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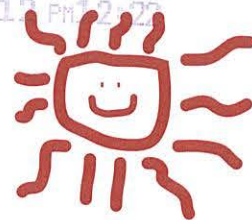
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explore & more
children's museum



CE

January 13, 2012

The Honorable Lynn M. Marinelli
Erie County Legislator
Chair, Community Enrichment Committee
1701 Hertel Avenue
Buffalo, NY 14216

Dear Legislator Marinelli,

Thank you for your recent letter regarding 2012 Erie County cultural funding for Explore & More Children's Museum. We **truly** appreciate all your efforts to support the culturals, and are very excited about your role as the Chair of the Community Enrichment Committee.

Enclosed is the museum's completed 2012 Cultural Organization Data Response Sheet, as well as a short summary of some of our successes in 2011 and plans for the future. As requested, we also will be sending the Legislature a budget allocation for 2012 funding under separate cover.

Explore & More continues to grow – now serving nearly 50,000 western New Yorkers. New exhibits, expanded programming and creative efforts are the result of intense planning. Now, more than ever, we are dedicated to expanding our reach in the region.

Thank you again for all you do and have done to make Western New York a wonderful place.

Sincerely,

Barbara Park Leggett
Executive Director

enc.

cc: James J. Cerroni, Jr. Clerk, Community Enrichment Committee

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where fun & learning play together

2012 Cultural Organization Data Response Sheet

CE

Name of Organization:	Explore & More Children's Museum
Yearly Budget Amount:	\$ 381,518
Yearly Operational Costs:	\$ 381,518
Yearly Projected Revenues:	\$ 381,518
Number of Yearly Events or Performances:	Open year round, 100+ special educational programs, served 47,456 people in 2011
Number of Full Time Employees:	1, although 4 at 32+ hrs
Number of Part Time Employees:	16

2012 Level of Anticipated County Funding:

Other Major Sources of External Anticipated Funding: Earned income (\$205,700), NYS Council on the Arts (\$18,760), East Hill Foundation (\$17,500)

Please return by

Erie County Legislator Lynn M. Marinelli, Chair, Community Enrichment Committee

1701 Hertel Avenue, Buffalo, NY 14216 Phone: (716) 832-0493

James J. Cerroni Jr., Clerk, Community Enrichment Committee

92 Franklin Street, 4th Floor, Buffalo, NY 14202 Phone: (716) 858-7771

Thank you for assisting in efforts to grow the roles and awareness of the value of the regions cultural organizations.

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Explore & More Children's Museum 2011 Accomplishments

In 2011, Explore & More Children's Museum had its busiest year ever. The museum served more children and families than ever before – welcoming 47,156 people to its East Aurora site or working with them in their own communities.

Exhibits & Programs

An ambitious schedule of creative and fun hands-on events included nearly 100+ programs for the general public throughout 2011. At the same time, a new exhibit – Make It Go! – delighted visitors of all ages with its golf ball ramps, loop-the-loops, roller coaster and more. Funded through the Easthill Foundation, the exhibit was an instant success. Exploration ROCKS opened in December and featured hands-on geology exploration. Funded by an individual, the exhibit includes hands-on fun with rocks and enables Explore & More to cross-promote with the Buffalo Museum of Science and Penn Dixie.

Programming throughout the year included Explore Even More, a drop-in program held Wednesday mornings from October through May for the museum's youngest visitors and "their" adults. Active play and learning in the gym took place with Let's Get Physical – held by-weekly during the winter months. During the school break weeks of February, April and December, Explore & More presented hands-on programming with artists and groups. Special celebrations included Chinese New Year, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Apple Day and more. Through two full days of programming funded by the NYS Council on the Arts Folk Arts program, children and families learned traditional Iroquois and Polish folk arts.

Throughout July and August, Explore & More was busy both at the museum and in the City. On Tuesdays, the museum worked with the Parkside Community Center to present Art in the Park. Wednesday WOWs, supported by Fisher-Price and held at the museum, featured crafts, activities and shows for the whole family. Then, each Friday and Saturday during Family Days at Canalside, Explore & More filled colorful tents with hands-on fun for the whole family – all focused around the Story of Buffalo theme.

