

This new column will explore Coulee Region organizations and their contributions to our community.

A Decade of Learning & Fun, Rolled into One!

A 10th anniversary marks the first major milestone for any organization. Here, we pay tribute to a Coulee Region organization that has touched most families in our area since it opened its doors 10 years ago.

by Kim Seidel

photos contributed by Jody Lyon

Play dates. Birthday parties. Field trips. Summer day camps. Easter Egg-Stravaganza, New Year's Countdown to Noon, and Boo-Seum Halloween parties. Chances are your family has enjoyed more than one of these opportunities at the Gertrude Salzer Gordon Children's Museum of La Crosse. As often as family and friends find reason to gather, the museum at 207 Fifth Ave. S. has provided a haven to learn and play—and so much more—since it opened 10 years ago. And on Feb. 28, the exact day it was born in 1999, the museum will celebrate its birthday with the community, with additional special events throughout the year.

With strong, consistent support, the Children's Museum has grown throughout the past decade, and the future looks bright, says Anne Steuer, executive director (See page 8, A Parent You Know). Currently, the organization maintains its success, boosted by about 1,083 memberships—its highest number to date. Memberships include family, pair (2Do), and grandparents.

This year the 500,000th visitor will walk through the doors—a huge milestone



for the Children's Museum, Steuer says. About 45,000 people visit the museum annually to explore three floors filled with interactive exhibits for children ages 1 to 12 of all abilities and their adult companions.

“Spending quality time with your kids is a good time,” says Steuer, who notes that member families visit more regularly than before. “People are finding that family time is even more of a priority—not that it wasn't before, but people are staying closer to home now.”

Going to the Children's Museum offers a good entertainment value, with family memberships at \$50 per year for unlimited visits. “Most families of four cannot afford to go to the movies every weekend, but they can afford to go to the Children's Museum every weekend,” Steuer says.

The museum's original exhibits remain popular, from the trademark fire truck that greets you at the front desk, to the whisper dishes and Shadow Room upstairs, to the river and the climbing wall downstairs. “Children like coming to the museum and playing with the same things,” Steuer says. “They learn through repetition.”

As children grow older, they use their imaginations and focus on exhibits in different ways, Steuer says. The Kwik Trip exhibit, which opened in 2005, is an excellent example. The younger children



Check out funmuseum.org for a schedule of regular programming, special events, and other useful information, including memberships and hours. Or call 784-2652.



enjoy putting groceries in baskets, and older ones like checking items out at the cash register.

“All kids love imitating their parents, which is another reason the Kwik Trip exhibit is popular,” Steuer says. “They love putting gas in the cars and filling their mug with coffee.”

The Lyon family of La Crosse has held a family membership to the museum since it opened. With seven nieces, a daughter, and a son, Jody Lyon says the Children’s Museum meets the needs of various ages. “At each visit, they all can find something to do,” Lyon says. “They can enjoy activities together, such as the Shadow Room and the Mississippi River.”

Like the Lyons, Scott Graham of La Crosse has held a family membership

for the past decade. When his daughters Devon and Mackenzie were younger, the museum offered a great opportunity for them to get out of the house and play for several hours. A third-grade teacher at Summit Elementary in La Crosse, Graham says the museum is an excellent place for school field trips. He’s looking forward to taking his students to the current Grossology exhibit.

The Grossology traveling exhibit is a wonderful way to thank the community for their support, Steuer says. One of the nation’s most popular traveling exhibits, Grossology explores the slimy, mushy, oozy, scaly, stinky, and gross (yet scientific) things that occur every day in our bodies. Adapted from a best-selling book with the same title, it is presented at the



museum through May 20 and features animatronic characters, interactive challenges, educational signage, multi-media technology, and more. **CPC**

Kim Seidel and her family have been enjoying their membership to the Children’s Museum for the past eight years, since their first daughter turned 2.

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