

Minnesota Children's Museum of Rochester

CREATING A SATELLITE FOR SMART PLAY



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Children's
Museum
Rochester
Smart Play

MINNESOTA CHILDREN'S MUSEUM'S PLAYFUL ROLE

Minnesota Children's Museum is a national leader in promoting children's learning through play. Numerous studies have shown that play cultivates skills required for a creative and successful workforce, including creativity, critical thinking and problem solving. Funding from the State of Minnesota's Arts and Cultural Heritage fund allowed Minnesota Children's Museum to open our first satellite organization, Minnesota Children's Museum of Rochester (MCMR). This exciting business model is not commonly adopted in this industry, making Minnesota Children's Museum one of the very few nationally to successfully launch and operate a satellite location.



MINNESOTA CHILDREN'S MUSEUM OF ROCHESTER GOALS:

Funding from the State of Minnesota was appropriated to specifically fund the opening of a satellite location of Minnesota Children's Museum in the city of Rochester with the goal of reaching 25,000 children, families and educators per year. Through the opening of this satellite, Minnesota Children's Museum has been able to greatly expand our reach and ability to increase access to children throughout Minnesota. The outcomes for the launch of a new Minnesota Children's Museum of Rochester were identified as follows:

1. Funding for two-year start-up of a children's museum in Rochester to expand Minnesotan's access to early learning experiences and arts activities in a community with previously limited opportunities.
2. Increase the number of children and families actively engaging in arts and cultural learning in Rochester and the southeast region of the state.
3. Sustain the new Museum with appropriated funds to support the opening and the first two years of program development.
4. Serve Rochester and the surrounding community and grow over time, thus these Legacy funds will help ensure funding continuity as local partners engage with matching and supplemental funding.
5. The new Museum will increase the attractiveness of Rochester as a favorable place to live, learn, run a business and raise a family.

LAUNCHING A NEW SPACE TO PLAY

Minnesota Children's Museum of Rochester grew out of a vision shared by a group of dedicated Rochester parents, business representatives and community leaders who recognized the importance of early learning experiences for young children. In 2006, they formed a non-profit advisory board, the Children's Museum of Rochester (CMR), to raise awareness about the value of early childhood education. At the same time, Minnesota Children's Museum in St. Paul was looking to expand its mission to greater Minnesota. Through



their research and communication with CMR, a partnership was formed, and Minnesota Children's Museum Rochester was created. On April 5, 2012, Minnesota Children's Museum of Rochester opened its doors to bring the shared Minnesota Children's Museum mission of "*sparkling children's learning through play*" to Southern Minnesota.

Over the past two years, Minnesota Children's Museum successfully opened the doors on a new space for sparking children's learning through play in the fast-growing city of Rochester. Quickly proving the demand for a children's museum in the southeastern part of the state, MCMR regularly surpassed goals for attendance, membership and playful experiences. Since opening, over 38,000 residents of Rochester and adjoining southeastern Minnesota communities have burst through the doors of MCMR to run, jump and explore the 5,000-square-foot space. Following are the milestones toward achieving the previously highlighted outcomes.



for admission scaled to meet the local community's economy, and eventually helped hire a team to serve as the inaugural staff for our Rochester museum.

Response to the opening has been overwhelming, with children and families regularly flooding MCMR with repeat visits to explore each new exhibit and activity. Programs, partnership and donors have been rapidly growing. But most importantly, visitors are coming to the Museum regularly, enjoying the galleries and programs that provide creative and hands-on learning, fulfilling our mission of *sparkling children's learning through play*.

Minnesota Children's Museum of Rochester is a satellite of the Minnesota Children's Museum of St. Paul, receiving administrative support and the rich history of the Museum. With that, MCMR champions and observes the same five core beliefs:

1. Early learning is the foundation for lifelong learning
2. Families are our children's first teachers
3. All children deserve a time and place to be children
4. Diverse perspectives enrich children's lives
5. Play is learning

ENGAGING IN EARLY LEARNING

By launching Minnesota Children's Museum of Rochester, the Museum focused on increasing engagement of children and their caring adults around playful learning experiences for those living in southeast region of the state. Within the first three months of opening, MCMR overachieved on service goals, welcoming 9,289 visitors and enrolling 456 members.



