

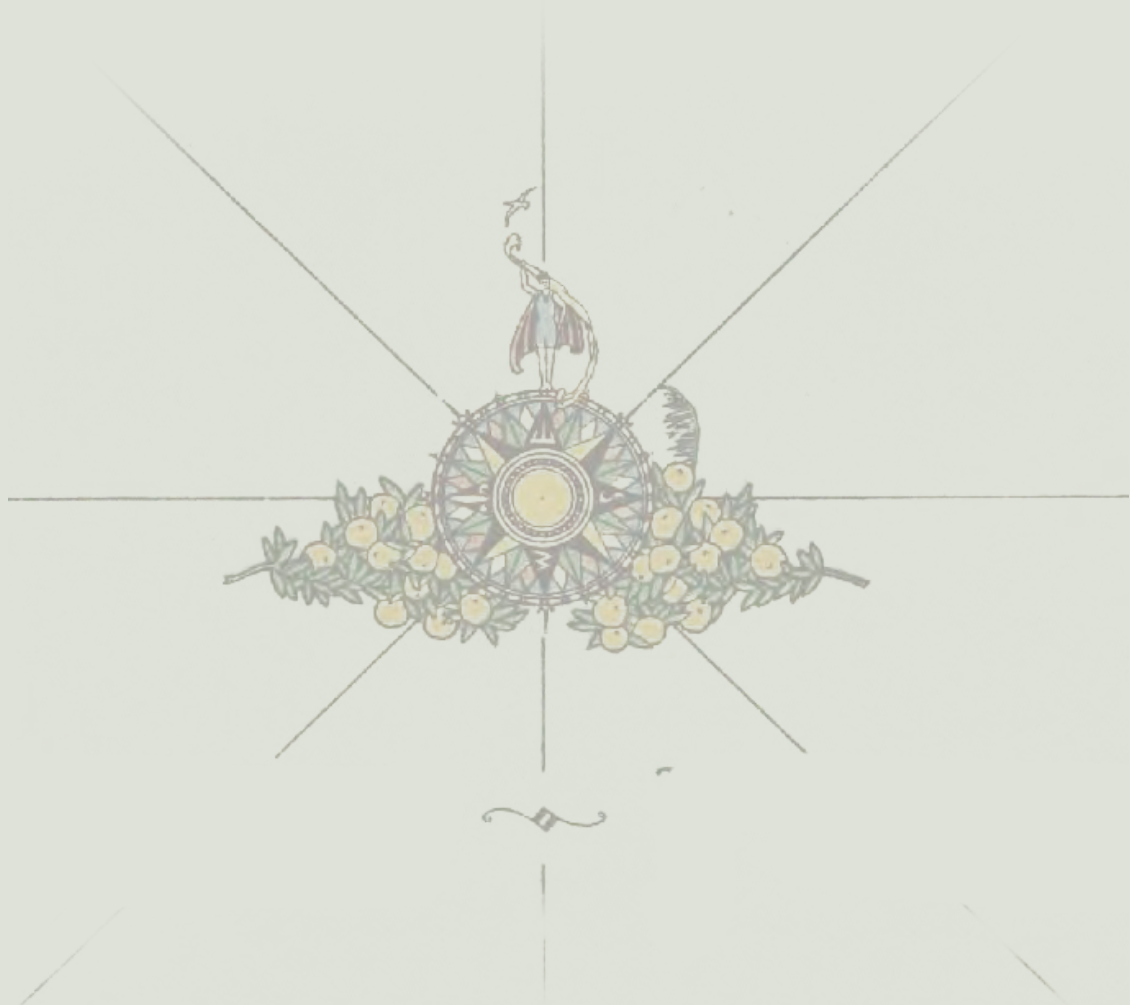


# Venice Area Museum

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## Expansion Project: Concept Phase Report

February 2013



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# Project Milestones to Date

