SOIL TOWERS in the GROWING SCIENCE GALLERY

Soil plays a vital role in the Earth’s ecosystem. Healthy soil gives us clean air and water, bountiful crops and forests, productive grazing lands, diverse wildlife, and beautiful landscapes. The Soil Towers exhibit will show how the various types of soils across North Dakota determine which plants will grow and thrive, helping visitors understand why specific types of agriculture are more appropriate to practice in each region.

To properly tell the story of North Dakota’s soil, Gateway to Science enlisted the expertise of soil scientist Wade Bott of the Natural Resources Conservation Service and soil scientists from soil conservation districts across the state. They assisted us in collecting native plant specimens and provided an abundance of information on soil profiles and core samples.

The plants and data were taken to Blue Rhino, an exhibit design studio in St. Paul, Minnesota, where Tim Quady and his talented team created our new science center’s Soil Towers exhibit. This exhibit consists of four beautiful, detailed, and most importantly accurate soil towers that illustrate how soil differences in North Dakota’s four land-use regions have shaped both native plants and farming practices.

Gateway to Science is a hands-on science center, so it is important that the exhibit features touchable structures that mimic the texture and color of core samples taken from each region. Each 2 x 2 x 7-foot soil tower is topped off by beautifully preserved native plants. To connect visually to our state’s landscape, the towers will stand adjacent to a 6 x 9-foot satellite image of North Dakota. Color bars on the left side of each tower will make it easy for guests to determine the land use of any location by matching it to the color overlay on the floor graphic. The front face of each tower provides information about native plants and soil composition. The back panels will be devoted to farming practices in each region.

The Soil Towers exhibit is positioned to be a welcoming and tone-setting entrance to the Growing Science Gallery and will give visitors a new appreciation for the beauty and importance of dirt.