

300 Gleed Avenue  
East Aurora, NY 14052  
716.655.5131 tel  
716.655-5466 fax  
www.exploreandmore.org



February 20, 2015

The Honorable John J. Mills  
Old Erie County Hall  
92 Franklin Street, Fourth Floor  
Buffalo, NY 14202

Dear Mr. Chairman,

Explore & More has inspired the children and families of Western New York for over 20 years and is incredibly grateful for the support Erie County has given along the way. The institution's track record of growth and sustainability was one of the reasons that it was chosen by the Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation to be the anchor attraction on Buffalo's waterfront.

Explore & More at Canalside will have a major impact on the region — economically, educationally and socially. The multi-faceted benefits to the area have inspired community leaders from all sectors — public and private — and this widespread support has allowed Explore & More to raise \$6 million against its \$10 million capital campaign goal, while still in the early stages of the campaign.

It is anticipated that Explore & More will host over 250,000 visitors in its first year alone and that it will have an \$88 million impact on the region. Families from every district will be touched by the addition of Explore & More at Canalside — whether at the downtown location or through outbound programming that Explore & More offers in schools, libraries and community centers.

At this time, we respectfully request an opportunity to present to the full Legislature at an upcoming meeting. In addition to a short overview, we will outline how the County of Erie could play an instrumental role in making Explore & More at Canalside a reality for the children of Western New York.

Thank you for your consideration.

With warmest regards,

Barbara Park Leggett  
Executive Director

cc: Honorable Joseph C. Lorigo, Honorable Betty Jean Grant

## BOARD OF TRUSTEES

**PRESIDENT**  
Matthew Davison

**VICE PRESIDENT**  
Eileen Martin

**TREASURER**  
Jarod Haslinger

**SECRETARY**  
Jennifer Shah

## MEMBERS AT-LARGE

Deborah Andrews  
Peter Bergmann  
Lisa Chrapowicz  
Sarah Duddy  
Barbara Elias  
Jill Ervin  
Charles Fashana  
Rebecca Diina LaCivita  
Amity Lippes Mann  
Jenny Pierce  
Ralph Pignataro  
Tim Sanders  
Gary Sennikoff  
Julia Spitz  
Barry Swartz  
Kimberly Trent  
Tina Zinter-Chahin  
Walter Zmuda



## WHO WE ARE

Over two decades ago, Explore & More opened in a 500-square foot room in a school basement. The idea of having high-quality play-based learning for children from all over Western New York had been cultivated in the minds of a small group of dedicated parents, educators and toy designers. The museum with its all-volunteer staff saw 1,000 visitors that first year. Flash forward 20 years later, to Explore & More today, currently housed in a space 14 times that size, serving over 60,000 children and their family members each year.

With nationally recognized and **award-winning programs and exhibits**, the **most generous free admission policy** in the area, and a **mission to provide critically important informal learning experiences for all**, Explore & More has become an important asset to the well-being of children and families in the Buffalo-Niagara region.

Dating back to 2007, Explore & More became the **first organization to offer free programming at Canalside**. Their early partnership with the Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation (ECHDC) led to Explore & More being selected as the anchor attraction on Buffalo's revitalized waterfront – **a year-round draw for residents and tourists that will ignite children's imagination, economic development and community partnerships**.

As Victor Hugo once remarked, "Nothing is as powerful as an idea whose time has come." As the community anxiously awaits the Museum's future on the waterfront, in the heart of Buffalo's economic revitalization, it is very clear that Explore & More at Canalside is an idea whose time has come.

*"Nothing is as powerful as an idea whose time has come."* -Victor Hugo



## WHERE WE'RE HEADED

Explore & More is about to undertake one of the most exciting cultural projects in the history of Erie County. The construction of Buffalo's first children's museum—in the heart of Canalside development—will provide a learning environment for over 200,000 children and families each year.

With over \$6 million raised to date and another \$2 million under consideration, Explore & More is well on its way to reaching its \$10 million capital campaign target. This **early and generous support illustrates the widespread community enthusiasm for the Museum's vision** — a gold-standard children's museum that inspires visitors of all ages. Most heartwarming are the gifts from new and different funders – some making the largest investment they've ever made to any Buffalo institution.

A dynamic Master Plan led to the completion of schematic designs that are impressing corporate, public and philanthropic community leaders across the region. With groundbreaking planned for the summer of 2015, the Museum is on track to open in late 2016.

**Having listened to over 400 voices across Erie County, Explore & More will be FOR and ABOUT Buffalo.** Through seven Educational Play Zones, this community-focused museum will highlight the best of who we are. It will feature Buffalo's architecture, agriculture, weather, and the importance of our waterways. It will pay tribute to our sports teams, our inventiveness, and the fact that we're the City of Good Neighbors – and what it means to be a good neighbor. But more important than the impressive new facility, **Explore & More is expected to have a measureable impact on the area educationally, economically and socially.**

*"Play is the highest form of research."*     *-Albert Einstein*



## ECONOMIC IMPACT ON BUFFALO

With over 300 children's museums operating in the United States today — this is not a new concept. They are the fastest growing and most financially sustainable of any type of museum. Children's museums are excellent economic engines bringing children and families to urban neighborhoods and spurring year-round activity, tourist traffic and high ancillary spending. **In fact, over 50% of those built in the last 10 years have been part of urban revitalization projects.** And where there is a waterfront, they are often on the waterfront.

