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## Chicago museums see decline in attendance

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Chicago's major museums saw a 1 percent decline in attendance in 2008, officials announced Tuesday.

Attendance fell to 7.7 million in 2008 from 7.8 million in 2007.

The Shedd Aquarium topped the list as Chicago's most popular cultural institution, with 1.86 million, down from 2 million in 2007, a drop of about 7 percent.

The largest drop percentage-wise came at the Museum of Science and Industry, which saw a decline of 15 percent to 1.4 million.

The Shedd noted that its Oceanarium was closed for renovation in late summer. The MSI saw unusually higher attendance in 2007 with temporary exhibits such as Body Worlds II and Star Wars.

Museums showing double digit increases included the Notebaert Nature Museum, up 46 percent to 304,810, and the Chicago History Museum, up 32 percent to 265,991.

The Notebaert credited the exhibit Lawn Nation and said it was allowed to count some viewers of its free outdoor native prairie landscape as part of its attendance numbers. The Chicago History Museum reported success with its fashion exhibition, Chic Chicago.

"When you look at what people are facing in a difficult economy, it is a relief to see that support for Chicago's museums still remains strong," said History Museum president Gary T. Johnson, who also serves as the president of the city museum umbrella group, Museums in the Park.

Overall, free day admissions increased 15 percent in 2007 over 2008, from 928,265 to slightly more than 1 million.

Other attendance figures include:

Adler Planetarium: 414,995 (up 3 percent.)

Art Institute: 1,397,363 (up 3 percent)

Du Sable Museum: 176,538 (up 5 percent)

Field Museum: 1,390,896 (up 5 percent.)

National Museum of Mexican Art: 171,695 (up 5 percent).

Museum of Contemporary Art: 285,982 (up 1 percent).

Total: 7,692,806 (down 1 percent.)

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