

Kids' smiles light up Children's Museum - New exhibit features LED Pla



Submitted photo Children try out the new LED PlayDance Floor at the Children's Museum in Utica during its grand opening May 8.

By LISA KAPPS **Pennysaver** Posted May 20, 2009 @ 10:12 AM

UTICA — The Children's Museum recently installed a new light fixture – on the floor. On May 8, the museum held a grand opening for its lighted PlayDance Floor, which is part of an interactive exhibit that allows children to play games, make music and create light shows. The LED-lit, pressure-sensitive light floor detects players' location and movement during games and activities. Children can stomp on brightly colored "ants" and jump over the "dodge ball" or create music by dancing on LED piano keys.

Museum Executive Director Marlene Brown said during the grand opening, children were using the PlayDance Floor with "great big smiles, just looking at it in amazement." A feedback survey conducted by the Children's Museum found that addition of more interactive exhibits for older children, like the light floor, was a top priority among museum-goers. Brown said it is the goal of the museum "to stay with our vision and mission, but to update with the needs and requests of our visitors." The exhibit has added a new dimension to the museum, Brown said. "Now, there is a place where children are encouraged to run and jump. To me, a museum should be a place where you explore." A museum should also be a place for learning, she said, and with this exhibit children can develop coordination, learn importance of exercise and staying fit, and increase their social skills.

The floor was funded by a grant from The Community Foundation of Herkimer and Oneida Counties. "Our grants committee received a request from the Children's Museum for three new exhibits, one of which being the play floor," said Jan Squadrito, senior program officer at The Community Foundation. "I think we all know there is an issue with childhood obesity in this country. I think we all thought this would get kids moving because they would want to move." The grant also funded two touch-screen quiz games, which will be installed this summer. One is a geography-related quiz game called "Where on Earth?" and the other is a quiz game called "A Place in History" that challenges children to identify the inventors and date of invention of everyday items. Brown said she was surprised at how many of the inventors she herself could not identify. Squadrito said that the three exhibits "(encompass) a variety of topics that we thought would appeal (to the) older children that the museum was hoping to attract" while still educating children about different topics – exercise, history and geography – in a fun way.

Brown said the Children's Museum's goal is to provide "an educationally enjoyable environment for kids from 1 to 101." Brown is already looking ahead toward generating funding for the museum's next big projects. The museum has applied for federal stimulus money to complete a project that would place solar panels and wind turbines on one-third of the museum's roof. A green garden would cover another third and the final third would be left open as an observatory with tables, benches and telescopes. There are also plans to add bathrooms to the third floor, replace carpeting on the second floor and to create an observatory in the fifth floor. "That's a huge project," Brown said.