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## Harvard Grad Starts Math Museum Helped by Google, Hedge Funder

By Patrick Cole



Glen Whitney, founder of the Museum of Mathematics, behind a math puzzle in his new institution under construction. Funded by foundations and private sources which include hedge fund titan Jim Simons and Google Inc., MoMath is scheduled to open in 2012. Photographer: Patrick Cole/Bloomberg

As a devout numbers geek, Glen Whitney was bothered that the cultural landscape offered no museum celebrating the field of mathematics.

So he left his job as an algorithms specialist and manager at Renaissance Technologies LLC, a quantitative hedge fund started by Jim Simons, and created the nonprofit Museum of Mathematics.

This year, he found a 19,000-square-foot space on East 26th Street in Manhattan and plans to open the doors in 2012.

"I started this museum because I wanted people to have a chance to see the beauty, excitement and wonder of mathematics," said Whitney, 42, speaking in the empty space under construction.

When it opens, MoMath won't display slide rules or other relics initially. It will offer math experiences for visitors of all ages: logic puzzles and games like Rubik's Cube and a hyper hyperboloid, a sculpture made of lines of red thread that create the illusion of being in a curved cage of strings. One planned exhibit features a square-wheeled tricycle that can ride on a special path as smoothly as one with round wheels.

Whitney, the museum's executive director, is especially targeting children in grades 4 through 8, yet he hopes their parents and his peers from the hedge-fund industry will stop in and even make a donation.

"We need an institution like a Museum of Mathematics so people are aware of it and better serve their roles in society, whether it's understanding a budget or even just the lottery," Whitney said. "Right now, I think the lotteries are a tax on the mathematically illiterate, and people need to understand the risks they're taking."

### Google, Sloan Help

Whitney has raised about \$22 million from some 300 donors such as Google Inc. (GOOG), the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation and a charity founded by Simons. Whitney hopes to eventually create a museum national in scope with a broad donor base.

Born in Rahway, New Jersey, and raised in nearby Linden, Whitney got hooked on numbers when his parents sent him to a math camp at Ohio State University in his early teens.



Glen Whitney, founder of the Museum of Mathematics. He stands inside a hyperboloid made of straight strands of thread that create the illusion being in a curved sculpture of string. It is one of featured experience-oriented exhibits the museum now under construction will display when it opens in Manhattan in 2012. Photographer: Patrick Cole/Bloomberg

“While going through school, math wasn’t something that excited me,” he said. “Kids are told, ‘Here’s something you’ve got to learn for this test, and you’ll never need it again.’”

After studying math at Harvard, he earned a Ph.D. at the University of California, Los Angeles. He took a teaching job at the University of Michigan before joining Renaissance Technologies.

He then discovered the Goudreau Museum of Mathematics in Art and Science in New Hyde Park, New York, which closed a few years ago.

“It had stayed the same size, it was only open by appointment for 20 years. So I wanted to create an institution that could address the broader cultural problems with mathematics,” he said. “People don’t see math as something exciting that they should go into as part of their careers.”