

The Junior League of Phoenix and the Children's Museum of Phoenix

Engaging the minds, muscles and imaginations of children through art

By Shannon Brennan

The Junior League of Phoenix is taking a visionary role in the development of what will be a Valley institution, the Children's Museum of Phoenix (CMoP). It supports the plan of opening a children's museum in downtown Phoenix that will engage the minds, muscles and imaginations of children and the grown-ups who care about them.

The Junior League of Phoenix is providing funding and volunteers to facilitate the start of the museum. When the renovation of the Monroe School, a historic downtown structure, is complete it will house not only the museum exhibits, but also The Junior League of Phoenix Classroom, which will be available for use by those visiting the museum.



Founded in 1998 by a small group of volunteers, the notion of a children's museum caught on quickly. In 2001, Phoenix voters overwhelmingly approved \$10.5 million in bond funds to purchase and partially renovate the historic Monroe School as CMoP's new home. Inside, the 70,000 square foot building is a combination of dramatic spaces and smaller, more intimate rooms; a perfect place for young children (ages 0-8) to safely explore with their families.

Plans include active small-scale workspaces for role play, large-scale building and inventing with recycled materials, collaborative art projects, travel-inspired exhibits for exploring the world's diversity, urban landscapes for investigation and adventure and areas just for ages 0-3 to bond with their caregivers.

The projected annual attendance of 300,000 will include approximately 20% school



visits, 20% reduced- or free-admission guests, and 18% children with special needs. The Museum expects to open its doors to the public in 2008.

The Junior League of Phoenix Classroom will provide a permanently dedicated classroom in the Museum that can be used for Junior League programs supporting children and/or families as well as other Museum programs. The approximate size of The Junior League of Phoenix Classroom will be 1,100 square feet.

Currently, the Children's Museum of Phoenix is supporting its mission through the Museum Without Walls Program.



GROUND BREAKING

More than 200 community members, including JLP volunteers and their families, joined together in April 2006 to break ground on the renovation of the historic Monroe School, the future home of the Children's Museum of Phoenix. With sounds of a marching band in the background and bubbles filling the air, Mayor Phil Gordon, Jerry Colangelo and Suns owner Robert Sarver spoke about the importance of saving this historic landmark, the cultural value of the museum on the downtown community and its impact on early childhood education.

At the celebration, JLP volunteers worked hand-in-hand with children and their families on some of the Children's Museum's traveling exhibits including the Texture Café, Giant Bubble and In the Pipeline. In addition to the exhibits, the North High Marching Band entertained the crowd and a two-ton pile of magical sand amused young and old alike.



MUSEUM WITHOUT WALLS PROGRAM



MWW currently consists of eight hands-on learning experiences which visit schools and community events around the Valley. The program targets disadvantaged audiences in the community; activities and exhibits are provided with discounted or reduced fees for low-income schools and at most community events.

The Junior League of Phoenix has been instrumental in insuring sufficient volunteers to staff this program. Volunteer-staffed activities include building 3-D mathematical structures at In the Pipeline, weaving colorful fabrics into a Bird of the World sculpture, building with blocks and images in Room to Build and developing balance and gross motor skills and exploring the properties of airflow with Get the Ball Rolling.

With volunteer help, CMoP provided MWW experiences to 32,500 participants last year. On-site surveys indicated that 95% of teachers are very pleased with the content, materials and presentation of MWW programming and will support and visit a children's museum with their students.

MWW enhances the cultural and educational value of community events, adds to opportunities for low-income schools to host on-site field trips and fosters life-long learners who are eager to benefit from and support cultural programs and community programs. The program also builds community awareness that parent-child interaction and learning through play are critical components for strong emotional, social, physical and cognitive development in young children.

It addresses four community-identified needs:

1. A lack of early childhood education and hands-on learning experiences that meet the developmental needs of young children.
2. A need for support and education for parents and caregivers.
3. A need for a celebratory approach to the diversity of our community.
4. A need for collaboration among cultural social service organizations that share a commitment to the well-being of children.

