



A Perfect Place to Play

MY Museum's New \$3 Million Space for Kids

BY RENEE BRINCKS • PHOTOGRAPHY BY KELLI ULDALL

Seven-year-old Max Rosenblum is pretty excited about MY Museum's new location.

Why?

"Well, there's going to be some mini golf and a tractor. I've never been on a tractor," he says. "And there's all the art stuff."

Max and his little brother, Luke (who loves the museum's bubble machine), have been MY Museum regulars for five years. Their mom, Lori, also is looking forward to the November opening of the museum's new space at 425 Washington St. in Monterey.

"It's great for the community. It allows parents and children to connect within their family unit," she says. "At the same time, it lets families connect with other families."



Lauren Cohen, executive director, worked nonstop on the new MY Museum.



The enticing exhibits at MY Museum encourage creative, fun playtime for kids up to age 12.

MY Museum first opened in 1997, after a Junior League of Monterey County study documented com-

munity interest in such a facility. The original 2,500-square-foot space on Wave Street housed 25 exhibits and drew 20,000 visitors annually.

Though it welcomed guests for 11 years, the location never was meant to be permanent.

"People really liked the museum so we stayed, but our intent was always to find something bigger and better," says Executive Director Lauren Cohen.

Museum leaders purchased their new building in 2004 and, to date, a capital campaign has raised \$2.85 million of the \$3 million needed to

fund the project. Children's Miracle Network, Hayward Lumber, Monterey Peninsula Foundation, Harden Foundation, Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula and Kitchen Studios are among major supporters, with additional donations coming from community members and businesses. Plans for the new facility were guided by local focus group feedback and the best of other children's museums.

At 8,500 square feet, the new MY Museum is more than three times the size of the original facility. Cohen anticipates that 50,000 guests a year will visit the wheelchair-accessible space, which boasts 80 exhibits for children up to age 12.

Each of the seven major galleries represents an aspect of Monterey County. At the museum's center is the MY ImagiTree, a nature and science exhibit with a tree house and slide. MY Day at the Beach serves ages 3 and under with sand-



Little ones enjoy a water-filled surface to bounce on and a red boat to drive after a trip down the slide.



A computer screen makes an interactive, silly looking kaleidoscope of kids moving around.

castle-shaped blocks, a boat floating on a waterbed mat and a walk-through lighthouse. Little ones strengthen hand-eye coordination on the greens in the MY Go-Fore Golf exhibit, which features crawl-through gopher tunnels spotlighting underground animals.

Other exhibits include MY Healthy Fields, showcasing local agriculture; MY Hospital, with a

life-size version of the game "Operation"; and an expanded MY Creation Station where children use paper, pipe cleaners, CDs and other materials for crafts and creative projects. At MY Theater, kids experiment with costumes, props and camera equipment. And, MY Museum's interior administrative offices and classroom space reflect local landscapes, framed by repro-

ductions of the Carmel Mission, a Pacific Grove adobe and Monterey's first fire station—with a kid-sized fire truck parked outside.

Because it is near the Monterey Sports Center, Jacks Park and Fisherman's Wharf, Cohen says the new location will attract local and visiting families alike. It also boosts MY Museum's educational impact.

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"Now, we can reach different populations and become more of a player in the community. This really allows us a whole new opportunity to do that," she says.

Lori Rosenblum recognizes MY Museum's educational benefits for her children and for others.

"Kids spend so much time in gymnastics, karate, singing lessons...MY Museum lets them



Exhibits teach about parts of the body, allow for dress up and puppet shows, and encourage kids to role-play activities like driving an ambulance, being a farmer or playing golf.

just play, without an agenda. That unstructured play is so good for their imaginations and creative development," she says, discussing how her young sons have grown at the museum.

"When they were little, they loved to climb on the fire truck and pretend. Now that they're older, they love the arts opportunities. It's fun to watch how involved they get when they're there."

MY Museum's new facility opens to members on November 1 and to the public on November 15. Details on exhibits, events and family memberships are available at www.mymuseum.org or 831/649-6444. ■

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