



^{x1776} E. coli K-12

THAT'S NOT NATURAL

It would be surprising to find a display about *E. coli x1776* in a natural-history style exhibit. For one thing, it's a bacterium—not exactly the usual dinos-and-Darwin fare. More importantly, it's not *natural*. *E. coli x1776* was invented in a laboratory in 1976 as a safe research organism that couldn't survive outside the lab. Genentech cofounder Herbert Boyer (PhD '63) used *E. coli x1776* in the work that led to mass-produced insulin; his invention of recombinant DNA could be seen as a Promethean moment. But while a lab origin may take it out of the running for natural history museums, it makes *E. coli x1776* perfect for the Center for PostNatural History.

Founded by Richard Pell, associate professor in Carnegie Mellon

University's School of Art, with colleagues including lead scientific advisor Lauren Allen, a graduate student in Pitt's Science and Education Policy Program, the center is an archive and public-outreach project that features living organisms that have been altered by humans. From sterilized screwworms to transgenic chestnut trees (engineered to resist chestnut blight), the center keeps documentation and specimens of transgenic living things. It also creates exhibits for its new storefront gallery in Pittsburgh's Garfield neighborhood and for venues as diverse as European avant-garde art spaces and the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History, where Pell was a research fellow in 2010.

—Justin Hopper

—Illustration courtesy Center for PostNatural History