

The Shape of Play Today & The Future of our Children

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Recently there has been renewed concern and controversy about how our children should spend their free time. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends (Clinical Play, October, 2006) unscheduled family time and free, child-centered play to build creativity and emotional resiliency in children.

Several factors are driving this concern. More families are aware that the first years of life are essential to future learning and want to make the most of their child's time. Families feel pressure to prepare their children for the competitive preschool, private school and college admissions process.

What has also changed is the resources available to children and families. In 1975 there were 38 children's museums in the US. Today there are 300. Our Children's Museum, open to the public in 1963, has been providing an educationally enjoyable environment for kids from 1 to 101 ever since.

Children's museums have successfully reinterpreted play for today's families. We keep the best of traditional approaches to play, hands-on exploration for the whole family. The sixty pavilions and hundreds of exhibits on our four floors exist to provide families with engaging visits and programs in a healthy, nurturing environment.

For many families, visiting a children's museum is a chance to get away from household distractions, meet friends and spend quality family time. When caregivers and children enter a children's museum they leave the adult-centric world behind and step into a place designed with the child in mind.

Recently, we attended the first NYS children's museums conference where we shared we were the only museum adopted by NASA and the Office of Science. Keynoter James Chung said, "I hope your community understands how fortunate they are to have that kind of resource available to them, that can change the lives of children in very positive ways."

Our future plans include the continued renovation of the building, keeping its historic charm while making it a green building. We'll be completing the 4th floor Sherwood Boehlert Surround Sound Theatre & Mission Control Center, and redoing the building's lighting. Other future plans include an expanded history section, astronomy center, planetarium, and observatory.

Remember the first time you walked through The Children's Museums doors and gazed in wonder at all the sights before you? It started with the dream of the Junior League, who inspired a community to create a center for exploring, discovering, and learning. Over the years, many people have had a hand in CM's success and the museum has grown from a one-room display to a state-of-the-art facility that serves thousands each year.

The cost of providing our vital exhibits and programs cannot be completely funded through admissions and fees. Keeping the dream alive for future generations requires community involvement. Your financial support ensures future generations will have a place to go where they can expand their world, challenge their thinking, reach for the stars.

Bring your family or group to visit the museum. Join us Saturday December 2nd, 2006 for our Gala Benefit. We're hoping to raise \$100,000. Our Board of Directors, are asking for your support. Join them and our Honorary Chair, Congressman Sherry Boehlert, in "*helping to write the next chapter of the Children's Museums ongoing success story*". Share the wonder of CM and help us provide inspiration for the next teacher, doctor, astronaut, explorer, and scientist. Though times are different; the opportunity for peer, family and community interaction, creative expression and discovery is still available. And luckily for our community, it's just around the corner.