Parties mark Children Museum's FIRST YEAR



The Children's Museum of the Upstate features 18 interactive exhibits, including a giant wind tunnel.



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Mary Sellers
Children's Museum CEO



STAFF / File

The Children's Museum of the Upstate will celebrate one year of educating and entertaining children at two birthday celebrations this week.

Adults take over tonight; kids celebrate on Saturday

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The date was July 31, 2009. The doors of the Children's Museum of the Upstate opened for the first time to visitors, and scores of excited children and adults poured in for their first glimpse at the state-of-the-art, multimillion-dollar facility.

It had taken a decade and more than $21 million to bring the 79,000-square-foot children's museum to life.

"This community has spent several years planning the launch of the museum, and so to be crossing that one-year milestone is really a testament to the community's ongoing support and efforts," said Mary Sellers, who recently took the helm at the Children's Museum as chief executive officer.

And it's been a good year, said Shannon Harris, director of marketing for the museum.

The museum at 300 College St. has just surpassed its goal of 100,000 visitors for the first year, and about 500 still come in every day.

"We've been extremely pleased with that because this has been our first summer to really be open and be able to gauge what it would be as far as a tourist attraction," Harris said.

"The visitor experience is really quite spectacular," Sellers said.

"And I can say that because I didn't have anything do with it," she added with a laugh.

This week, the Children's Museum is marking the first anniversary of its opening with two celebrations — one for the grown-ups and one for the kids.

The "I Can Be a Kid Again" event will be held tonight at 7 for all those adults who've longed to push their kids out of the way and have a go on the flight simulator or in the TV studio.

"That will be a chance for adults to come experience the museum though a kid's eyes," Harris said.

"You wouldn't believe the number of times we get asked that. 'Oh, I want to come, but I don't have children.' Or, 'I want to come and play without my children so I don't have to feel bad about a child being on the race-car and I want to be driving it,' " she said.

Tickets for tonight's event, which will include live music and local celebrity appearances, are

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$75 per person and can be purchased by calling the museum at 233-7755.

For the kids — you know, the ones the museum was actually designed for — there's the Lil' Kid Birthday Extravaganza, going on all day Saturday.

"We like to do things over the top," said Gilliam Trimboli, event marketing coordinator.

"As a kid, there are certain things that we have come to expect at a birthday party," she said. "We just wanted to take those expectations and go above and beyond."

The daylong celebration will include a balloon artist, face painting, party projects and crafts, an interactive musical performance (at 11 a.m. and 2 p.m.) and some surprises.

The birthday events will reflect programming typically held at the museum, meaning it'll be hands-on and educational.

Take the "science of ice cream" program going on in the "What's Cooking?" test kitchen, for example.

"Kids can come in and actually learn about some of the science behind how ice cream is created and go into our test kitchen and experience that process and then, of course, the best part, which is tasting the ice cream at the end," Trimboli said.

Most of the programming will be held from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday and is included in the museum's $12 admission fee.

For more about the museum, call 233-7755 or visit www.tcmgreenvillesc.org.