

April 24, 2009

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St. Louis, MO 63146

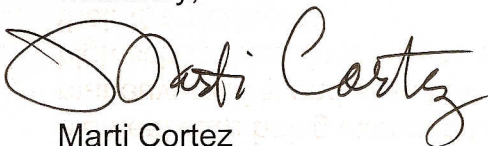
Dear Scott:

I am writing to let you know how pleased we are with our speckFINDER HD. We placed it in the Life Sciences Lab, and it is proving to be a versatile option to the traditional equipment we were using. Our staff is finding new applications with other disciplines in our museum as well. Our lab staff loves that it has a built in PC allowing them to save and work with images. Dissections of fossils and other elements are being examined by the staff in our Paleo Prep Lab. It's maneuverability and style has also caught the attention of the professors at the high school next door for use with larger groups and class room presentations on their Smart Boards.

In the Life Sciences Lab, they are holding informal presentations to school groups. One of their projects using the speckFINDER has drawn the attention of the local media. The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* did a piece which describes the how we are raising axolotl salamander embryos while studying their growth cycles and regeneration properties. After the story ran, we received calls from guests and experienced a piqued interest from teachers and school groups. Attached is a copy.

We are very pleased to have the latest in DAZOR technology. This speckFINDER offers a whole new element of discovery for our guests.

Sincerely,



Marti Cortez
Senior VP, Visitor Experience & HR

Attachment



Axolotl: These salamanders are 'regenerating' interest here

Monday, Mar. 16 2009

Look closely at the globby looking balls on display at the St. Louis Science Center and you might notice a pair of gills or nubby little limbs.

If not, just have a little patience and watch the metamorphosis take place.

"In just a few weeks, they'll really start to look like salamanders," said Michael Blanford, a gallery assistant for the science center. "Because they're in this gooey membrane, you'll get a really clear look."

The center has recently acquired 30 axolotl, an endangered salamander that's only found in the wild in what's left of a Mexico City lake plagued by pollution and the introduction of non-native tilapia, which apparently like to dine on the amphibians.

The embryos are on display at the center's Life Science Lab, where visitors will be able to view them through a newly acquired digital microscope that has a large liquid crystal display screen. Eventually, the embryos will evolve into adult salamanders and be placed in an aquarium.

Blanford said the science center decided to obtain the salamanders — also known as the Mexican walking fish — in hopes the odd-looking creature could serve as a teaching tool about biological concepts, including regeneration.

The axolotl has the ability to regenerate a limb within a period of a few months. Not only can the salamander self-repair a damaged limb, it can also grow an extra appendage. Some have actually been able to accept transplants of eyes and less vital parts of the brain from other axolotl and restore them to working order.

"It's really known as a model organism and is used in labs across the world," Blanford said.

The axolotl is also unique because it has the rare trait of being able to

retain larval features throughout its life. If a frog could do this, it would mean it might keep the tail it has as a tadpole. For the axolotl, the salamanders keep their feathery-looking gills and a dorsal-like fin on their bodies.

Because the axolotl reproduces easily in captivity, it's not likely to become extinct, despite its precarious state in its native Mexico.

The St. Louis Science Center is acquiring its specimens from the Ambystoma Genetic Stock Center at the University of Kentucky, which maintains a captive breeding colony and is supported by the National Science Foundation.

In coming weeks, Blanford said he plans on obtaining about 30 more axolotl embryos that have been bioengineered to contain a green fluorescent protein that glows.

"Because they're essentially encased in a big mucous membrane, you should be able to get a real good look at them," Blanford said.

— KIM MCGUIRE

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