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## 2011

*April 21*-Longtime Venice resident Julia Cousins Laning donates \$1 million to Venice Archives expansion project

*October 14-15*-Fricker Studio (exhibition design) and FleischmanGarcia (architectural design) attend Pre-Concept Phase Charrette at Venice Archives and Area Historical Collection(VAAHC) includes site tour, meetings with community leaders, and brainstorming sessions

*October 28*-Fricker Studio delivers Venice Charrette Report

*November 30*- Economic Consulting Services hired to conduct Feasibility Study

## 2012

*April 9*- FleischmanGarcia Architecture hired as project architect for phase I, concept design and development

*April 11*-VAAHC earns accreditation by the American Association for State and Local History

*April 12*-Venice Archives and Area Historical Collection becomes Venice Museum and Archives (VMA)

*April 29-May 2*- James Hagler, Jean Trammell, and Fricker Studio team attend American Alliance of Museums annual conference in Minneapolis, MN (includes tours of Real Pirates traveling exhibition designed by Fricker Studio, Minnesota History Center, Mill City Museum, and The Bakken Museum)

*May 3* - Fricker Studio hired as exhibition design consultant for phase I, concept design and development

*June 5*- Fricker Studio delivers MN trip report

*July-September*- Meetings/calls with content experts (see Appendix for complete list)

*August 7-10*- James Hagler and Fricker Studio team attend Design Charrette in Denver, CO (includes tour of Colorado History Center and its archives)

*August 14*- Fricker Studio delivers Denver Charrette Report

*September 17-19*- Fricker Studio conducts artifact and content research in Venice (includes meetings at Laurel Civic Association, Sarasota County History Center, Spanish Point and The Circus Museum)

*September 24*- Fricker Studio delivers Content Research Outline, including preliminary inventory of artifacts for display

*September 30-October 5*- Fricker Studio and FleischmanGarcia teams attend Design Meetings hosted by VMA in Venice (includes presentation of preliminary architecture and design concepts to James Hagler)

*October 12*- James Hagler reviews potential building site with Kathleen Weeden, city engineer and Roger Clark, city planning and zoning

*November 28* - VMA applies for Conservation Assessment Program grant

*December 5*- James Hagler and Fricker Studio present VMA concept to focus group of local community leaders and educators

*December 6*- James Hagler and Fricker Studio present VMA concept to Venice Heritage, Inc. Board

## 2013

*January 2*- Venice Heritage, Inc. receives grant from Gulf Coast Community Foundation for full-time Collections Manager

*January 15*-VMA applies for Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) Museums for America grant for Exhibition Design Phase

*February 4*-VMA changes its name to Venice Area Museum(VAM)

*February 8*- Fricker Studio and FleischmanGarcia deliver final Concept Phase Book

# Executive Summary

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Since 1996, the Venice Area Museum (VAM) has served as the main repository for archaeological and historical materials pertaining to the city of Venice, Florida, and the surrounding communities of Nokomis, Laurel, and Osprey, whose histories have long been intertwined. The museum's collection spans millions of years of time and encompasses a rich diversity of objects. A few highlights include fossils of Ice Age mammals discovered in the area, Venice's first fire truck "Old Betsy(1926), circus costumes and props from 1960-1992, when the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus wintered in the city, and Venice's historic city plan (1926), which has become a model for urban planners developing livable new cities for America's future.