LAUNCHING A SATELLITE FOR SMART PLAY

The first objective for this initiative was to secure State funding to support the start-up for the first two-years of a children's museum in Rochester, expanding Minnesotans' access to early learning experiences and arts activities in a community with previously limited opportunities. As reported out previously, the Museum successfully located a venue to build a satellite location, hired and managed a project team, determined operating duties to be shared with the St. Paul staff, researched and decided an appropriate fee

In the first full fiscal year, MCMR welcomed over 38,000 individuals with over 800 active memberships, offering an ever-changing environment to support early learning experiences. Following is a closer look at the growth in attendance for FY13:

- **38,651** – Number of Visitors to date who have run, wiggled and jumped through the doors to explore MCMR in its first fiscal year, July 1, 2012-June 30, 2013
- **2,075** – Average number of visitors who explore the Museum every month, exceeding initial projections
- **843** – Number of families with an active MCMR membership
- **93%** – Percentage of members who plan on renewing their membership



Looking forward, Minnesota Children's Museum Rochester will launch the *Play for All* access program, intent on engaging even more families in early learning experiences and arts activities. This multi-faceted initiative will broaden the Museum's reach to low-income families and children across the region. Major components of this new program include:

- **Free memberships** for low-income Head Start and School Readiness families
- **Discounted school and community group field trips**, with structured curriculum and activities
- **Family Nights** for community organizations serving low-income families, offering an opportunity for families to experience the Museum and sign up for a free membership

While the *Play for All* access program is made possible through a separate grant from the State of Minnesota, it is important to highlight that MCMR continues to increase engagement and participation for all families and children in the Rochester area. In the first three months of the current fiscal year, 6,227 visitors have already come to MCMR. Additionally, MCMR has already conducted three free Family Nights to families served through the partnerships with Head Start, School Readiness, Family Literacy and WIC families.

SUSTAINING SUPPORT

Starting a new business comes with a variety of inherent risks from steep start-up costs to the chance of failing before getting your footing in the community. Funds from the State of Minnesota ensured this venture had the proper time to mature through sustainable funding for the first two years. Because of this, MCMR had the opportunity to open with three exciting exhibits, *Ball-o-Rama*, *Go Figure!* and *Art Park*. Since then, the site has hosted *Japanese Artful Traditions*, *Imagination Playground*, *Raceways*, *Framed: Step into Art™*, *Ag Cab Lab: Combine*, *Tot Spot Nature Adventure*, *Curious George™: Let's Get Curious*, *The Amazing Castle* and the Legacy-funded *Storyland: A Trip Through Childhood Favorites™*.

Following are some additional programs created for the Rochester community:

- Launched daily programs in the education classroom similar to those at the St. Paul location in the Curiosity



Center, including Sensory Stations, Large Scale Loose Parts, Inventors Workshop and painting. All activities are child-directed and help to extend playful learning while visiting the Rochester location

- Testing school group visits during the summer months and officially launching field trips during the school year
- Continue to program Special Events like costume character visits, breakfasts, birthday parties and rentals
- Grand Opening events for each new exhibit
- Off-site events, partnering with local non-profits. Working with such groups as: United Way, Quarry Hill Nature Center, Preschool Screening, and PossAbilities



In its second year, the Minnesota Children's Museum of Rochester serves an average of 2,075 people every month. Not only are visitors engaging in playful learning with the visiting exhibits, families are invited to climb in the Tot Spot, snuggle in the Book Nook or paint in the classroom, reinforcing the importance the role play has in early learning.

BUILDING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

In order for the Minnesota Children's Museum of Rochester to continue to thrive and become entirely self-sustaining, building important community partnerships was critical. Together with the site Director, Dawn Devine, the MCMR advisory board and Minnesota Children's Museum's St. Paul staff, the Museum entered into meaningful relationships with 125 individual and institutional funders, providing financial support for the ongoing operation of this satellite.

Following is a list of those passionate community members, foundations and companies who are committed to Minnesota Children's Museum of Rochester's success:

Alpha Delta Kappa - Chi Chapter
 Banfield, the Pet Hospital
 Barnes & Noble Booksellers
 Gus and Ann Chafoulas Foundation
 Children's Museum of Rochester
 Dunlap & Seeger, P.A
 Eastwood Bank
 Fidelity Charitable Gift Fund
 K12, Inc.
 KSMQ
 Mayo Clinic
 People's Energy Cooperative
 Rochester Arts Council
 The Rochester Rotary Club
 Sam's Club
 Carl and Verna Schmidt Foundation
 Seneca Foods Foundation
 Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation
 Sunrisers Kiwanis Club
 Target Corporation
 Think Mutual Bank
 U.S. Bancorp Foundation
 Wal-Mart Stores (Three Local Locations)
 100 individual donors
 Plus many in-kind donations of items needed to start up the Museum

ADDING TO ROCHESTER VITALITY

Since launching, Minnesota Children's Museum of Rochester has quickly escalated in the community as a key partner in early learning experiences and looked to as an important family destination in Rochester. Following are key community initiatives MCMR has launched within the city:

Relationships with Other Organizations

Minnesota Children's Museum of Rochester collaborates with many local organizations to achieve our mission.

