

Exploration Place Celebrates 10 Years

(Music playing)

When the first board met in the fall of 1992 we did some studies of other Science Centers and Children's Museums. We really didn't know much about them. As we got into that it was sort of a spontaneous reaction but we needed to think bigger than what our original charge was, for a Children's Museum. So as we did that, and we visited other places, we concluded that it was in the best interest of the community to seize this opportunity to really try to optimize what we had before us. So, we went from that and, of course, we ended up with a larger institution that we feel fills a great need here in Wichita.

The fact that it would be involving children and would be for their future. Things that would be creative and educational and it would be hands-on projects that they can experiment and realize to maybe even be a future for some of those things and their knowledge.

Public and private partnerships are incredibly important for communities that want to be vibrant. Let me tell you about the early 1990's. Sedgwick County had an opportunity to participate in this project. We offered up \$20 million but the most important part of that story is we offered up money so the architect could continue with his drawings. This was before the fund-raising was complete. We took a risk knowing full well that this project was going to be a go.

We were able to conduct a very significant, major, architectural search. It was a world-wide search for a 'named architect' if you will. We put together a search committee which traveled literally to Europe, Canada and the United States to view buildings of the final six architects that were selected. In the end, we selected Mr. Mosha Softee whose offices are in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He has done work all over the world and there was just something about the style of buildings that he had developed that seemed to us to be inviting, plus he didn't have a particular style that he designed to. He was willing to wait and see what the project was, what the sight looked like and then work to make it the best building.

It's a great place for our child and it's a great place for me as a parent. Um, there's a lot of space there's an attentive and solicitous staff who help him enjoy and know things but it's the exhibits that are great. He has tremendous fun here but while he's having fun, he's learning, so that's what my wife and I are so interested in. We both are the recipients of tremendous benefit from education. I would say in my life that education has probably been the key to unlocking the treasure of happiness and meaning in my life. And I see this as not just a playground, it's really a kind of a school; it's an educational experience for our son so as he plays with things here, he learns things and he asks questions. And, again, as I said, it's not just me he has as a resource but the staff here also interact with us, just in terms of being friendly people. That's a learning thing for him now, getting to know people outside of his family. And then people who know things that maybe Dad doesn't particularly know, or Mom doesn't particularly know but that he's interested in, and that's on exhibit here and that there's some staff member who knows.

Well, Exploration Place has always been that kind of an iconoclastic place where families and their kids and old people alike can go and experience our community, experience science and nature and have an

experience of learning and fun all at the same time. It's on the river, which is so glorious, it's wonderful architecture and it gives you the feeling that Wichita is a special place for families to enjoy.

I really like airplanes and I knew some information about them but I wanted to learn more and I thought this would be a good opportunity to do that and it really interested me since I heard about it.

As David and I are both educators, we are convinced that creativity is given, is short-changed in our world, especially in our children's education, so we're making it a point in his early years to just get the message that there are possibilities in the world. It's not all about 'no' and limitations. That's a message he'll have to learn at some point but we want him to learn about possibilities, to believe in possibilities, and I think Exploration Place is a place that gives him the message that there are all kinds of possibilities in this material world, in this universe, to explore.

Exploration Place is an absolutely wonderful attraction for our visitors and an absolutely wonderful attraction for our residents as well. It is such a multi-faceted venue that you can celebrate special events, such as children's birthdays or even a special wedding anniversary right here in Exploration Place. When visitors become residents they often look at various attractions and things to do in our community. Exploration Place has actually become a venue, an attraction, that people see and it helps make their decision in becoming a resident of Wichita. So, it has become that crown jewel in Wichita and we're so lucky to have such a great attraction here in Exploration Place.

A Science Center is so much more than the exhibits and the people coming there. It's also a tremendous educational asset and resource and in this case Exploration Place is an educational resource, not just for Wichita and Sedgwick County, but for all of Kansas. We have marvelous, exciting plans in the years to come to really be able to expand with our educational programming, both the depth of the content and our geographic reach. We're going to do that with lots of collaboration and partnerships with other organizations here in Kansas.

Well, I love it for a lot of different reasons, but I dammed up a river, I've been in the middle of a tornado, I've slayed a dragon in a castle, all through the eyes of my grandkids. And, you know, it's about future generations, it's about making Wichita and Sedgwick County a place where the kids can grow and be healthy and learn, but it's about those next generations. I can enjoy it too, but now I'm enjoying it through the eyes of my grandkids.

Exploration Place is this amazing, wonderful Science Center here in Wichita. And one of the things that has been so good for this facility over the last few years is the traveling exhibit program. We are going to be continuing with the wonderful, traveling exhibit program. We have the next two years charted out and we are looking at some really great opportunities for after that as well. It's really good for folks in the local community; they want to come back and see different things and the traveling exhibits are a great way to do it. But it's also not the only way to do it; one of the key things we're going to be focusing on here in the near future is the rejuvenation of our galleries. We're already starting to work on the castle, which is one of our early childhood galleries, and plans are underway right now for 'Tot Spots', which is our preschool gallery. So, in the coming years you're going to see a lot of changes and a lot of upgrades to our existing galleries, which is a perfect complement to the traveling exhibit program.

But it's fun to see it develop over time and I think with the new team of people we have in place, that have come on board in the past year or so; it's sort of like a rebirth. Projects of this type typically have an opening up-curve, then there's a slight descent and tail off and then it becomes re-invigorated a few years later. And that, I think, is what we are doing here and we'll adjust to the times, to the people, and to the community and I think there's nothing but an upward slope now for Exploration Place.

It was a wonderful way in which we could participate financially to make this beautiful facility part of our community. Partnerships, public and private partnerships in communities today are equally important and that's why this institution survives is because of that partnership. It is a gift to the community, it is a welcome gift that we all love and cherish. I hope you enjoy it as much as I do.

As a matter of fact, visitors as well as residents enjoy Exploration Place and it has been a major economic impact in bringing visitors and individuals from across the state of Kansas, as well as, from across the world.

I think it is the involvement of the schools and of the entire population; not just the children, but the parents, grandchildren and grandparents and the entire community.

I think it enhances his creativity because this is a 'yes' place. I think of this as a 'yes' place. This is the most kid-friendly place in all of Wichita. Everything is built for children and we're not always having to say, "No, don't touch that, No, don't do that". It's like, "yes, you can try that, yes, you can explore that, yes, you can investigate that, yes, you can learn", and this is just one environment that's just set up to facilitate learning and creativity.

I love Exploration Place.

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