Business consultants predict that the museum will have a nearly **\$90 million economic impact on the community** over a ten-year period, including very high ancillary spending by Explore & More visitors. A federal study found that a children's museum visitor average spending beyond the price of admission is \$22 per visitor, with average tourists spending almost double, or \$38 per visitor.

In addition, there's the economic impact resulting from the Heckman Equation. Nobel Prize winning economist James Heckman states that **every \$1 invested in a child's early learning experiences between birth and age five will have a 7-10% annual return on investment that extends throughout the child's lifetime.** This community dividend will come in the form of increased tax revenues and decreased spending on social services (e.g., remedial education, welfare and criminal justice system expenditures).

**With the support of Erie County, Explore & More can be the economic 'shot in the arm' for the Buffalo-Niagara region that children's museums have proven themselves to be nationwide.**

*"Children need the freedom and time to play. Play is not a luxury. Play is a necessity."*

- Kay Redfield Jamison, Ph.D.



## EDUCATIONAL IMPACT ON BUFFALO

Erie County has a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to partner with Explore & More to **improve school readiness for the 50% of city school children who enter the system at a remedial academic level.**

**90% of brain development happens before the age of five** and studies clearly show that the most important way that young children learn is through play. Children's museums are ideal venues for providing the unstructured play opportunities and vocabulary building situations which are germane to school readiness for children.

Those who may question whether a museum visit could have an impact on a child's academic success need only turn to a recent federal study that cited that **children who visit a museum even once in Kindergarten show higher achievement scores by third grade in reading, math, and science, regardless of socio-economic status.** And third grade reading scores have a direct correlation to high school graduation rates. Children of all backgrounds benefit from the informal learning experiences provided by a children's museum — and children living in poverty most of all.

With the Museum's longstanding commitment to allowing all children access to their world-class programming and activities regardless of financial means, Explore & More can ensure that **children living in poverty can participate in the creative play and learning environment that Explore & More provides.**

Both at the Museum and in our off-site programming, Explore & More reaches children and families in every Erie County Legislative District. Readyng children for school and providing them with 21st century skills (and experiences) necessary to succeed in life and the workplace is of paramount importance at Explore & More — and together, with Erie County's support, we can make a difference.

*"Play gives children a chance to practice what they are learning."*

- **Comm. 4M-3**  
- **Page 5 of 7**



## SOCIAL IMPACT ON BUFFALO

Children's museums become town squares in their communities, bringing children and families from different walks of life together. This will be especially true for Explore & More, where a heavy emphasis will be placed on our Buffalo-Niagara identity, community curated exhibits and programming, shared history, shared dreams, and being good neighbors. **This type of encouraged congregation is much needed in the third most segregated city in the U.S.**

**Serving as important “third spaces” (beyond our community’s highly homogenous school / work places and neighborhoods), children’s museums build social capital.** A landmark examination of civic engagement, *Working Together: Community Involvement in America*, indicates that children are one of the most likely subjects to motivate community involvement. Explore & More will engage families of all backgrounds and encourage them to share their talents and points of view.

**Explore & More is also uniquely positioned to help reverse stigma and discrimination.**

Children's museums are popular and neutral sources of information. They attract a diverse cross-section of people, providing shared experiences through interpretative and interactive exhibits. Explore & More creates bridges of understanding by exposing adults and children to unfamiliar concepts in a non-threatening, hands-on approach, and by ensuring that the museum experience is accessible to those of differing abilities and backgrounds.

**Also, individuals who visit museums are more likely to vote, be civically engaged and volunteer as adults** — attributes the Museum hopes to foster in all Erie County residents.

*“Children learn as they play. Most importantly, in play children learn how to learn.”*

- O. Fred Donaldson, Ph.D.

Comm. 4M-3

Page 6 of 7





## ACCESSIBILITY

One of the primary reasons that 50% of our City's children enter school at a remedial academic level is the lack of informal learning experiences they've had access to before the age of five. Explore & More majors in these experiences. There are countless studies that depict the critical need for quality enrichment opportunities for children from underserved populations. Understanding this, **Explore & More has identified eliminating barriers to access for disadvantaged families as a top priority both at their current location, and in anticipation of their future location in the City of Buffalo.**

Explore & More brings quality programming directly to schools, offers free programming to Erie County library branches in communities deemed in need of services, presents an extremely popular free summer series at the Buffalo waterfront, and hosts a free monthly event held exclusively for children on the autism spectrum and their friends and families.

In addition, Explore & More has launched admissions-related initiatives intended to reduce the barriers to access for the region's children. The **Free & Discounted Admission Fund** allows families participating in the WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) program to receive free admission to the museum. Explore & More also participates in the Arts Access Pass Program, available to SNAP (Supplementary Nutrition Assistance Program) recipients and their families. Explore & More has developed free Organizational Memberships for non-profits serving families in deep poverty or crisis situations, enabling them to bring families to the museum free of charge.

Concerns about educational inequality are paramount in Buffalo, where the high school graduation rate hovers around 50%. Furthermore, given the extremely high rates of childhood poverty in Buffalo, data pointing to the severe lack of 'school readiness' among young children from low-income families is especially concerning. **Explore & More at Canalside can help to move the needle on school readiness for the children of Erie County.**

In order to capture the perspective of those who are often underserved by cultural and educational institutions, Explore & More, in collaboration with noted Sociologist Dr. Shelley Kimelberg, plans to conduct **a community needs assessment through interviews with parents of young children who represent a range of racial/ethnic, socioeconomic, immigrant, and religious backgrounds.** Results from this assessment will inform Explore & More's policies and initiatives related to accessibility.