Current partners include:

- **Community partnerships** with organizations such as Boys and Girls Club, Head Start, PossAbilities disability program, School Readiness, Ronald McDonald House and United Way. The Museum hosts free family nights for participants, as well as promoting the free *Play for All* memberships through these organizations.
- **University of Minnesota** is a major research partner with Minnesota Children's Museum, including the recent publication of a research summary on the benefits of play in early childhood development.



Community Partnerships

Partnerships have been vital toward helping Minnesota Children's Museum broaden its reach, especially in building operational health for the Rochester satellite. As an example led by Dawn Devine, the Rochester Museum has entered into the following partnerships that aim to build ongoing community support:



- **United Way** – This partnership has helped the Rochester Museum develop the Born Learning trail on the river walking path adjacent to the building. Along the path, visitors will see up to 10 signs with parent messaging to encourage engaging activities for parents to participate in with their children. Some signs include activities such as “turn in a circle, eyes wide open, or name three things you see that are green.”
- **Project Go (Get Outdoors)** – Through this partnership, the Rochester Museum provides six backpacks loaded with gear for fun outdoor activities such as binoculars, laminated ID Cards for bird watching, a bug box, bandanas with activities printed on them. Families can check them out from the Museum at no cost to expand their day of play into an outdoor adventure.
- **Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation (SMIF)** – This partnership opens up the Rochester location to Head Start and School Readiness families for free Family Nights. These nights include open play throughout the Museum and activities such as drawing, scavenger hunts, Imagination Library and offers stations for families to enroll in preschool screening for their children.

Community Partnership Results

Following is a quantitative look at how these partnerships have helped us achieve our objective in developing important community relationships:

- **112:** Number of volunteers (plus 4 therapy dogs!) to date who help spark learning through play

- **3381:** Number of volunteer hours spent weekly at the Museum (total value of volunteer service: \$74,000)
- **8:** Number of Free Family Nights for Ronald McDonald House or Head Start Families
- **268:** Number of families that attended the first free Head Start family night
- **12:** Number of story times in partnership with Rochester Public Library
- **20:** Number of families that participated in a Project Get Outdoors
- **140:** Number of Children reached through Wild About Reading Literary Event at Quarry Hill

- “From the first time I heard about the opportunity to have a children’s museum here in Rochester, I wanted to get actively involved. That was more than seven years ago and I am still energized. I remain passionate about the work that the Museum does both locally and through our many outreach partnerships with other individuals and organizations, such as Head Start and School Readiness. I am excited to lend my time and talents wherever I can to make sure that children and families have an inspiring, local destination, to learn through play.”

— Melissa Brinkman, Chair, Minnesota Children’s Museum of Rochester Advisory Board

- “I brought my grandchildren to this museum last April. When they came to visit me today, they asked if I could take them to that museum again. They have remembered all the different activities they participated in 6 months ago.”

— A very pleased Grandma

- “You guys must be doing something right. I told the boys if we left right now we could get some ice cream but they both wanted to stay and play!”

— A happy Mother



Additionally, Minnesota Children’s Museum Rochester continues to elevate its role in the community by hosting or participating in a variety of community events. The site hosted its first annual Super Hero Scramble which engaged families in an exciting and action-packed obstacle course. MCMR also presented a Movies Under the Stars event over the summer, serving as a venue for an outdoor movie experience for families. Minnesota Children’s Museum of Rochester also participated in a city-wide Ice Cream Social and marched in the RochesterFest parade. Finally, this past August, MCMR conducted a three week STAYCATION, showing fun, easy ways to enjoy a “get-away” close to home and highlighting local activities that are free or low cost before heading back to school.

Perhaps it is the response of the core service audience that best supports how MCMR is impacting the Rochester community. Following are a few of the comments from the community of families with young children who have visited the Museum.



THANK YOU!

Minnesota Children’s Museum of Rochester would not have been possible without the State of Minnesota and funding through the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund resulting from the Clean Water, Land and Legacy amendment. Thank you!

**Minnesota
Children's
Museum
Rochester**

Smart Play

1643 North Broadway, Suite A, Rochester, MN 55906
507-218-3100 • Rochester.MCM.org

Mission

Sparking children's learning through play

Foundational Beliefs

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Families are our children's first teachers.

All children deserve a time and place to be children.

Diverse perspectives enrich children's lives.

Playing is learning.