



NEWS RELEASE: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Explore Children's Museum Opens Hands-On Exhibits Encourage Learning Through Play

Sun Prairie ... Dane County's newest children's museum, Explore Children's Museum, will celebrate its grand opening on Tuesday, February 8th with a ribbon cutting ceremony at 12:30pm. Explore Children's Museum, located at 1433 W Main St, opened with a mission to provide meaningful opportunities, inspire participation in purposeful play and promote lifelong learning.

Explore Children's Museum is a 4,800 square foot facility that is home to a wide range of both permanent and rotating exhibits that were specifically selected and curated to encourage imaginative play, collaboration, creative thinking, and hands-on learning. The exhibits spark curiosity around art, building and construction, literature, science exploration, large motor development and more.

Explore Children's Museum was carefully and thoughtfully designed and constructed to enhance early childhood development through what research tells us is the most effective way children learn: through play. As O. Fred Donaldson, play specialist, author, and internationally recognized researcher, said "Children learn as they play. Most importantly, in play, children learn how to learn."

When children have agency in their play, when they are creative, enthusiastically engaged, exploratory and given the opportunity to take risks and experiment, they are actively building their brains to prepare them for school and the world beyond. Play also supports the critical formation of child-caregiver relationships through positive attention, mutual joy and shared attunement that children need to thrive.

Explore Children's Museum provides a place for children to play. It is a place for children and caregivers to nurture their relationships. It is a part of a collaborative community effort to prepare children for school and life. Explore Children's Museum offers guided play, where the child directs the play in a setting that is carefully constructed with educational goals in mind.



“Every children’s museum is unique and Explore Children’s Museum is no exception. Many of Explore’s exhibits cannot be found at any other museum in Wisconsin. We are committed to creating a manageable and enjoyable experience for parents and caregivers, while at the same time keeping children engaged with high interest play areas and by regularly rotating some exhibit components such as those found in the “Building Site” and “Imagination Station.” Shared Katey Kamoku, Executive Director.

Explore Children’s Museum has free parking, an admittance fee of \$8/person for everyone over the age of 12 months, and annual family memberships are only \$120. The Museum is committed to creating an intentionally inclusive experience for ALL guests. Explore has a quiet room, called the Zen Den, for nursing mothers and those that need a sensory, tantrum, or “owie” break during their museum visit. Explore also has Accommodation Kits available to visitors. The kits include visual timers, fidgets and headphones. The museum is open seven days a week and has a space dedicated to hosting birthday parties and private events. Hours of Play vary, for instance, the museum closes at noon on Tuesdays for deep cleaning and exhibit rotation. Museum staff also clean the museum on a daily basis, including using a non-toxic, ultra pure chlorine dioxide disinfectant that is misted on all surfaces, exhibits and exhibit components.

The idea of opening a children’s museum in Sun Prairie was born in the spring of 2019 during a conversation amongst friends who are Sun Prairie residents, moms and educators. These conversations were followed by gaining inspiration by visiting, researching and connecting with children’s museums around the midwest. In 2020, a Board of Directors was established and Explore Children’s Museum officially became a 501(c)3 nonprofit. While the original plans had to be revamped due to the global pandemic, 2020 was about bringing the community together to support the mission through awareness campaigns, socially distanced fundraising events, and collecting feedback from the community on the idea of a local children’s museum. In 2021, the Explore Children’s Museum Board of Directors selected a physical building location, worked with exhibit designers to solidify exhibit plans, selected a construction company, and networked with donors and local businesses to raise the funding needed to ensure Explore Children’s Museum moved from dream to reality.

In 2021, the Board of Directors selected Katey Kamoku as the Executive Director. Kamoku has a Masters in Special Education, with a teaching certification in special and general education. She has worked with children of all ages and abilities for almost 20 years and believes “Children’s museums are built to spark children’s imaginations, allow them to follow their passions and discover new passions, a place where children can



show us how they play, and in doing so, how their brains are developing.” Kamoku and her husband, a native of Hawaii and middle school associate principal, are raising four young children in Sun Prairie.

Kristin Wilkinson, Explore’s Director of Community Outreach and Education, taught Kindergarten for 18 years in Sun Prairie while her and her husband Jack, a Sun Prairie native and police officer, raised their two daughters. Wilkinson says “Our children truly are the future...we MUST give them the best opportunities to learn, grow, and EXPLORE right here in our community.” Taylor Delmore, Explore’s Director of Guest Services and Volunteer Coordinator, is a Minnesota native with a degree in elementary education who taught in the Sun Prairie School District before joining Explore’s team. Delmore lives in Sun Prairie with her husband MJ. They look forward to raising a family in the area. Delmore says “Children’s museums provide opportunities for children to develop their minds in creative and innovative ways. Through purposeful play, children are able to explore and discover the world around them.”

The dream of Explore Children’s Museum of Sun Prairie would not have been possible without the confidence, faith, and support, both financially and with in-kind donations, of their initial sponsors. The “Partner of Play” donors Tom & Rita Tubbs, Bank of Sun Prairie, Andrea Cecelia, and Summit Credit Union. The “Leader of Play” donors Cardinal Heating & Air Conditioning, Hallman-Lindsay Paints, JJ’s Boxing & Wrestling Gym, Vivian Hitch in memory of Larry Hitch, Feiner Electric Company, Lindsay Letters Co., Everlight Solar, and Chase Lumber. The “Supporter of Play” donors West Prairie Dental, The Shutwell Family, Trachte Building Systems, Pat Feldman & Friends, the Leola Culver Family Foundation, CI Pediatric Therapy Centers, and The Crawford-Fogg Family. The “Friend of Play” donors Big Dreamers United, Wind River Financial, The Haumersen Family, TDS, Allure Skin Health, Kraemer Development, Harms Insurance Group, John & Christina Drake, Signature Hardwood Floors, Woodman’s Markets, The Kleist Family, Culver’s, Bob & Mary Andrew, Park Bank, Leader of the Pack Doggie Daycare, and Jeff and Maralee Tubbs. CG Schmidt Construction company turned a former hair salon and fitness studio into a bright, sunny, safe and beautifully constructed space that is home to Explore Children’s Museum.

For more information, please visit Explore Children’s Museum’s website at www.exploreecm.org, email contact@exploreecm.org or call 608-478-5456. Up-to-date museum happenings are posted on <https://www.facebook.com/exploreecm.org/> and on Instagram @grow_with_ecm