



**JUNIOR LEAGUE OF
PITTSBURGH**
Women building better communities

Lights

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Fall

Special Edition



(L-R) Stephanie Hoogendoorn, Gretchen Smathers and Vicky Guscoff at the Great Night Gala



(L-T) Becky Torbin and Gretchen Smathers at the Great Night Gala

The Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh provides an innovative museum experience that inspires joy, creativity, and curiosity in children and parents alike. Last year, the museum had record breaking admission of 267,000 people, a 7% increase over the previous year’s attendance. The Children’s Museum recently celebrated its 30th anniversary as well, and that occasion provides an opportunity to remember its history and its humble beginnings. The museum came about as a result of a Junior League of Pittsburgh Signature Project, and there were nine members of the Junior League of Pittsburgh on the Children’s Museum Founding Committee: Jeanne Berdik, Anne Camp, Janet Chadwick, Mary Louise Gailliot, Carol Heppner, Ann Shuman, Ellen Srodes, Thea Stover, Becky Torbin, and Elizabeth T. Wainwright. Those distinguished women demonstrated a great example of leadership and volunteerism, and they were remembered and recognized recently, on Saturday, June 7th, 2013, at the Great Night Gala, which commemorated the Children’s Museum’s thirty years.

At the Gala, the Children’s Museum presented the Great Friend of Children Award to JLP, Henry Gailliot, and Ron Wertz in gratitude to for their efforts that made the Children’s Museum a reality. The Great Friend of Children Award brings great honor to its recipients and to JLP. The award began in 1994 to recognize persons, nationally and locally, who had demonstrated a long-term commitment to supporting children and families in the community. Previous award recipients include Fred Rogers, Jim Henson, and T. Berry Brazelton. In explaining the motivation for the award, Gina Evans, the Director of Development for the Children’s Museum, said, “The Children’s Museum wanted to give the award to JLP on the

**children’s
museum**
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30th anniversary of the museum because these women started the museum. The celebration of the 30th anniversary of the beginning of the museum and the award given to JLP made this a very momentous time.”

The award is particularly apt now because the vision of the founders has been a reality for over a generation. The Junior League of Pittsburgh created the Children’s Museum so that children could have a place to go and create. The Founding Committee thought that it was very important to for children to learn interactively and to participate in the learning experiences – a hands-on, minds-on experience. They obviously had it right: the Museum has attracted tens of thousands of visitors each year since its opening, providing an enjoyable learning experience for children of all ages.

The vision of the founders was not achieved overnight. The Museum’s beginning can be traced back to a mobile traveling unit at the Three River’s Arts Festival in 1972. But with a notion of the Pittsburgh would embrace something more, the founding committee traveled around the country to evaluate other children’s museums and to learn what made a great children’s museum. The founding members also solicited donors to fund the museum, and that was not an easy task. While several businesses helped out, many did not – at the time a museum for children was not a priority, especially a museum which enabled and encouraged children to play as they learned.

The founding committee was not deterred by those obstacles, and they persisted in the search of donations. Those efforts paid off when the Hillman Foundation provided a donation of \$100,000 and endorsed the concept. From there, the Museum began to take shape, and was aided further with a grant from the JLP in 1983, which enabled the Museum to establish its permanent location in the basement of the North Side Post Office Building in Allegheny Center. That central location enables the Museum to bring together children from the entire Pittsburgh region. Children from the south hills, the north hills, the east, and the west can explore, create, and imagine all within the confines of a safe environment close to downtown. And each visit promises to be a unique experience, with the exhibits changing regularly to allow children to experience something new. For instance, this fall, the Museum will launch a new Tapescape exhibit which consists of plastic shrink-wrap stretched back and forth on a steel pipe structure, then wrapped and woven to strengthen it.

Another new exhibit for this year is tough art which is interactive pieces of art. The Museum will also launch a new youth program which encourages middle school and high school students come back to the museum to

assist with the Museum’s exhibits. Thus, in every season, the Museum is a good destination for children of all ages: they can step inside and be inspired by the arts in a kid-friendly environment.

As was made clear at the annual Great Night Gala in June, the Museum wants these experiences to be accessible to children of all incomes. To further that goal, the Museum’s executive staff and its founders announced the Great Friend of Families Fund. That fund will ensure that every family, regardless of income, has the opportunity to experience the Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh. Established by a group of the original Junior League of Pittsburgh volunteers and former Children’s Museum board members and staff, the Fund seeks to raise \$350,000 annually to provide subsidized admissions and programming for underserved children and families. Gifts to the Great Friend of Families Fund assist the Museum in providing admission for more than 30,000 disadvantaged school children and low-income families annually through the \$1 admission program, free days, and free school field trip program for 10,000 students and teachers. The Great Friend of Families Fund is yet another legacy left by the founding committee – each member made lead gifts toward the fund to show their continued support to the museum.

There is no doubt that the Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh is a special place for children of all backgrounds to learn and to discover. The Museum’s success is also a credit to the Junior League’s mission to promote voluntarism, to develop the potential of women, and to improve the community through effective action and leadership of trained volunteers.

To deepen our appreciation of those efforts, JLP Lights was able to catch up with three award recipients from the Founding Committee who shared some of reflections on the Children’s Museum.

What did the opening mean to you?

Janet Chadwick: The children’s museum of Pittsburgh was a great accomplishment to create a museum for children and give it to the city of Pittsburgh.

