

Ideas taking shape as kids' museum nears April groundbreaking

By **Monica Alonzo-Dunsmoor**
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The Children's Museum of Phoenix won't be a collection of exhibits.

Rather, its creators envision a place that will foster children's early-education development, where toddlers and little kids can engage their minds and bodies in imaginative play.

Museum officials also see it as a center that doubles as a living lab for Arizona State University students.

The partnership with ASU is the latest development, and boost, for the museum that will soon be under construction at Seventh and Van Buren streets in Phoenix. Officials plan to break ground on the \$22 million project in April and open its doors by 2007.

Kate Wells, director of communication and development for the museum, said she was enthusiastic about the plans finally unfolding.

"Play is really key to the inner workings of a child," Wells said.

"This is the last piece of the cultural puzzle in Phoenix. We don't address the children in a comprehensive way."

Phoenix is one of the few major cities without a children's museum. There are about 400 across the country.

Like many other non-profits, the museum has struggled to raise money.

Phoenix voters bought into the idea and in 2001 approved giving the fledgling museum \$10.5 million as

part of the city's bond program. Founders have to raise an additional \$12.3 million to renovate and convert historic Monroe School into a playground for children and their imaginations.

Phoenix Suns managing general partner Jerry Colangelo and owner Robert Sarver are heading up that capital campaign, which has already raised more than \$4 million.

When all the construction dust

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settles, its youngest patrons will delve into role play, create art and explore hands-on exhibits that will stimulate their senses, all inside a 1913 school that served children from the surrounding neighborhoods until the early 1970s.

Beyond creative-play areas, museum and university officials plan to have a bilingual preschool on site, classrooms for college students taking early-education classes and a health clinic with ties to the university's nursing program.

Elaine Surbeck, associate dean of ASU's College of Education, said working with the museum is a "perfect match."

She said the college officials want students to have experi-

Children's Museum of Phoenix

The Children's Museum of Phoenix is expected to open in 2007. The three-story building will have about 45,000 square feet of exhibit space and may draw 300,000 visitors each year. Some features:

- An area where children can make and shape clay.
- An outdoor "alley" where they can get knee-deep in the messy, gooey and gory art projects.
- A room where they can work with artists on their own creations or on a community art project.

ences teaching children in an urban setting.

"This was too good an opportunity for us to pass up," she said. "We're happy to have classroom space in downtown (Phoenix) because it's at a high priority right now."

That wasn't the case about eight years when the idea for a children's museum in downtown Phoenix was conceived.

Wells said the amount of time that has passed is pretty typical

to open a center as large as Phoenix's children's museum. When it's complete, it will have 45,000 square feet of exhibit space.

"The average is about 10 years," she said. "We had to hire architects, contractors, go through the city's permitting process and find leadership for the fund-raising."

The city doesn't kick in its share of the money until construction begins.