

THE FAMILY MUSEUM STRATEGIC PLAN

BACKGROUND. A 1994 merger of two City of Bettendorf services, the Children's Museum and Center for Cultural Arts, created a new city-supported service, the Family Museum of Arts and Science. The City built a new 44,000 square foot facility for the children's museum and cultural arts center in central Bettendorf on a 10-acre learning campus shared with the Library that opened its doors to a broad audience of children, youth and adults in the Quad Cities Area in 1997. Its interactive exhibits, school and family programs, a pre-school, and dance classes reflected the interests and expertise of the two merged organizations. Just as an audience of youth and teens turned out to have limited interest in the Museum's offerings, young children (and their parents) increasingly found the Museum's interactive exhibits and pre-school offerings attractive. An explicit arts and science focus that helped join and focus two newly merged organizations in 1995 was limiting by 2005. Perhaps influencing these changes was the growth of children's museums with their play-based learning experiences for children and families as an increasingly recognized "brand" with a concurrent lack of significant development of a "family museum" brand.

A MAP (Museum Assessment Program) self-study and peer review process in 2007 provided insights for the Museum serving as a catalyst for continued self-study and reflection by board and staff. Aspects of its history, realities of its community position, self-identification as a children's museum, and opportunities for new approaches converged to frame the Museum's planning challenge. The Museum had become a nice place to visit for children and families, in twelve years, but had not become an essential community resource. Its hope of being a community asset was challenged by serving a regional area comprised of two states, three counties, five cities and many smaller communities. Shifts in the Museum's name and target audience had slowed development of an identity as a recognized and valued resource. Finally, in some ways the merger between the two organizations had never been fully realized.

PROCESS. To explore these insights in a comprehensive and deliberate way, Museum leadership engaged Vergeront Museum Planning (Minneapolis, MN) in summer 2008 to conduct a strategic planning process. During the six months of planning, the process actively engaged a staff and board Core Planning Team, the Museum's board and many members of its staff. Planning began with Vergeront developing a Strategic Backdrop based on a review of organizational documents, interviews with external and internal stakeholders, an environmental scan, and an analysis of data on comparable children's museums. This summary of internal and external factors lead to a set of Conclusions and Implications clarifying strategic issues the Museum would likely face over the next five years. Finally, a set of strategic goals identifying significant areas of change was set.

RESULTS. Consideration of these issues during the course of the planning process affirmed the Museum's targeted audience of children eight years and under, their parents, grandparents, and caregivers. It also revealed a distinct civic opportunity the Museum enjoys as a municipal entity. By assuming a stronger external focus supported by deeper community engagement and connections, the Museum can contribute to a more vibrant community in the future: bringing it together around children's well-being and potential. The Strategic Plan set a future course for the Museum to become a robust, sustainable Quad Cities community asset focusing on children's well-being and potential through active play and learning experiences and environments.