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Kids take over their museum



OWEN RILEY JR. / Staff

The Children's Museum of the Upstate holds its grand opening Friday morning at Heritage Green in Greenville.



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Kiauna Corey, 7, enjoys the Children's Museum Friday morning.

Opening caps decade of effort

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A stream of eager families flowed into the Children's Museum of the Upstate for the first time Friday after a grand opening ceremony that capped more than 10 years of dreams, dedication and hard work to bring the idea to life on the grounds of Heritage Green.

Amber Ring, 19, brought her two babysitting charges, ages 5 and 8, to be among the first kids to experience Greenville's first children's museum.

"I've lived here 15 years, and we've never had anything like this," she said. "I heard it was the grand opening, and I've been excited about it."

The trio was among the approximately 200 people who had already spilled through the doors in the first hour, and 600 more came through the course of the day to visit one of Greenville's most long-awaited attractions.

"This project has been going on for so long," said Julie Accetta, development associate for the museum, "and so many peo-

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ple just didn't really know exactly what we were building. What is a children's museum? How big is it going to be? What quality are the exhibits going to be?

"Everyone that has come through seems to be so excited and impressed. We don't want to just meet their expectations, we want to exceed them, and I think we're doing that."

Cheryl Kozmic and her daughter, Erica, agreed that the museum was a top-notch experience.

"We've been to quite a few children's museums — Asheville, Chicago and other cities — and this looks like it's way up here," Kozmic said. "This is awesome."



OWEN RILEY JR. /

Brian Cassidy and his kids Ella, 2, and Carson, 6, enjoy the Bi-Lo Market area at The Children's Museum of the Upsta

Scottie Lu Brandt, who has led the museum's board of directors for five years, welcomed local leaders to the morning's opening festivities, including Mayor Knox White; David Wilkins, former U.S. ambassador to Canada; former U.S. Secretary of Education Dick Riley; and County Councilman Jim Burns.

Burns brought along his three children — Kelly, 10; Colin, 8; and Josh, 4 — to explore the new museum.

"The 4-year-old mind here is just going nuts at someplace like this," he said with a laugh. "They're just thrilled. It's just a great place you can bring your kids over and over and over."

The 79,000-square-foot facility houses 18 permanent, interactive exhibits, and the first wave of children quickly staked out favorite spots.

Toddlers splashed in a lily pond downstairs; a boy scrambled up a climbing wall while three competitors raced to pull the

selves up a pole using pulleys. Some marveled at the power of wind in a giant wind tunnel while others shopped at the miniature market.

Troy Desorbo, 10, hopped in the racing simulator and pulled off fourth place in his first go-round.

"We've had small groups test things, and we've had adults here for our gala, but to have 20 kids in the climbing structure, five in the giant stomach, every race car manned — it's really great to see it all come together," Accetta said.

That coming together got under way in earnest in December 2003 with the donation of the former library building, and it took more than five years and $21.7 million to transform the space into a world of discovery and exploration for kids of nearly every age.

The Children's Museum of the Upstate, at 300 College St., is open 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Mondays through Saturdays and 1-5 p.m. Sundays. Admission is $12 per person. For more information, visit www.tcmgreenvillesc.org.