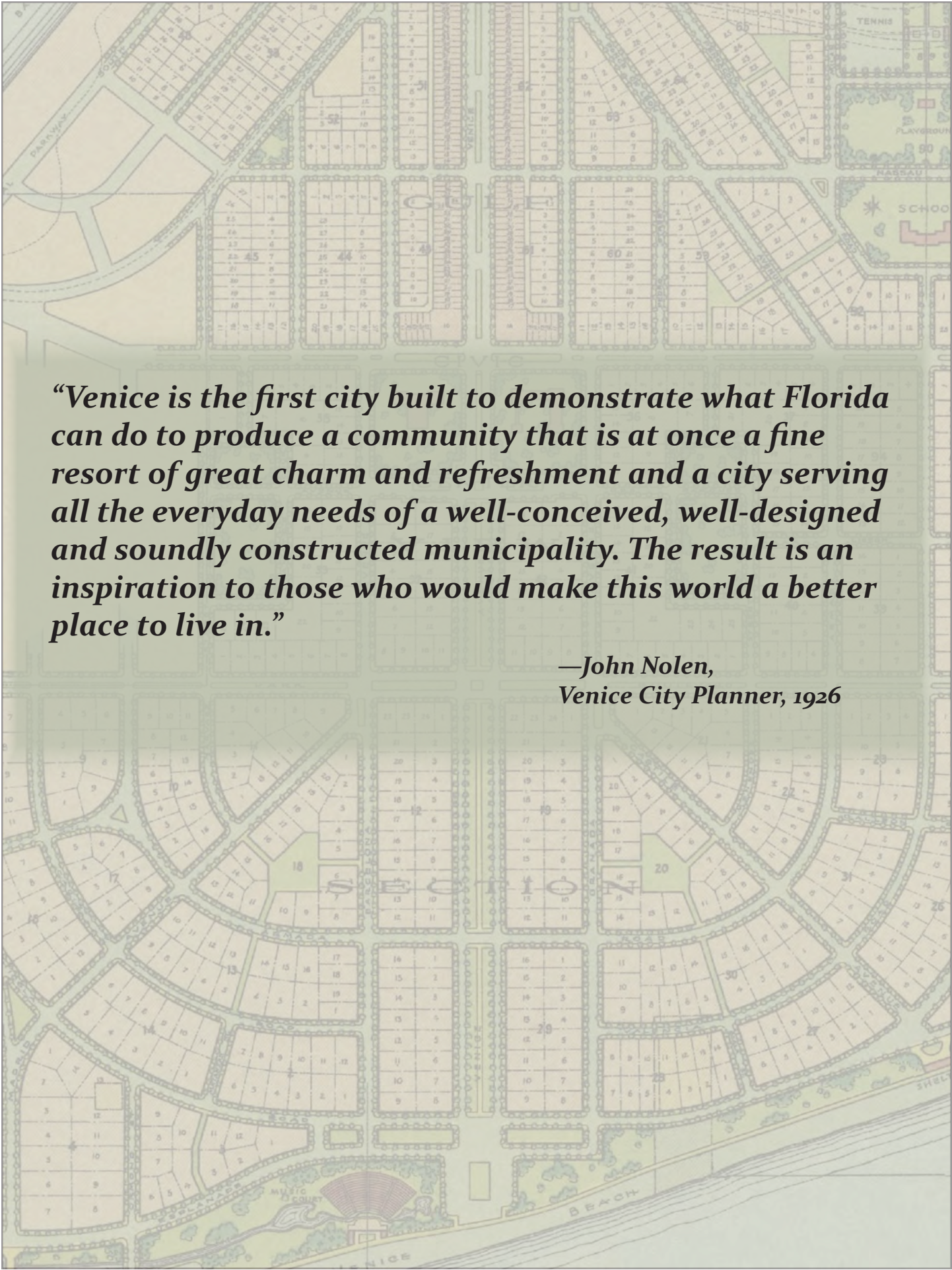
Presently, the VAM is housed in a historical building known as the Triangle Inn (1927), which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, along with 697 other structures in the city. The iconic, triangular shaped structure is one of four public facilities that comprise Venice's popular Cultural Campus next to Blalock Park—the others being the Venice Public Library, the Venice Art Center, and the Venice Community Center. While abundant in charm, the Triangle Inn is limited in size and features only 500 square feet of exhibition space. This has severely restricted VAM's ability to share its collection—and the important stories it has to tell—with the public. VAM has also outgrown the 700 square feet of collections storage space available in the Triangle Inn, limiting the Museum's ability to continue to collect and preserve Venice Area history.

