

Great River Children’s Museum and ECFE: Leading for Play, Families and DEI

Tomoko Rebeck and Linda McNelly, MNAFEE April 11, 2024

With support and guidance from Jane Ellison & Glen Palm

2012 – The project began as a retirement dream of Glen Palm’s, who explored the possibility with his wife, Jane Ellison, and a small group of friends – Greg Reigstad, Deb Campbell, John Wertz, and Becky Coborn. 4 of this group of 6 founders had long careers in ECFE. The other 2 were retired educators. The group filed as a 501(C)3 non-profit organization, conducted initial feasibility studies, visited children’s museums around the country, and studied what parent education might look like in a children’s museum setting.

2018 – Site searching led to a donation from Liberty Bank of their 25,0000 SF building, located in downtown St. Cloud. This act of generosity prompted the creation of a 14-member GRCM Board of Directors and working Committees (Facility, Exhibits, Marketing, Fundraising, Community Engagement, and Personnel). Later task and project groups emerged – Grants, Capital Campaign, Language, Cultural Inclusion, Art, Building Project Team.

2019 - GRCM hired Children’s Museum consultants, Jeanne Vergeront and Jim Rowe, who led a 9-month process of creating a Museum Strategic Master Plan. GRCM next hired an Architect firm, Exhibit Designers, and a Construction Contractor-at-Risk. It was the beginning of grants-writing, community engagement programming and fund-raising.

2020-2021 – GRCM hired Executive Director, Cassie Miles - the Capital Campaign launched, programming pivoted from on-site to remote during covid. GRCM hired Kylie Conover, as Community Programs and Outreach Manger.

FROM GRCM Strategic Master Plan (2019)

GRCM’s MISSION:

Great River Children’s Museum shines a bright light on the power of **PLAY** to spark children’s **learning**, strengthen **families**, and build **community** connections.

GRCM’s VALUES:

Joyful learning through **PLAY**
Quality family experience
Access, inclusion, and belonging
Diverse community positive engagement
Nature and sense of place matter

What will GRCM offer?

EXHIBITS 1st floor:

Climber to the Clouds
Community Connections
Great Explorations
Great Big River

EXHIBITS 2nd floor:

Everyday Engineering
Tinker Workshop
The Headwaters

MEETING SPACES 1st floor

Travelling Exhibits
Program room(s)/Teaching Kitchen for field trips, birthday parties, special programs, and classes

MEETING SPACE 2nd floor

Rooftop Deck

MEETING SPACES 3rd floor

Community room – classroom, meetings, events

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND OUTREACH

Diversity of Voices - GRCM conducted building tours and invited a vast array of input into Architect and Exhibit design, development, and plans - from 1500 participants. These listening sessions employed a variety of formats – a survey, planned roundtables, countless building tours, and ongoing frequent discussions with targeted groups, and the public, as part of the overall museum development- and of the exhibit and architecture design process.

Programs and Experiences – GRCM hosted seven Roundtable listening sessions for friends and stakeholders of GRCM, Educators, Non-profits/youth-serving organizations, Mental Health & SPED, Immigrant Parents & Community Members, and Reach-Up Head Start Staff. GRCM also hosted two of six planned targeted Play, Explore and Learn (PEL Labs) for 33 adults and 60 children (30% SPED). A third for Families with Infants & Toddlers was set up and ready to go when COVID shut museums down throughout the state.

During Covid, GRCM pivoted to online experiences planned by volunteer teams representing backgrounds in Science, Literacy & Math, Social & Emotional, Cultural and Music. 22 Family Fun Clubs were produced and had 500+ views. GRCM also distributed 850 activity kits to child-serving organizations and installed a Free Library.

The museum reopened several months later to family and small groups previously exposed to one another with adult masking and sanitizing between sessions. The Storyland and Curious George traveling exhibits hosted over 100 sessions with 1000+ visitors. Two PEL Labs resumed in 2022 for Somali and Immigrant Families. Hundreds of outreach events and activities were offered after covid restrictions were lifted – and continue.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS – the below lists do not include all the many, many GRCM partners.

EDUCATION – SCSU, SCTCC, SJU/CSB, ISD 742, ISD 47, ECFE, SPED, Reach-Up Head Start, THRIVE, and the Home School Network

NON-PROFITS, CLUBS, FOUNDATIONS – Stearns History Museum, Paramount, Great River Regional Library, Milestones, Big Brother/Big Sisters, Boys & Girls Clubs, YES Network, Promise Neighborhood, Anna Marie's, Hands Across the World, Diggin' Diversity Middle School Club, United Way Partners for Student Success, Central MN Community Foundation, Morgan Family Foundation, African Women's Alliance, Optimist and Rotary Clubs

BUSINESS AND GOVERNMENT – Xcel Energy, Capital One, XDIG Media, Downtown Council, City of St. Cloud, MN Humanities Council, State of MN Legacy

EVENTS – Yirhan African Arts, Lemonade Art Fair, Llama-llama, Farmer's Markets, MLK Family Days, Juneteenth, Pride in the Park

Community Partnerships – Programs Manager, Kylie Conover was hired and began an ambitious and exciting array of programming, outreach and partnership that increased participation numbers from 5,000 in 2019-22 to 8,648 in 2023!

WHERE ARE WE RIGHT NOW?

- *The Capital Campaign raised \$10 million through 2023
- *GRCM Secured a \$7 million state bonding grant in 2023
- *Exhibits are in production
- *Contractors and sub-contractors are hired
- *The building remodel is in process
- *Thousands of families have experienced GRCM activities
- *Engaging a diverse community continues
- *Planning museum programs and experiences continues
- *Raising funds for access & programming continues

WHAT'S NEXT FOR GRM?

Visitor experience focus:

- Arrival to departure - Coat room, admissions desk, bathrooms, store, wellness rooms, wayfinding, accessibility, affordability, on-site food, and eating

Charting the Course – Onboarding the museum workforce

- Recruiting, hiring, training, and supporting a diverse staff

Consulting with museum veterans and educators:

- Preparing for Opening Doors
- Preparing to support parent-child relationship in a children's museum environment ...

Cassie Miles

FOCUS ON PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP

DIFFERENT ROLES FOR PARENTS

- Encourage and support exploration -free play
- Observer- to watch child and learn about them in a museum environment
- Playmate - enjoy learning together, have fun being silly together
- Emotion Coach - helping child with social interactions and emotional regulation
- Facilitator/Guided Play- asking questions, sharing stories, reflecting with child, adding information

Glen Palm

SMALL GROUP PROCESS & SHARE

Question 1 – How could your program become involved with GRM?

Question 2 – How might you use the museum to offer a parent education opportunity?

Question 3 – What challenges would need to be addressed?

Question 4 – Any other input you would like to provide?

Q & A

CLOSING

QUALITY FAMILY EXPERIENCES PROVIDE ...

Joyful learning for families

Parents, adults and children having fun together

A welcoming place that reduces stress

Parents and adults as co-learners with children

Families building positive memories together

Shared positive relationships

Glen Palm, 2023

THANK YOU MNAFEE
And THANK YOU, ECFE - FOR 50 YEARS!