



Fall 9-11-2006

## World's Largest Periodic Table Involves Ties to IWU Past, Present

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### Recommended Citation

Aubry, Ann, "World's Largest Periodic Table Involves Ties to IWU Past, Present" (2006).  
*News and Events*. 3262.  
<https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news/3262>

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World's Largest  
Periodic Table  
Involves Ties to IWU  
Past, Present  
September 11, 2006

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.  
– Illinois Wesleyan  
University alum  
Mike Davis is  
constructing the  
World's Largest  
Periodic Table of  
the Elements, to be  
displayed in the



Mike Davis '98 gives a science demonstration in front of the Daley Center with its Periodic Table Display.

windows of the Daley Center in Chicago from Sept. 22-29, in a project aimed at highlighting the relevance of science in people's everyday lives.

[Read a story in the \*Chicago Tribune\*.](#)

Davis orchestrated the project as part of the "Chicago Science Expedition: Two Weeks' Worth of Wow," which is a collaboration between the City of Chicago under Mayor Richard Daley's Office, the Chicago Public Schools and area colleges, universities and museums. Davis, who earned a bachelor's in chemistry from IWU in 1998, is assistant professor of chemistry and chair of the Physical Sciences Department at Harold Washington College in Chicago.

The periodic table of the elements will be rendered eight stories tall in the windows of the Daley Center, with each of the 111 elemental symbols represented on an 8-foot-square panel.

"The iconic symbol of chemistry captures the imagination of almost anyone who looks at it," Davis said. "I wanted to turn this building and all of Chicago into a classroom for a week."

Community and corporate supporters of the project have been enlisted to sponsor individual elements, providing their reasons for choosing a particular element as a means of communicating its importance in our daily lives.

Illinois Wesleyan University is sponsoring the panels for bismuth and chromium. Bismuth was chosen because of the groundbreaking work led by Associate Professor of Chemistry Ram Mohan in the development of bismuth compounds as environmentally friendly catalysts. Undergraduate students at IWU work with Mohan on research with bismuth in the field known as green chemistry.

Chromium was chosen because of its historic significance at the University. A former professor, Joseph C. Collins, was instrumental in developing a chromium reagent now known as Collins' reagent. Retired chemistry professors Wendell W. Hess and Forrest Frank co-authored a key publication with Collins about this reagent in 1968.

When Chicago's periodic table display is concluded, printed materials from the event will be available as tools for educators, enabling students to make connections to real-world applications of science.

Davis credits his education at Illinois Wesleyan for leading him to his present work, which includes a traveling science show he has been performing for eight years to promote the excitement and understanding of science.

"Professor Tim Rettich (who has taught at Illinois Wesleyan since 1981) did demonstrations as part of his class, and he headed up the American Chemical Society group on campus, with an emphasis on demonstration shows," Davis said. "I became enthralled with that idea."

One of Davis' science demonstrations caught the attention of the mayor's office and prompted the invitation for him to join the Science Expedition planning committee. Whether it involves shooting a potato out of a tube for schoolchildren or catching the eyes and minds of thousands in the Windy City, Davis wants to show people they shouldn't be afraid of science, but can discover it for themselves.

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