In 2011, a generous \$1-million donation from longtime Venice resident Julia Cousins Laning enabled VAM to initiate a plan to build a new, larger facility next door to the Triangle Inn. As the fifth major destination on the city's Cultural Campus, this new building will feature 4,800 square feet of immersive exhibits that will transport visitors on an educational journey to discover the people and events that ultimately led to Venice becoming a model for livable cities across our nation. It will also include a 3,200-square-foot archives center with high-density storage, a library/research room, offices, and a large conference room for public programs and events.

While the new VAM exhibits will be rooted in local history, they will address larger themes that are relevant to visitors from near and far. Among these themes are the evolving relationship between humans and the environment, the causes and effects of historical patterns of economic boom and bust, and how the physical shape of a city can influence the lives and wellbeing of its inhabitants. A full calendar of educational public programs will support the exhibits and encourage visitors to return often. These programs will include storytelling events, guest speakers, workshops, and seasonal celebrations, as well as learning labs for K-12 students from Sarasota County (a currently underserved audience at the museum).

In 2011, VAM hired Economic Consulting Services of Newport Beach, California, to complete an economic feasibility study for the project. This study indicated that the new facility will not only be economically viable, but that it will also become an important cultural anchor and community hub for locals and out-of-towners alike. In 2012, VAM hired FleischmanGarcia, an award-winning architecture firm, and Fricker Studio, a renowned exhibit planning and design firm, to carry out the Conceptual Development Phase of the new facility. This phase included extensive research, meetings with content experts, artifact reviews, story development, design charrettes, focus group testing, and months of design work—resulting in an exciting and sound conceptual vision for the new VAM and its exhibition spaces and programs. That vision is presented in this Conceptual Development Phase Report.





*“Venice is the first city built to demonstrate what Florida can do to produce a community that is at once a fine resort of great charm and refreshment and a city serving all the everyday needs of a well-conceived, well-designed and soundly constructed municipality. The result is an inspiration to those who would make this world a better place to live in.”*

*—John Nolen,  
Venice City Planner, 1926*



# An Opportunity

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With its charming historic Main Street, its pristine beaches, its year-round summer, and its endless opportunities for community enjoyment, it is no wonder the city of Venice is gaining a reputation as Florida's "Paradise on the Gulf."

What is less known, however, is the story of the people and events that shaped Venice into the special place it is today and that made it a model for livable cities across America. Soon, residents and tourists will connect to this story in a whole new way.

A generous \$1-million donation from long-time resident Julia Cousins Laning has enabled the Venice Area Museum (VAM)—now housed in the historic Triangle Inn—to embark on a plan to build a larger home for itself. The new building will give VAM and its collection storage the expanded space it needs to continue to preserve the history of Venice and the neighboring communities that have left an imprint on the city. More importantly, the facility will feature a world-class public exhibition space, so this history can enlighten and inspire generations into the future.



Julia Cousins Laning

# Project Goals

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The goals of the Venice Area Museum expansion project are to:

- Build a state-of-the-art facility for the collection and preservation of historic and prehistoric artifacts related to the story of Venice and the neighboring communities of Nokomis, Laurel, and Osprey.
- Increase the percentage of VAM's collection that is on display for the public to explore and discover.
- Create an immersive visitor experience that engages contemporary audiences in the stories of Venice's past, while offering improved interpretation of the objects, documents, and photographs in the collection.
- Offer school programs and public programs such as family events, lectures, and workshops to encourage repeat visitation.
- Provide adequate space and storage systems to allow the VAM collection to continue to expand well into the future.
- Offer workspace for community members and outside scholars to conduct research using the resources in the collection.
- Provide administrative offices for staff and the dedicated volunteers who support the daily operations of the museum and archives.
- Promote the cultural vibrancy of Venice by adding a fifth facility to the city's Cultural Campus, which now includes the historic Triangle Inn, Venice Art Center, Venice Community Center, and Venice Public Library.
- Serve as a gateway to the historical landmarks located throughout the city of Venice by sharing stories that help visitors interpret the sites they will encounter in the community.
- Remove the archives and exhibits from the historic Triangle Inn to enable that building to be restored to its original 1930s purpose as a tearoom.



