop and collection active storage.

Pat Reagan in his woodshop.



The mid-1970s exhibit cases were moved to the new building in 2011 because replacing them was prohibitively expensive. The oak wood veneer of the floor cases (11) and the oak laminate (13) of the wall cases show wear and are out of date. For some time, Pat and I discussed options for inexpensive modernization of the existing cases. I recall one day Pat stopped by the museum to tell me of his latest idea for the floor cases, simply paint them black and replace the doors (12). Pat completed the refurbishing experiment for the Gemstone gallery and feedback was uniformly positive. The concept was applied to the wall cases, but Pat thought an upper cherry door would not look as good as simply painting the laminate black (14). The museum now has an inexpensive path forward to extend the life of the existing exhibit cases decades into the future.

Pat Reagan is no longer the museum's "hidden gem!" In talking with Pat last week, he told me that there are "not a whole lot of places in the museum without my fingerprints." This is so true! In closing, I would like to thank Pat for making the museum a better place for visitors and employees.

Until next time, Ted Bornhorst, Executive Director and Interim Curator



(1) Keweenaw highlight case



(2) Pat (blue shirt)



(3) Exhibit case insert



(4) Floor case with black strips



(5) Pat front right side



(6) Mineral Treasures gallery with garnet schist door panel in inset



(7) Gift shop



(8) Copper exhibit showing base



(9) Plinths in highlight case



(10) Annex gift shop and collection storage



(11) Floor cases not yet refurbished



(12) Floor cases refurbished



(13) Wall cases not yet refurbished



(14) Wall cases after refurbished