

# UBC's \$50m biodiversity centre opens to world's researchers

Blue whale skeleton is centrepiece of facility which includes a museum

BY GERRY BELLETT

The University of B.C. on Thursday opened its \$50-million Beaty Biodiversity Centre, which will bring together some of the world's leading researchers.

The centrepiece of the new facility is the awe-inspiring 26-metre-long skeleton of a blue whale that was washed ashore on Prince Edward Island in 1987.

The enormous skeleton of the largest animal ever to live on the planet occupies a two-storey glass gallery in the Beaty Biodiversity Museum that contains two million specimens. It will open to the public this fall.

UBC president Stephen Toope, along with Premier Gordon Campbell and donor Ross Beaty and his wife Trisha, were among those present at the opening.

Ross Beaty is chairman and CEO of Magma Energy Corp. The Beatys donated \$8 million toward the centre.

The Djavad Mowafaghian Atrium that houses the skeleton -- shown with its jaws wide open in its lunge feeding pose -- was built with a \$3-million gift from the Djavad Mowafaghian Foundation.

Other funds for the centre came from the Canadian Foundation for Innovation.

"The Beaty Biodiversity Centre exemplifies UBC's goal to engage and inspire," said Toope.

"The curiosity and reflection inspired by the museum's public programs will have enormous impact on our understanding of our complex and interconnected world."

Biodiversity is defined as the variety of life and the range of genetic, species and ecosystems in an environment.

The centre will have 50 scientists dedicated to the study of biodiversity, half of whom will conduct their research from there.

Beaty played down his part in the centre's opening.

"I only had a minor role; all I did was write a cheque for \$8 million. I've been very lucky in business and it's a joy to be able to return some of that luck here," he said.

In an address to the dozens of guests gathered on the ground floor of the atrium with the whale suspended above them, Beaty gave a personal account of why he believes in the need to "protect nature, and what is rich and precious to our existence."

"Biodiversity creates the platform for our existence on Earth," he said. "It nourishes us physically and mentally. But it is constantly under threat from the amazing ability humans have to destroy."

A couple of years ago he rode a motorcycle from Beijing to Munich.

"In 5,000 kilometres of riding in China, I saw almost no bugs, and what a surprise, no birds," he said. "The land was completely given over to humans."

In 10,000 kilometres of riding from Beijing to Istanbul, he said he saw only one park -- a postage-stamp sized park on a hilltop in Turkey.

"I saw no wild animals, very few birds, very few indigenous plant species and butchered ecosystems," Beaty said.

"We are the lucky ones here in British Columbia and Canada."