For about 165 million years dinosaurs walked the earth, and they'll soon be making a return trip to Mount Airy. On Feb. 18 the Mount Airy Museum of Regional History will open a traveling exhibit called Tiny Titans: Dinosaur Eggs & Babies. The exhibit will be on display through the end of May. Museum executive director Matt Edwards said he has worked with the contracted company before and knows that it offers a tremendous product. The exhibit will offer hands-on components and displays, and Edwards hopes it will be a big hit, as the nearest museums which offer dinosaur exhibits are located in Raleigh, Asheville and Martinsville, Virginia. Of course, the Mount Airy museum isn't exactly ready to play host to a full-size tyrannosaurus rex, said Edwards. "Our temporary exhibit space is fairly small," said Edwards in explaining the exhibit will tell the story of dinosaurs by way of smaller baby dinosaurs and dinosaur eggs. The exhibit even features a model of a baby triceratops on which people can sit for a photo opportunity. Edwards said he was lucky enough to schedule the exhibit between its showings at two other museums, allowing for some cost-savings. According to Edwards, the baby dinosaur exhibit will tap into an area which is a little new for his organization — the sciences. That's important since the funding for the exhibit will come by way of a natural sciences grant. "It's a huge grant for us," said Edwards.

The museum recently received a $62,000 grant from the N.C. Museum of Natural Sciences, explained Edwards. It's a one-year, renewable grant which is contingent on continued funding from the legislature. The N.C. Museum of Natural Sciences handed out $2.3 million in such grants statewide, with emphasis going to museums which receive little or no state funding and operate in under-served communities. One condition of the grant is that money be put toward the sciences, said Edwards. However, the grant is enough money to fund a number of exhibits, offer some general operating dollars and allow the museum to reinstate a position it has operated without since 2010.

Education director

Edwards said one area in which the museum has failed to make headway in recent years is the continued development of education programs. In 2010, "circumstances following the recession" made it necessary for the museum to trim its staff. One position cut was the education position. With the new funding, Edwards is getting ready to post the position, which was included in the museum's grant application. Though current museum staff members have kept the education programs at the museum running throughout the past six years, Edwards said the museum has done "nothing extensive in new program development." Participation in the programs from local schools is also not as extensive as it once was. Edwards said one task for the new staff member will be to find ways to link the history lessons the museum offers with the STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and math) curriculum schools are now using. "This

position will offer a tremendous opportunity to reconnect with the education community and the community as a whole," noted Edwards. Edwards explained the first task for the education director will be a complete overhaul of the museum's education programs. Some successful portions of the programs will remain in place, while the museum may end others. New programs will be offered eventually. The person will also lead a teachers advisory committee, comprised of volunteer teachers, to ensure the museum is offering programs which are helpful to local schools and that the programs align with the curriculum taught to local youngsters.

Edwards said he's looking forward to the dinosaur exhibit, a revamping of the education program and other exciting opportunities which the new grant will help to fund.