

The Sag Harbor Express.

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Children's Museum of the East End Director Steven Long on Tuesday, with models of the proposed expansion and renovation that will take place at the museum. *heller photo*

BRIDGEHAMPTON

CMEE Plans Expansion

Mini-golf part of plan to attract audience

BY EMILY J. WEITZ

THE CHILDREN'S MUSEUM of the East End (CMEE) has become an institution for families on the East End. From those who drop in on a rainy day in July to the kids who make it part of their weekly January routine, CMEE has nestled itself into an essential corner of the community. In the past year alone, more than 60,000 people walked through its doors. And each person probably left having learned something, even if they didn't realize it.

That is at the core of the philosophy of CMEE: to integrate learning into play. The fact is, notes executive director Steve Long, kids these days are spending more time on screens and less time engaging in creative play. CMEE sets about to counter that trend, and with the campaign it launched last weekend, the museum seems intent on becoming still more of a resource for the East End community.

While most organizations launch

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CMEE plans an expansion of facilities

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capital campaigns at cocktail parties or ribbon cuttings, Long thought it would be fitting to use CMEE's annual Rocket Launch to launch their \$2 million campaign. So he dressed up in a NASA flight suit and greeted families at the free event. Inside, children built their own stomp rockets, which were then launched outside. At a brief presentation in the amphitheater, the public capital campaign was announced.

Already nine months into the fundraising process, CMEE is halfway there with \$1 million in funds raised so far. But they hope that taking the campaign public will help them achieve the second half of their goal. Funds raised will be used to pay down the existing mortgage, to establish an endowment, and to help cover costs of the functioning of the museum. But they will also be allotted to exciting new exhibits that will add to the array of learning opportunities that CMEE already provides.

"The new exhibits at CMEE grew out of feedback the museum staff collected from members and other visitors," says Long. "In response to their input, we're reconstructing the ship exhibit inside the museum."

The ship, which currently houses a dress-up area, a fishing deck, and a few computers, among other things, will now incorporate climbing tubes and ladders to get kids really moving.

"We'll lower the hulls to a height of six feet," says Long, "and add tiered levels with climbing tubes and ladders to enclosed crow's nests located 25 feet in the air, which will help promote gross motor skills."

Particularly in the winter, when the beach and the playgrounds are too cold for play, CMEE offers an outlet for kids to stay physical. This new design is meant to utilize the vertical space in the museum.

Inside the ship, a new exhibit will be installed aimed at teaching kids the basics of engineering.

"A hands-on exhibit will teach children about the six simple machines," says Long. "For example, kids will be able to manipulate an inclined plane, wheels, levers, and pulleys, just like they would on a real ship."

Another new exhibit will teach children about the different kinds of renewable energy, like solar and wind power. As always, teachings will draw on the inspiration of the East End to illustrate these ideas. CMEE already features locally inspired exhibits like one interactive display that shows how potato chips are made, and another that's a soda shop inspired by the likes of the Candy Kitchen in Bridgehampton.

Another planned addition at the museum will be an outdoor mini golf course.

"Many families loved the idea of building a miniature golf course at CMEE," says Long. "Not only is golf

a part of the local community, it's a great way to teach physics, which we've seen with the miniature golf courses at the Ithaca Science Center and the New York Hall of Science."

Long thinks that mini golf will also appeal to older kids, which has been a goal of CMEE for some time. As they outgrow some of the other exhibits, like the fire truck or the dress-up areas, they will be able to stay engaged with a few holes of miniature golf. But what they might not realize is how much they are learning.

"It's much easier for kids to understand Newton's Law of Inertia: an object at rest will remain at rest unless acted on by an unbalanced force," he says, "if they can see it in action by hitting a golf ball with a putter."

Since there is no mini golf in Bridgehampton or the surrounding towns, it seemed like a great way to offer something new and fun to the community, while slipping the education in. CMEE staff decided to take it directly to the kids as they planned the layout of the course.

"To begin designing the course," says Long, "we surveyed seven to 10 year olds about what were their favorite miniature golf holes."

Once they established some of the most popular designs, then they figured out how to use them to teach.

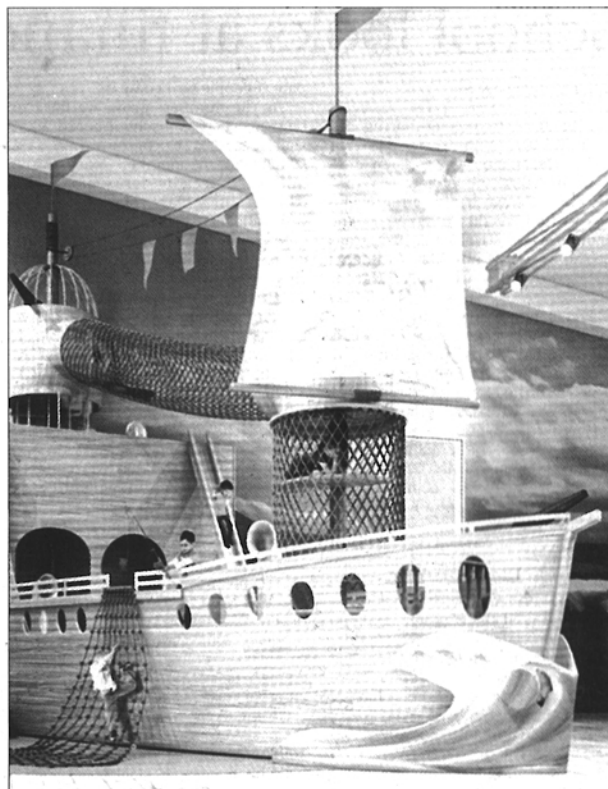
"We worked with science teachers at the Ross School's Innovation Lab and from other local schools," says Long, "to identify the physical prin-

ciples that govern the hole. For example, almost all kids love to hit a ball through a loop-the-loop. When they play the course at CMEE, they'll begin to learn about Newton's Second Law, which is that force is mass times acceleration."

All of these new additions are designed, above all else, to be fun. The

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learning is in the process of playing, and Long sees this as the greatest offering CMEE has to give. As they continue to plan for the future, Long emphasizes the importance of being a part of the community. He encourages any local organizations that might benefit from a collaboration with the museum to reach out, so the whole community can grow together.



A scale model of a boat children can play on will be a new exhibit at CMEE.