

Museum offers family fun

Written by Stefanie Schappert For the Poughkeepsie Journal
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Feeling tired of winter? The Mid-Hudson Children's Museum in Poughkeepsie, which celebrates its 25th anniversary this year, offers two monthly programs that could help banish the winter blues: My Grandparents & Me Day and Family Free Day. Both programs are light on the wallet, but heavy on the fun.

My Grandparents & Me Day provides free admission to grandparents accompanied by their grandkids all day until 5 p.m. the second Friday of every month. The museum's Family Free Day offers complimentary admission to all visitors from 5-8 p.m. every third Saturday.

"Grandparents day is really popular, if you walk through the museum during My Grandparent & Me Day, you'll see anywhere from 25 to 50 families that have grandparents bringing in their grandkids. That's significant for us," said Sara Capozzoli, public, media and corporate relations director for the Mid-Hudson Children's Museum.

The Hudson Valley's only children's museum, Capozzoli said it's an ideal place for families to bring their children.

"It's a whole different experience when you are out at a children's museum," she said. "The parents and grandparents are able to teach the kids, show them different things with our exhibits. They're able to have that really good one-on-one time."

The museum is on the historic Poughkeepsie waterfront and offers two floors of "purposeful play" for children of all ages.

All of the museum's programming and interactive exhibits are focused around three strategic initiatives — school readiness, health and wellness, and community building. Activities using nature, science, books, art and music are designed to spark creativity and development.

"The things that we have here are tried, true and researched. It's about getting kids to think critically and do it in a hands-on way. They're playing, learning, and engaging with their caregivers. There is really nothing like it around here," Capozzoli said.

Capozzoli, who has been with the museum for more than a decade, said the discounted family days have been ongoing for a number of years, but the past six months has seen a record number of visitors and a huge increase in admissions sales, many of them coming from across the Hudson River.

"Over the last 10 to 12 years, we've seen an increase in the amount of grandparents that are caregivers to their grandkids — really helping out with raising the kids. It's really nice to be able to offer something special for them," she explained.

"I think the bond with a grandparent and a child is a really special one, and there aren't so many opportunities for that one-on-one interaction outside the home. To do something like this in an environment that's safe, climate controlled, comfortable and educational — it's really unique and different."

The museum opened up its most recent permanent exhibit, the Early Learning Junction, on the first floor in December.

The train station-themed exhibit is geared toward children 5 and under. Kids will walk in and see an actual multi-level train station they can climb and crawl into, a life-sized plinko board with its own conveyer belt, several interactive air-play exhibits and an enormous custom-built train table designed to help with skills such as communication and fine motor coordination.

Other exhibits include; Imagination Playground, a collection of life-sized, light-weight building blocks; Fun, 2, 3, 4!, a 16-part, hands-on, math-themed exhibit; RiverTown, a kid-size reproduction of Main Street, USA, for role-playing; Hyde Park Mastodon, a 12-foot-high skeletal replica of the Ice Age dinosaur; and the Hudson River Dive Bell, where kids can interact with the living Hudson River.

In honor of the museum's 25th anniversary, special events will be held throughout the year including a huge family-friendly Celebrate Summer/Birthday Party combination on June 26. The party will be held both inside the museum and outside under the pavilion with the Imagination Playground set up on the the lawn.

Also to celebrate and raise awareness, the museum has created the "Great Friend to Kids Award." A 25th anniversary awards ceremony and gala event will be held to announce the winners in July.

Nominating forms for this year's "Great Friend to Kids Award" can be found on the museum's website, www.mhcm.org and submitted before March 14, Capozzoli said.

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