The EnCompass Outreach program, funded by the General Mills Foundation, brought museum artists and educators to more than 1000 children and families in their own communities. This long-term collaboration with the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library is always a success. In addition, museum educators presented programs in schools and throughout the community, bringing Explore & More's unique learning experiences to thousands more, thanks in part to support from M&T Bank.

Behind-the-Scenes

While the museum staff was incredibly busy creating fun and educational experiences, Explore & More was also focused on several major efforts behind the scenes. As a recipient of a Fund for the Arts grant, Explore & More's staff, Board and volunteers spent the first half of 2011 finalizing a strategic plan with the Canisius College Center for Professional Development. Active committees looked at governance, development, marketing and location. An influx of new volunteers brought creative energy and expertise to the process. The Board re-affirmed its commitment to secure a centrally located site for the museum and developed plans to strengthen the museum to ensure Explore & More's success.

At the same time, the museum was one of five local organizations selected by the Easthill Foundation to go through a year-long training to implement a new fundraising model. The program generated new income and helped secure many new volunteers and committee members. Explore & More reached out to individuals, corporations and foundations in a whole new way. The program also helped the museum lay the foundation for a future capital campaign.

In 2011, Explore & More was also selected as the recipient of the assets of the now-defunct Toytown Museum in East Aurora. As part of the Toytown Museum's dissolution filing with NY State, the transfer included extensive infrastructure (desks, office supplies, equipment), limited objects (most of their collections were on loan), exhibits and cash assets. Historic objects of significance were donated to the Historical Society. Objects not within Explore & More's mission or seen needed now or in the future were sold. The process was a significant undertaking that required Explore & More to balance its respect for another institution's history with the museum's mission and business plans. Additional exhibits and unique objects were stored for a future site for Explore & More.

Explore & More's name recognition is also increasing in the community. New funders and greater interest are helping bolster the museum's efforts to bring fun and learning together for families. In 2011, the museum was listed in the top ten attraction web hits on the Visit Buffalo Niagara (formerly GBCVB) website – one of only three cultural institutions to make the list.

Location

One of the biggest challenges Explore & More faces is its location. Located outside of the urban core and away from the larger northern suburban communities, Explore & More needs to relocate to become more accessible to the entire Western New York community. Since 2005, the museum has been exploring multiple options. In 2008 - 2009, Explore & More launched summer programming on the Waterfront, expanded its presence in Buffalo and developed exhibit concepts, programming ideas, preliminary business plans, and site needs.

In 2010 - 2011, the museum refocused its search process. The museum's location committee developed a detailed plan to ensure the objective selection of a site. Criteria were set and weighted. Architectural program plans were developed to evaluate the needs of the museum's visitors. Sites needed to be in the City of Buffalo and have at least 25,000 net square feet to be considered. Multiple sites were visited, and preliminary layouts were developed for several that best met the criteria. The location committee (which included two architects, one construction person, one developer, staff and multiple museum visitors) recommended final choices to the Board by year-end.

At the same time, in 2011, Explore & More applied for consideration for a site on the Waterfront through a study commissioned by the ECHDC and completed by Lord Cultural Resources, Toronto. On January 10, 2012, the ECHDC released a Request for Proposals for a children's museum operator. Currently, Explore & More is developing its response to that RFP and is working under the guidelines set forth within it.

2012 Plans

The coming year looks to be as exciting as the past 18 months have been. Programming continues to be scheduled throughout the year, and even in the first few weeks of the year, attendance is high. Behind-the-scenes plans include an ambitious public relations effort in early spring, additional fundraising, long-range planning, Board and committee expansion and a greater effort to secure public input into the museum's future. Grants for many of these projects have already been submitted and general operating support from the NYS Council on the Arts and from Erie County will be pivotal in ensuring the museum's operational growth. Explore & More's future looks bright, thanks in large part to the support of the community.