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## Security, funding sought for Vero Man site

### Archaeological area is where in 1915 the partial skeletons of two humans were found

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VERO BEACH — The city is taking measures to secure a nationally recognized archaeological site, while efforts are made to find funding to properly excavate the area, which is southeast of the Vero Beach Municipal Airport.

The city is installing fencing, posting No Trespassing signs and policing several acres south of Aviation Boulevard, between the railroad tracks and the road leading to the Indian River County Administration Complex.

Within the next couple of weeks, County Historian Ruth Stanbridge and others belonging to a local group known as Old Vero Ice Age Site Committee is hoping to kick off a fund-raising effort to help pay for the excavation of the site, which could cost \$250,000.

People interested in helping fund the excavation can contact Stanbridge at 567-5363.

The area contains the site where in 1915 the partial skeletons of two humans, whose gender has been debated over the years, were discovered.

According to a February 2009 report by Thomas W. Stafford, of Stafford Research Laboratories, of Boulder, Colo., the site is the only one in North America where human remains co-occur with and are apparently the same age as extinct, Pleistocene animals. The Pleistocene period falls between about 1.8 million and 10,000 years ago and was when the most recent ice ages occurred.

According to Stafford, the remains of 11 extinct animals, including mammoth, mastodon, sabre-tooth cat and ancient species of tapir, horse and sloth were located at the site.

“If the human skeletons are contemporaneous with the extinct fauna, the Vero humans would date to ca. 13,000 yr. old and would represent only the second occurrence of humans that old in the New World,” wrote Stafford.

Stafford noted the proposed construction of a stormwater treatment facility in that area by Vero Beach presented a unique opportunity to re-examine the site and to

determine if the skeletons were actually 13,000 years old or younger.

The construction, however, never took place as plans were scuttled after city officials learned more about the process they would have to go through in order to do excavation at the site.

The city was working with Stafford and scientists like Barbara Purdy, professor emeritus of anthropology at the University of Florida, and Florida State University archaeologist Glen Doran on a plan to excavate the site in connection with a planned \$850,000 project to build a new facility to treat stormwater in that area.

Assistant City Engineer Bill Messersmith thought the city had developed with these professionals a pretty good plan to excavate the site last year. Funding for the excavation would have had to be raised from private sources.

When the Florida Department of Historic Preservation was contacted, however, Messersmith said officials there said the city needed to discuss the situation with federal officials and Indian representatives before proceeding.

Messersmith said because the city was under time constraints to use the \$510,000 grant money it had received for the stormwater work, it was decided to redirect the money to a stormwater project in the Humiston Park area. The city's project along Aviation Boulevard, along with the planned excavation of the Vero Man site, was put on hold.

The city still is willing to provide some heavy equipment to assist with excavation efforts if funding for the project can be found.

In the meantime, the discovery of a valuable, 13,000-year-old engraving of a mammoth on a fossilized bone by an amateur collector elsewhere in the Vero Beach area, spurring other people to start digging around the Vero Man site. Concern about such activity as well as safety concerns prompted the city to fence and post the area.

"The city of Vero Beach has been extraordinary in helping us protect the site," said Stanbridge.

Purdy is expected to travel to Vero Beach next week to help determine how large an area should be excavated if money can be raised to fund the venture. Stanbridge believes there will be some people who will want to be involved in such a significant discovery. She also envisions a time when an educational center perhaps containing Ice Age artifacts discovered at the site can be established there.

