

COMMENTARY

Editorials, letters, columns and other opinions

Balboa Park Perfect Home for Smithsonian West



COMMENTARY

George Mullen

The Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., was established in 1846 for “the increase and diffusion of knowledge” and is administered by the United States government. Its collection consists of more than 138 million objects, artworks, and specimens in what is the world’s largest museum and research complex — 19 museums and galleries, the National Zoological Park and nine research facilities.

The digitization of this vast collection is underway and will be a fantastic resource for all. However, there is simply no online experience comparable to standing in the presence of Abraham Lincoln’s actual top hat, Edison’s first incandescent bulb, the Wright Brother’s 1903 Flyer, the Apollo 11 Command Module or the array of other items. In-person experiences with these treasures of humanity influence thoughts, minds, and lives. Unfortunately, less than 1 percent of this extraordinary Smithsonian collection is on display — meaning 99 percent of it sits in storage.

A Proposal

So, San Diego, we have a proposal: We provide the Smithsonian with a world-class West Coast platform to display a sizable portion of this unseen collection. We have the perfect location to do this — the undeveloped east mesa of Balboa Park. The 70-acre mesa sits between Florida Drive, Pershing Drive and Morley Field and is currently used as a parking lot for city maintenance trucks. Part of this area remains contaminated from a sanitation landfill that was on the site from 1952 to 1974.

Let’s paint the picture: With the environmental contamination cleaned up,

imagine a “Smithsonian West” complex rising on Balboa Park’s east mesa that architecturally incorporates the natural topography and maze of hiking trails, while also maintaining significant open space. A minimalist pedestrian suspension bridge (foot, bike and tram only) rises over Florida Canyon, connecting the mesa’s Smithsonian complex to the Park Boulevard Bridge that exits at the Natural History Museum. San Diego’s trolley-line finally extends the last few blocks from Park Boulevard and C Street downtown all the way to the Natural History Museum, allowing easy access to the park, museums, zoo, and the new Smithsonian — all without the necessity of a car.

The Pinnacle

Balboa Park already has a number of reputable museums, but a Smithsonian West complex would be the pinnacle of the park’s collection. Think New York City’s Central Park, host to the incredible Metropolitan Museum of Art and its extraordinary collection.

The potential benefits to Balboa Park and San Diego would be extensive. We would gain an extraordinary asset via the Smithsonian collection and research facilities, as well as employment opportunities and economic benefits from a world-class tourism draw. Balboa Park museums and the zoo would gain an up-close, two-way relationship to borrow from one of the Smithsonian’s top-notch collections for their respective shows and an increase in attendance from the Smithsonian presence.

Balboa Park would finally activate the eastern section of the park, an area most San Diegans have never set foot on. In exchange for a Smithsonian West lease on the land, the partnership could lead to federal funding for the clean-up of the east mesa contamination (\$86.7 million 2008 estimate), the building of the

connecting pedestrian suspension bridge and help with Balboa Park’s \$300 million-plus in deferred maintenance needs.

The potential benefits to the Smithsonian are vast. A Smithsonian West would establish a world-class West Coast complex to display more of its collection. It also would create a research presence, opening the door to collaboration with the world-renowned zoo and San Diego’s numerous research institutions and universities.

The Car Solution

Ironically, Balboa Park’s contamination problem is fortuitous in this situation. In the process of reclamation, massive quantities of contaminated earth will need to be removed. In lieu of replacing with clean dirt, we can instead build out this area with climate-controlled underground storage facilities and parking. This will eliminate cars from the mesa’s surface while providing bunker-style protection for the collections.

The Smithsonian collections are almost exclusively located along the National Mall in Washington, D.C., while their main off-site storage facilities are six miles away. With the growing risk of a rogue state/terrorist attack, this lack of geographic diversification with our nation’s historical treasures is shocking.

There are many factors that make Smithsonian West the right idea at the right time.

Most San Diegans view Balboa Park as the crown jewel of our city. Unfortunately, for decades our political leadership has provided only lip service to the park. Leadership is about having a vision, then taking action. If we were sitting in the mayor’s seat, we would vigorously pursue Smithsonian West as a golden opportunity to do something great for Balboa Park and San Diego.

George Mullen is an artist and principal of studioevolution.com in San Diego.

Sale Helps Novatel Move Away from Hardware

TECH: Focus to Be On SaaS and the Internet of Things

By BRAD GRAVES

Novatel Wireless Inc. wrapped up a sale of hardware module product lines to Telit Wireless Solutions Inc. for \$14.75 million, the company said on April 11.

At the same time, Novatel Wireless (Nasdaq: MIFI) said it terminated another asset purchase agreement with New Jersey-based Micronet Enertec Technologies Inc. Novatel Wireless announced in mid-February that it had signed a deal to sell its telematics hardware business to Micronet for \$24 million.

The Sorrento Mesa company said it is still interested in selling the latter business to a third party — which may include Micronet (Nasdaq: MICT).

As part of the Telit deal, the buyer will pay Novatel Wireless \$11 million in cash up front and approximately \$3.75 million in cash for inventory within 90 days. Subsequent earn-out amounts may be paid following the closing of the transaction if certain conditions are met.



Melissa Jacobs
Sue Swenson, who took over as CEO of Novatel Wireless Inc. last fall, is repositioning the company which has failed to post a profit since 2009.

“The disposition of these modules assets accelerates our company’s transformation from a hardware-centric manufacturer to a true provider of IoT SaaS and solutions,” said Novatel Wireless CEO Sue Swenson in a prepared statement. The abbreviation IoT refers to the Internet of Things, where machines trade data with one another, often wirelessly. SaaS stands for software as a service, where customers pay a subscription fee to access software at the other end of a simple Internet connection.

Novatel Wireless is making major changes to its business model, sharpening

its focus on SaaS and services.

“Hardware’s a tough business,” Swenson told the *San Diego Business Journal* in a November interview.

In connection with the Telit sale, Novatel Wireless granted the buyer a license to develop, manufacture and sell certain Novatel Wireless cellular modules, including subsequent versions currently in development. Novatel Wireless and Telit also inked a manufacturing and supply agreement. The deal calls for Novatel Wireless to purchase modules that will be part of certain Novatel Wireless hardware products going forward.

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