

VALLEY

& State

Valley & State editor, 602.444.NEWS
or metronews@arizonarepublic.com

MONDAY, JULY 24, 2006

Foundation makes \$1 million
donation to Children's MuseumBy Linda Helsler
THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC

PHOENIX — A million-dollar donation to the Children's Museum of Phoenix will help make it one of the hottest spots in town.

"It's wonderful and a terrific gift that comes at a really important time," said Debbie Gilpin, president and chief executive officer of the long-planned museum for youth that will be housed in the historic Monroe School at Seventh and Van Buren streets.

"Summer is a time when capital campaigns can lag, so this is a great boost and puts us halfway to our goal of \$12.3 million," she added.

The windfall, a gift from the Daron and Ron Barness Family Foundation, was more than warranted, according to the foundation's patriarch.

"Children, being the most important aspect of our community and often the least represented, deserve a world-class institution such as this to help them develop and grow into great contributors to our society," said Ron Barness, 45, who formed the charitable foundation along with his wife, Daron, and their children Jordana, 16, and Zachary, 15.

Chairman of Barness Papas Investments, a commercial real estate firm, and an owner and member of the executive board of the Arizona Diamondbacks Baseball Club, Barness said all other major cities in the United States have children's museums.

"And it's an absolute need that Phoenix must have one, so we're committed to making sure that it does happen here," he added.

Since 1998, a museum for children in Phoenix has been



NICK OZA/THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC

Jordan Wiener (left), 4, plays with her twin sister, Claire, outside the Children's Museum of Phoenix. The Daron and Ron Barness Family Foundation recently donated \$1 million to the museum.

**Children's Museum
of Phoenix**

Where: 215 N. Seventh St., Phoenix.

What: Hands-on, interactive arts-based experience geared for children up to age 8.

When: Scheduled to open late 2007.

Information: www.childrensmuseumofphoenix.org or (602) 253-0501.

in the works, starting with the name Phoenix Family Museum. At the beginning of this year, it was renamed Children's Museum of Phoenix.

Funding for the hands-on, arts-based interactive museum where children can play to learn and their parents can learn to play has been a long process.

In 2001, Phoenix voters approved Proposition 6, which gave \$10.5 million to the project to purchase and renovate

the 70,000-square-foot, three-story school.

Last year, Robert Sarver, owner of the Phoenix Suns, and Jerry Colangelo, chairman and CEO of the team, pledged \$1.2 million to the project.

Although donations in the millions are impressive and greatly appreciated, Gilpin, 45, said she's also hoping for some financial help from kids and parents.

"Next spring, we'll have a big kickoff rally where we'll ask the community for gifts of all sizes," she said.

Until then, renovation continues on the Monroe School, a facility that first opened to children in 1913.

By the early 1970s, the school was closed because of declining enrollment and destined for demolition before city leaders saved it.

"It almost looks more like a museum than a school, but it doesn't have the foreboding look that some museums do, but it does have a sense of importance," said Gilpin, referring to the massive columns of the building's façade.

The new museum is scheduled to open in late 2007.