Thea Stover: For me, the opening of the Children’s Museum was the culmination of many years of hard work.

Becky Torbin: When the doors of the Children’s Museum opened, it was the most joyful and rewarding experience in my career as a community volunteer. Rarely in one’s lifetime does one have the opportunity to work on a project from the conceptual stage, through the planning phase and on to the completion of the project.

Jeanne Berdik: The opening of the Museum was the result of many years of hard work selling the idea of a participatory museum to the community. It showed that you cannot be afraid of a “big idea.” On the day the Museum opened, I was the President of the Junior

What was your role in the formation of the Children's Museum?

Janet Chadwick: I worked to create the exhibits.

Thea Stover: In 1977, I brought the idea of a Pittsburgh Children's Museum to the Community Research Committee which decided to present it to the Junior League. The League voted to establish a grant of \$2,750.00 for a committee co-chaired by Sheila Traub and myself to research the feasibility of establishing a Children's Museum in Pittsburgh. In March 1980, the membership voted to grant \$100,000.00 and provide a minimum of 40 volunteers through May, 1983 for the Pittsburgh Children's Museum Project. 130 members agreed to work on the project. Within a month, we had written by-laws, become incorporated and were granted tax-exempt status. League members formed the first Board of Directors and served on the committees. In May, 1983, the JLP commitment to the PCM was fulfilled and in June, 1983, the Museum opened its doors hoping to attract 50,000 visitors the first year. However, at year's end over 100,000 people had visited the museum.

Becky Torbin: I started in the very beginning on a committee researching other children's museums and exploring the potential for such a project in Pittsburgh. After the Junior League voted the project in and provided a significant grant as the seed money, I participated in the feasibility study to determine the direction that the League should proceed. The study outlined a plan to start in a rented space and that the funding community would support a campaign of \$1,000,000 for the initial phase.

Jeanne Berdik: I was the head of public relations and I remember the day when the idea was born. Gaining support and selling the idea of a "participatory museum" to the community was quite a challenge. We traveled throughout the community with a slideshow presentation working to sell the idea of a participatory museum to community leaders. It was not until the Hillman Foundation provided a donation of \$100,000 and gave their stamp of approval that the concept of the Museum truly began to take shape.

What is your favorite exhibit then and now for the children's museum?

Janet Chadwick: It is impossible to pick a favorite exhibit because there are too many are great and creative.

Thea Stover: The water exhibits have been and are still my favorite.

Becky Torbin: The exhibits are constantly changing and becoming more interactive and creative for the children to learn and develop. Every time you go you learn something new.

Jeanne Berdik: The Museum's first and signature exhibit, "Stuffee," is one that really stands out in my mind. Stuffee is a rather large stuffed figure that has allowed generations of children to learn about anatomy.

How did you feel to receive the Great Friend of Children Award from the Children's Museum?

Janet Chadwick: It was a great pleasure to receive the award.

Thea Stover: Having watched the museum grow from an idea to where it is today makes me very proud.

Becky Torbin: It was the greatest honor of my volunteer career to be selected to receive the Great Friend of Children award on behalf of the Junior League of Pittsburgh. The Children's Museum became a reality because the women of the Junior League had the courage, commitment and determination to take a "dream" and bring it to fruition making a very significant impact in our community benefitting children and their families.

Jeanne Berdik: I was proud and touched. The award is a true testament of what a group of women can accomplish if they decide to do something. I truly believe that the JLP has a unique role to fill and the ability to grow the future of women's leadership in the community.



Museum Committee Planning Meeting, November 1979
Boston Museum planner Michael Sand & Thea Stover

Great. Night. Gala
30th BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION



Museum Committee Planning Meeting, November 1979
Becky Torbin & Sheila Traub

Great. Night. Gala
30th BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION



Reviewing Plans for the Museum

Jeanne Berdik, Anne Camp & Sheila Traub (Jim Loney, in back)

Great. Night. Gala
30th BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

Children's Museum Opening Day
June 12, 1983

William Nelson, First Museum Board President
David Crosson, First Museum Executive Director
& Jeanne Berdik



Great. Night. Gala
30th BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION



Opening Day
Becky Torbin & Carol Hepper

Great. Night. Gala
30th BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION



Opening Day

Jeanne Berdik, Carol Hepper, Sigi Rutherford & Grace Anderson

Great. Night. Gala
30th BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION



Museum Reception, August 1982

Beth Wainwright, Sheila Traub & Mary Louise Galliot

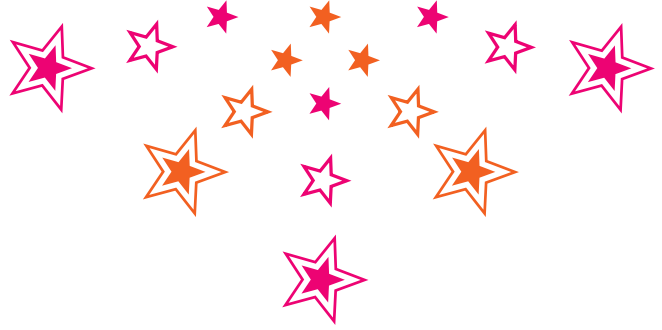
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30th BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

WE NEED VOLUNTEERS!
Sign up TODAY on JLPGH.org

Saturday, November 16,
at 11am, 2:30pm, 6pm
and
Sunday, November 17,
at 1pm, 4pm

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