# A New Mission

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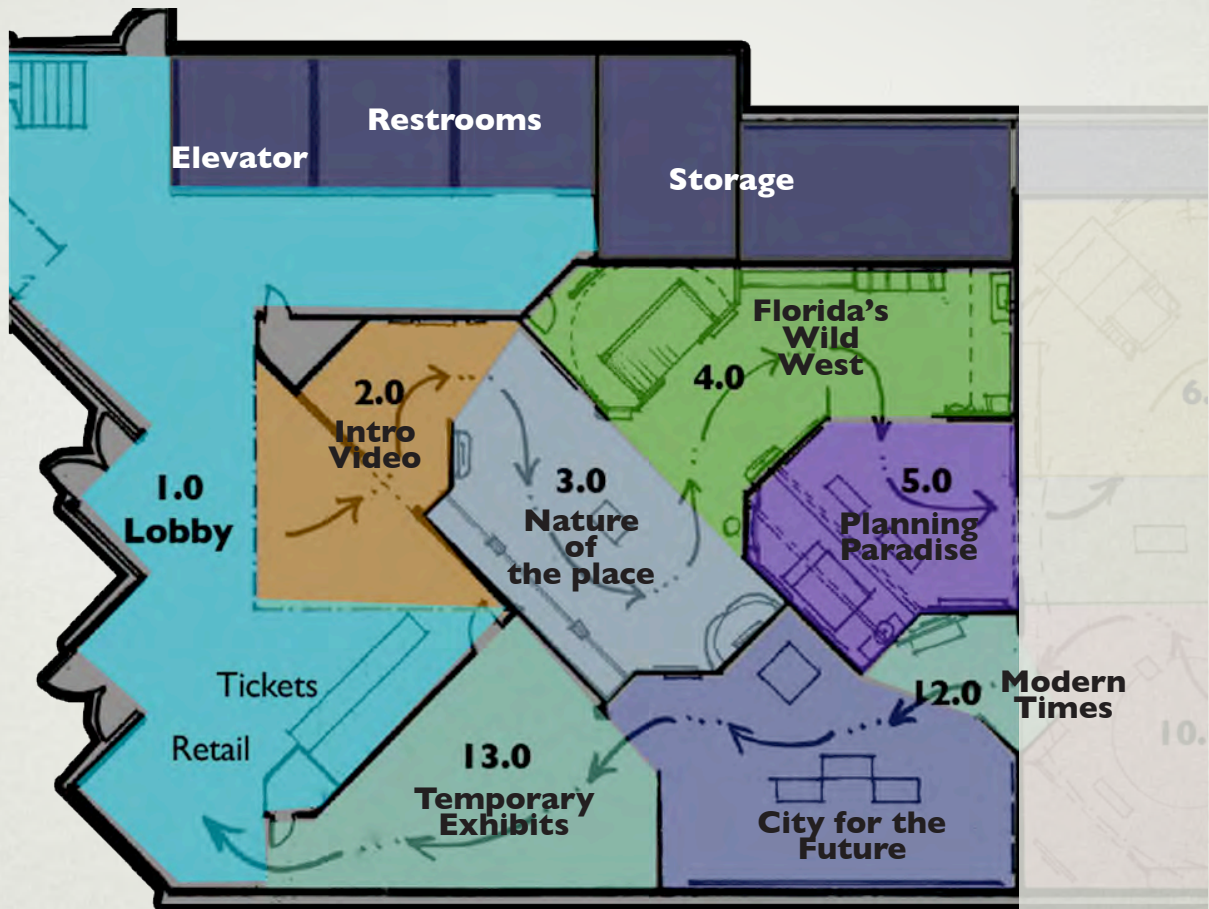
The Venice Area Museum expansion project represents a major step forward, not only in the institution's physical presence, but also in its fundamental purpose. With significantly expanded exhibition space, VAM will continue to broaden its focus from collecting and preserving archeological and historical materials to also interpreting and sharing them with the public. This growth is reflected in a new mission statement:

