

Treasure trove: Visitors can hunt, dress like pirates at Lynx exhibit

By David Burge \ El Paso Times

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Visitors to the "Treasure!" exhibit may participate in a panning-for-gold station. Visitors can pan for fool's gold, operate a small diving robot to find sunken treasure, use hand-held metal detectors to find objects in a dig pit and crawl through a sunken ship. (Photos provided by NRG! Exhibits)

Treasure stirs the imagination and conjures up images of pirates and sunken ships filled with gold, coins and other loot.

But treasure can come in other more mundane forms, like a grandmother's engagement ring or what can be found in your attic.

Today, Lynx Exhibits, a privately owned museum featuring traveling exhibits, opens its new attraction titled "Treasure!" It will be on view through May 29.

It features eight thematic areas and explores the history and technology of searching for treasure. It also delves into the personalities drawn to the hunt.

The exhibit is on loan from NRG! Exhibits of Kirkland, Wash., and is meant to provide a fun and interactive way for families to enjoy learning about the different types of treasure, said Deborah Chaney, education director and curator for the museum. Laurie Paternoster, co-owner of Lynx, said it will bring in people who are curious about pirate treasure and sunken treasure, but it will also educate people about treasures that can be found in their own homes or among their belongings.

The exhibit is full of interactive activities for children and for adults who are young at heart.

Visitors will be able to pan for fool's gold, operate a small diving robot to find sunken, underwater treasure, use hand-held metal detectors to find objects in a dig pit and see a display on things you might find in your attic, such as an original 1959 Barbie doll, Chaney said.

Boys and girls also will be able to dress up like pirates and fire mock cannons, she said.

Visitors can also learn about an activity called geocaching in which you use Global Positioning Systems and computers to hide and find treasure for fun. Items are hidden at more than 300 geocaching sites in El Paso, Chaney said.

One topic explored in "Treasure!" is the mysterious Oak Island Treasure Pit in Nova Scotia, which has befuddled treasure hunters since it was discovered in 1795.

"We're not sure if there is anything even there or if it is just an elaborate joke," Chaney said.

When treasure hunters dig down to the 100-foot level, the pit floods with water, preventing them from going farther, she said.

The exhibit also includes gold and silver artifacts, a flintlock pistol, jewels, coins and china found by noted treasure hunter Robert "Frogfoot" Weller. This cache of loot, valued at about \$500,000, is from his personal collection and is also on loan from NRG! Exhibits. Weller lives and works in Florida.

Lynx has also added some extra features on its own, Chaney said, as it does with all its attractions.

The museum has constructed a sunken ship that kids can crawl through and explore. It has been lent a collection of objects found by the El Paso Prospectors Club during the course of 40 years. Gem Center USA has also provided a collection of rocks and minerals.

El Pasoan Vanessa Villarreal said children are naturally curious about treasure. "Children believe in hidden treasures -- at least mine do," she said. "They are always looking in the backyard for treasure. It's something in their fantasies." Villarreal frequently takes her children, 6-year-old son Bruce Fernando, and 12-year-old daughter, Carolina, to see whatever is on display at Lynx.

"It's better than going to the movies," Villarreal said. "You definitely interact with your children. It's something parents should consider, and you learn a lot, too, even the adults."

For opening day, Susan Eisen of Susan Eisen Fine Jewelry & Watches will have a microscope and jewels that can be identified with it.

Bounty Hunter brand metal detectors will demonstrate the latest technology in metal detectors, while Saucedo Brothers Lock and Security will have a safecracking demonstration and activity. If anyone is successful in cracking the safe, the person will win it. The company will also raffle off a safe.

Sonitrol will demonstrate the latest in alarm technology. Noah's Ark Pets and Supplies will bring some exotic reptiles and other animals.

All the opening-day activities are free, but admission to the exhibit is separate.

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Make plans

"Treasure!" opens at Lynx Exhibits, 300 W. San Antonio, at 10 a.m. today.

Admission is \$5 today; Regular admission, \$10 for adults; \$8 for military, students and seniors; \$6 for

children ages 4-11; and free for those 3 and younger.

A grand-opening party will be from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. The exhibit stays open until 6 p.m.

The exhibit will be on display through May 29.

Hours: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays; 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Fridays;

and noon to 6 p.m. Sundays. The museum is closed on Mondays. Last admission is an hour before closing.

Information: 533-4330 or www.lynxexhibits.com.

