Play a little, learn a lot
Museum offers kids fun, educational programs

By Kaylyn Boccia
For the Poughkeepsie Journal

The Mid-Hudson Children's Museum has found a way to create a fun learning environment that keeps children wanting to come back.

Using unique exhibits and play stations, children are able to learn basic, necessary skills without even realizing it, focusing on nature, science, literacy, art and a sense of community.

The museum on the waterfront of the Hudson River in the City of Poughkeepsie is a nonprofit and is supported by admission, membership and program fees, as well as donations and grants.

April Lowe, 28, was visiting the museum for the first time.

IF YOU GO
What: Mid-Hudson Children's Museum
When: 9:30 a.m.-5 p.m., Monday-Saturday; 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Sunday
Where: 75 N. Water St., Poughkeepsie
Admission: $7.50 per adult, $7.50 per child, free for members and children under 1 year
Information: www.mhcm.org, 845-471-0589

“The best thing is that the kids can play with everything,” she said, “and there is something for all ages.”

Grants are usually given to the museum to help support certain projects, said Sara Capozzoli, 35, director of marketing and community relations.

The museum's three basic areas of focus are School Readiness, the Health and Wellness Initiative, and Community Building.

School Readiness is one of the most important areas, said Lara Litchfield-Kimber, executive director of the mu-
Museum

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seum.

Within the School Readiness program, there are five major areas of development addressed through exploration of the exhibits — social and emotional readiness, cognitive development, physical readiness, language, and openness to different styles of learning.

The basic concept of this program is to help children successfully transition into full-time school.

"School readiness skill development starts as soon as a baby is born," Litchfield-Kimber, 43, of New Paltz, said.

The museum features an area for the youngest children, called Carolina’s Baby Park, which helps to encourage motor skills and visual tracking, a pre-reading skill.

Tools such as the "ball rolling wall," where children release a ball and watch it travel down the wall, create visual tracking, teaching the eyes a skill similar to reading, said Exhibit Manager Joe Cook, 33, of Saugerties.

Cook both builds and maintains the exhibits. Before working at the museum, he built sets and scenery for plays in New York City for years, and has been a "museum junkie" since he was a kid.

The new exhibition, Imagination Playground, an area of large foam blocks and shapes that can be used to build anything, is one of the favorites among the children, the museum staff and Cook said.

It is intended to spark creativity, imagination and encourage teamwork.

"I work closely with the educators to maximize the educational value of the exhibits," Cook said.

The museum’s new and improved summer camp program is open for the season now. The camp is for children ages 4-6 and has been redesigned to better fit the initiative of the School Readiness program, and development of those essential skills.

ONLINE

» For video from the Mid-Hudson Children’s Museum, visit pougkheepsiejournal.com.

Museum Educator Terese Giammarco, 49, of Garrison, Putnam County, runs the camp.

Her years of teaching experience and background in art and theater help with the needed aspect of creativity when working with children, she said.

"Being a part of such a creative environment, and reaching out to so many children within this environment" is what makes educating at the museum so enjoyable, Giammarco said.

Family members who visit the camp can work with their kids, regardless of age, to help gain a fun learning experience from the museum.

The museum works with parents to help better prepare their children for early success in school and to encourage "parents as first teachers," Litchfield-Kimber said.

"There is no wrong way to use these exhibits."

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York system.

One is Dutchess Community College, where Thursday’s meeting was held.

DCC is weighing options for using Start-Up NY aid to attract some companies and jobs to the Poughkeepsie campus, college President David Conklin said.

He said he will look into it further as the rules and regulations are issued. Vargas said these details are in development.

Colleges need to come up with a plan and identify land or buildings that could be made available to companies. Also eligible is space of up to 200,000 square feet that is within one mile of the more than 20 acres, but it’s earmarked for relocation of athletic fields, he said.

Private colleges can participate, too, using vacant land or space on or off campus.

The businesses that are recruited are supposed to have a connection with the academic mission of the school, Vargas said. For example, one company involved in the film industry is looking at a campus that has related curriculum.

The program does not pertain to retail, restaurants or hotels, Vargas said. And, rules will be tight to prevent "shirt-changing," in which an existing company changes its name to get tax breaks. Competitors against existing New York businesses aren’t eligible.

"It’s net new jobs," choose 20 strategic properties that are not at colleges but that can be linked with one. These would be vacant state-owned properties, or ones to be closed, Vargas said. She didn’t list any, but two in Dutchess County could be Hudson River Psychiatric and the Beacon Correctional Facility, also known as Camp Beacon.

Cathy Maloney, president of Dutchess County Economic Development Corp., gave an update on recent activity. "We’re seeing a few projects getting close to signing leases," she said. "We’re getting a little cluster of microbreweries," at least three. One is Mill Street Brewing in the City of Poughkeepsie. Joseph Le- pore, whose company owns buildings on Cottage Street, said a brewer plans to lease one.

Maloney said the bonds or other breaks.

The LDC is issuing bonds with which Vassar College will borrow for an $86 million science building project. Marist College is refinancing $33 million of old bonds to cut costs. Health Quest is looking to use bonds to raise $56 million for expansion of Northern Dutchess Hospital in Rhinebeck. Millbrook School is expanding with a $23 million project.

Neptune Capital Partners is seeking extension of a property “payment in lieu of taxes” deal for the Neptune Road project off Route 9 in the Town of Poughkeepsie involving rehabilitation of old industrial buildings for light manufacturing or flexible-use space. The deal would not include the Route 9 portion where new retail buildings are going. Maloney said. One