***The Venice Area Museum collects, preserves, and interprets the rich history of the city of Venice and the neighboring communities of Nokomis, Laurel, and Osprey, whose stories have been intertwined from 1867 to today.***



Jesse Knight, pioneer cattleman,  
arrived with his family in 1868

# Concept Summary



12 thematic galleries occupy 4,800 sq.ft.

At the new VAM, visitors will launch on a quest to find out what makes Venice, Venice and how this place became one of the most charming cities in Florida. Along the way, they will see how geography and climate made the area a magnet for prehistoric mammoths, saber-toothed cats, and other Ice Age “snowbirds”.

They’ll relive Venice’s dramatic growth during the 1920s Florida land boom, when it became one of the first “planned cities” in America. And they’ll learn how this plan laid the foundations for a city whose people have enjoyed a true love of place that endured the Great Depression and hardships that followed.



## Concept Summary cont.



As the story unfolds, a combination of artifacts, multimedia presentations, and interactive exhibits will make the past resonate for contemporary audiences. Meanwhile, updateable displays and temporary exhibits will bring new chapters of the Venice story to life.

VAM will also offer a full calendar of programs and events throughout the year—including storytelling events, guest speakers, hands-on workshops, and seasonal celebrations—to connect community members of all ages to Venice history.

# Interpretive Themes

The best history museums do more than convey facts and figures. They also offer insight to help visitors understand the present and imagine the future. Five interpretive themes will be woven through the exhibits at the new Venice Area Museum to bridge the gap between the history of Venice and the lives of residents and visitors today:

- **A Seasonal City**
- **People and the Environment**
- **Transportation**
- **Boom & Bust**
- **A City with a Plan**





### **A Seasonal City**

Venice has always been a place where life has ebbed and flowed with the seasons. During the Ice Age, prehistoric animals—the area’s first “snowbirds”—migrated here from the north as the ice pack advanced southward. Later, native peoples occupied the area seasonally to fish. Tourists and part-time residents continued this trend starting in the mid-1800s.

### **People and the Environment**

The Venice of today is the result of a centuries-old interaction between people and the environment of this unique place. The area’s geography and natural resources have influenced the lives and livelihoods of the people, while the people, in turn, have reshaped their environment.

### **Transportation**

Evolving modes of transportation played an important role in the development of cities throughout Florida by making remote areas ever more accessible to settlers and tourists. During the mid-1800s, pioneers in the Venice area traveled primarily by boat or by wagon. It wasn’t long before the railroads arrived and the “iron horse” made

traveling and shipping goods faster. In the early 20th century, paved roads, the automobile, and the creation of an airfield kept the city rollin’ and flyin’ into the future.

### **Boom and Bust**

Like other cities in Florida, Venice’s history has been punctuated by cycles of boom and bust. Dreamers and schemers looking to get rich quick sparked a land boom that built to a frenzy in the mid-1920s—only to bottom out just before the Depression, leaving Venice a ghost town. The city rebuilt with help from newcomers who, like others before them, saw promise in this place. But the roller coaster ride would repeat.

### **A City with a Plan**

One of the reasons Venice is such an appealing place today is that it evolved from a well-thought-out historic plan that created attractive areas for people to live, work, play, and interact as a community. In the 1980s, the city became a model for the New Urbanism movement to develop more livable cities for America’s future.



