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By Heather Haddon

live in the know

SECAUCUS, N.J.—Eons ago, the duck-billed Hadrosaurus and meat-eating Dryptosaurus roamed New Jersey. Now, they are poised for a comeback.

Field Station: Dinosaurs is set to open next month, one of the only permanent dinosaur exhibits in the country to use advanced robotics to make the beasts "move" in response to visitors.

"As a paleontologist, you often hear of something like this and roll your eyes," said Jason Schein, the assistant curator of natural history at the New Jersey State Museum, who is a consultant for the park. "No one has gone to this extent to make it as realistic as possible."

The 16-acre theme park is set to open to schools on May 14 and to the general public on May 26. The bulk of the 31 dinosaurs are arriving from China in shipping containers on Saturday. They are life-size models, including a 90-foot Argentinosaurus that should be visible from Manhattan.

A dinosaur theme park perched on a New Jersey bluff started as a vague notion in the head of theater director Guy Gsell.

The 51-year-old father of two sharpened his vision after stumbling on an undeveloped parcel of land nine miles west of Manhattan

31 Prehistoric Creatures Invading N.J.



One of the dinosaurs that will be shipped to a park in New Jersey starts its trip in Zigong, China, in March.

Jade Bamboo Culture Development

that once housed Hudson County's insane asylum. He started calling officials.

"They looked at me like I had two heads," said Mr. Gsell, recalling his early meetings with seven county representatives. "Everyone said, 'Who is this guy?'"

He cold-called investors and eventually raised the \$2.5 million needed to launch the park. The state museum is helping to design exhibits that will teach children about the Meadowlands, earth sciences, geology, birds and paleontology.

Included will be the Hadrosaurus, which is the state's official dinosaur.

But the real draw, Mr. Gsell believes, will be the dinosaurs rooted in steel platforms along the park's dirt paths. The creatures have metal skeletons, sculpted foam bodies and rubber "skin" stretched on top.

Mr. Schein traveled to Zigong, China, to guide the fabricators in making them scientifically accurate.

The dinosaurs will include the Hadrosaurus, which is the state's official dinosaur, and Dryptosaurus, a small carnivore.

Three of the dinosaurs are now being outfitted with batches of sensors and facial-recognition software at KumoTek, a robotics company in Richardson, Texas.

The company is racing against a tight deadline to fit the dinosaurs with technology

that will allow them to careen their "necks" when they detect low movement—such as children—and "roar" when there is a larger crowd in front of them. The rest of the dinosaurs will have preset movements.

KumoTek's "animatronics" dinosaurs were first displayed at a 2010 exhibit at the Field Museum in Chicago, with roughly 197,000 visitors purchasing tickets. They were also featured at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science. But this is the first time the technology will be used outside in such large models, a challenge the engineers are still confronting.

"It's absolutely unique," said Matthew Fisher, KumoTek's chief technical officer. "If it can be done, we can do it."

Mr. Gsell has traveled to a dozen dinosaur exhibits—from the Zigong Dinosaur Museum in China to Plane-Dino in Amneville, France—since he began work on the theme park in December 2010. Most recently a director at Discovery New York, Mr. Gsell said he has a lifelong love of dinosaurs dating back to an exhibit at the 1965 New York World's Fair.

The Bloomfield, N.J., man has employed some unusual marketing techniques. He appeared on "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire" in January so he could talk about the exhibit, and his human-size dinosaur puppets were featured during Giants and Jets games in December.

"I get no sleep," said Mr. Gsell, who now has a staff of nine and is rarely seen without a dinosaur-print tie.

The Hudson County Improvement Authority

gave him a three-year lease for 20 acres of land for \$1 million, and Mr. Gsell is banking on the park becoming profitable enough to renew the lease for two years.

State tourism officials have taken note of the park, and hope to feature it in a bigger push to lure New York City visitors to New Jersey attractions.

"I think it's going to be a big draw," said Grace Hanlon, the executive director of the state Division of Travel and Tourism, who visited the park last week. "I was in awe when I walked through it."

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