



PROGRAM OF PROMISE THE MISSISSIPPI CHILDREN'S MUSEUM



The inviting red doors of the Mississippi Children's Museum (MCM), located in Jackson, officially opened on December 7, 2010. Since then the museum, a non-profit organization, has been welcoming families and school groups from across the state to enjoy the educational opportunities of a facility designed around both the imaginations of children and the rich heritage of Mississippi. The Museum's exhibits and programs for children, families, and educators are a major asset to the children of Mississippi. In honor of their incredible contributions to fueling creativity and learning in our children, the Mississippi Children's Museum is the 2013 Mississippi KIDS COUNT Program of Promise.

The vision and plans for the museum were turned into an impressive reality by over 40 founding donors. Signature donors individually contributing over one million dollars include the CSpire Foundation, the Bower Foundation, Donna and Jim Barksdale, the Junior League of Jackson, the State of Mississippi, and the Luckyday Foundation. These generous donors, benefactors, and visionaries made invaluable contributions to the interactive, imaginative, and accessible exhibits and programs provided by the Mississippi Children's Museum.

William Bynum, MCM's Board of Directors Chair, has high praises for the facilities: "At MCM children from every corner of the



state are exposed to a wonderful world of ideas, experiences, and role models that let them know that they can do and be anything they can imagine." The museum's five major galleries are specially designed to be Mississippi kid-friendly in size, content, and learning approach. An especially commendable aspect of these exhibits is the focus on issues such as health, nutrition, and literacy, which can positively impact Mississippi's children. There are also exhibits designed to teach children about the arts, our Mississippi heritage, and Mississippi industry.

In addition to permanent exhibits, the museum offers engaging weekly programs that are integral to the educational mission of the museum. The Artist in Residence program, a month long position, allows artists and tradesmen of all media types, even blacksmithing, to demonstrate and display their talents. Also, the "Question it? Discover it!" health and science career program is held on Saturdays each month.

The Mississippi Children's Museum also offers programs for the entire family. Last year the Museum sponsored a pilot, seven week family literacy program, "Planting the Seeds to Read," in which parents learned how to read effectively to their children while children developed their grade level reading skills. Families gathered one night a week in the museum to play, learn and enjoy a healthful meal together. Evaluations prior to and after the pilot program showed marked increases approaching a new grade level in reading skills in 39 out of 40 participants, with all participants improving to some degree, according to Susan Garrard, MCM President/CEO. This year, participation has increased to over 100 participants due to the success of the pilot program.

The museum uses inquiry-based learning and play to develop children's minds. These strategies carry over in professional development workshops in which educators learn how to implement these approaches in their own classrooms. According to comments from workshops listed on the museum's website, one teacher praises, "The workshop made inquiry-based learning easy to understand. I will bring the lessons I learned here back to my classroom." Another teacher comments, "MCM professional development workshops helped me gain insight into the way my students learn." The Museum has an Educator Advisory Board to ensure such offerings through the museum meet educational expectations of educators and parents alike.



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The museum's primary goal is to reach as many children across Mississippi as possible. Claiborne Barksdale, Chief Executive Officer of the Barksdale Reading Institute and member of the museum's board of directors, adds, "We have had over 50,000 students from 74 school districts visit the museum on a field trip since opening about 21 months ago, and we are continuing to explore ways in which we can expand our impact." To help accomplish their outreach goals, the museum offers field trip scholarships to underserved children and takes strides to keep ticket prices low for all patrons. A lot of time and resources are dedicated to ensure visits for all patrons continue to be affordable, but field trip scholarship awards are a shining example of the museum's dedication to all Mississippi children. So far, the museum has awarded field trip scholarships to schools in 19 different districts to give these children a chance to enjoy and learn from the Museum's offerings. To maximize their educational

effectiveness, all field trips can be designed around Common Core curriculum standards for Mississippi schools through museum resources. "Teachers and administrators bring children back, so we know that what we're doing must be of value," says Garrard. Field trips are so enriching that even revisits from coastal school districts are not unusual, acknowledging the special touch the Museum has for engaging children in learning.

The Mississippi Children's Museum has big plans for the future. Be on the lookout for a unique addition to the Museum – a Literacy Garden. It will be an interactive, outdoor sculpture garden incorporating nature as featured in children's literature, and is believed to be the first of its kind in the sphere of children's museums. So next week, or in 2014 when the garden is expected to be completed, take a child you love to the museum for an educational and play experience like no other in the state.



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