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STETSON UNIVERSITY

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Florida Geologists to Discuss Agatized Coral at Stetson University's Gillespie Museum

Stunning, diverse exhibit features 140 fossil specimens from Florida

DELAND, Florida, Sept. 26, 2019 – [Gillespie Museum's](#) next Science Café will give visitors an opportunity to view 140 specimens in the "Agatized Coral and Other Silicified Fossils of Florida" exhibit on [Stetson University's](#) campus. The display, which includes agatized coral and silicate fossils, is a stunning and diverse assemblage from the personal collections of Florida geologists Sam Upchurch, PhD, professor emeritus of geology and former Geology Department chair at the University of South Florida, and Gary Maddox, a state hydrogeologist and co-owner of Apalachee Minerals.

Guests will have a chance to learn more about the exhibit during a free opening-night reception and gallery talk by Upchurch and Maddox on Friday, Oct. 4, 5-7 p.m.

Upchurch has been collecting minerals and fossils for more than 50 years. During the late 1970s, he received a research grant from the State of Florida to develop a method for archaeologists to identify locations in Florida where early Native Americans obtained chert (silicified limestone) for the manufacturing of tools, such as, spear points, arrowheads and knives/scrapers. As part of the research, Upchurch and his colleagues discovered the mechanisms for silicification in Florida. He also continues to publish his research findings about Florida karst, sedimentology and geochemistry.

Maddox's interest in geology was deepened after relocating to Jacksonville when he was 11 years old. He joined the Jacksonville Gem and Mineral Society and attended the group's collecting trips, which sparked his interest in geology and environmental science. Maddox has worked as a geologist in Florida for the past 33 years. In 2003, he began a commercial mining project in south Florida, which included collecting and preserving calcite-filled clams and other mineralized fossils. The mining project gave him the chance to work with mineral and agate specimens online and at gem and mineral shows.

Agatized coral was chosen by the state legislature in 1970 as Florida's state rock. The rock formed when silica in the ocean water replaced ancient buried corals. The specimens in this exhibit represent organisms that lived 20 to 30 million years ago in the shallow seas, which covered prehistoric Florida during the Oligocene and early Miocene epochs. Today, agatized coral can be found in the Econfina (Taylor County) and Withlacoochee Rivers (near the Florida and Georgia state line), Ballast Point (Hillsborough County) and Nutall Rise in the Aucilla River (Jefferson County) in Florida.

The “Agatized Coral and Other Silicified Fossils of Florida” exhibit will be on display through Wednesday, May 6, and will be the focus of a range of Science Café conversations and Science Saturday events in late fall and spring.

About Stetson University

Founded in 1883, [Stetson University](#) is the oldest private university in Central Florida. Stetson focuses on intense learning experiences in a supportive community that allows students to develop their voice in a connected, inclusive environment. Stetson University ranks No. 5 on U.S. News & World Report's 2019 list of Best Regional Universities (South), and has been recognized as one of The Princeton Review's 385 Best Colleges, 2020 edition. [Stay connected](#) with Stetson on social media.

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