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HEARD & SCENE

An International Crafting Trip for Children



Left, a boy on the Children's Museum of the East End's firetruck during its family fair. Above, a simulated archaeological dig at the event.

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BRIDGE-HAMPTON, N.Y.—If there's one thing that a lot of the moms talk about in the Hamptons, it's exercise.

If there's a second thing they talk about, it's the Children's Museum of the East End, which is on the Bridgehampton Sag Harbor Turnpike.

We don't have children, so we hadn't had any need to go there before this weekend, but the way these moms tell it, CMEE, as it's abbreviated, is a godsend, a lifesaver, a panacea.

When you're in the Hamptons and the kids are driving you crazy, when it's rainy, when you just need five minutes to yourself, this is apparently the place to take them.

On Saturday, CMEE hosted its fifth annual summer fundraiser. A handful of local bold-face moms came with their kids for the late morning affair, including Ali Wentworth, Jane Krakowski, Mariska Hargitay, Kelly Klein, Christa Miller and Tiffani Thiessen. And a lot of social moms and dads were there, too.

Since there tends to be so much diversity in the Hamptons, the theme was a global one. Kids got a passport when they walked in. In turn, they could collect passport stamps by going around to various stations, both indoors and outdoors, to learn about international cultures and customs.

For Australia, there was a touch tank, where they could learn about crabs and lizards. For South Africa, they could decorate tribal masks. For Chile, they could create a South American rain stick. For Guatemala, they could make a worry doll; for Mexico, a paper-bag piñata; for Thailand, a beeswax candle; for Kenya, a mancala game; for Japan, a wind sock; for Egypt, a shadow clock; for Jordan, a drum; for China, a wind chime.

This meant at the end of the afternoon, not only had your kids eaten some junk food (dumplings, hot dogs and Sno-Cones), not only were they wet from various water rides, not only had they had their faces painted, but you were bringing home a bagful of the aforementioned crafts you didn't really want to your pristine Hamptons manse. Kids and their activities!

There were also things the children could do that at least didn't involve a tchotchke to take home. These included vegetable sushi making (thanks Japan!); a soccer kick (courtesy of Brazil!); Irish step dancing (yes, from Ireland!); martial arts instruction (yay South Korea!); a simulated archaeological dig in a sandbox made from a large tire (this was Israel!); and a sports challenge, meant to evoke the classical athleticism of Greece.

Needless to say, this was all pretty well thought out. So much so that the play sets inside of the museum were surprisingly free of children.

We would have loved this

place when we were a kid. It's like a giant playroom, movie set or doll house, with areas where you can dress up in costume, run around a pirate ship, a soda shop or a farm stand and learn how a potato becomes a potato chip.

Eventually, the museum hopes to open an energy exhibit to educate kids on how to harness water as well as about solar-powered cars. A nine-hole minigolf course is also forthcoming.

"My son loves the firetruck," said Ms. Krakowski of her 2-year-old, Bennett.

"That's a very popular one," said Stephen Long, the museum's executive director. "Also the farm stand. The kids love a farm stand."

Why? There are a lot of plastic vegetables and fruits to play with. And it's very environmentally Hamptons.

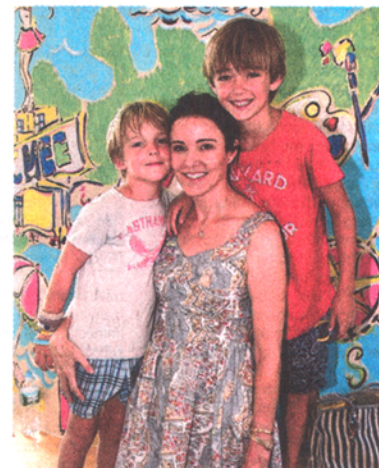
"Kids need play the way we need oxygen," said Mr. Long, of the importance of the museum in town. "We need to keep kids imagining."

Another goal of Mr. Long's is to try to concentrate on issues facing the area, such as low literacy, and turn CMEE into a "community living room."

Mr. Long said, surprisingly, that the most hectic place in the museum would probably have to be the fake ice-cream parlor.

"It can get really tight on a busy day," he explained. "How many ice-cream shop waiters can you have?"

Note, no real ice cream is served in this ice-cream parlor.



Clockwise from above left: Tiffani Thiessen with her husband Brady Smith and daughter Harper; Christa Miller with sons Henry and Will Laurence; a boy plays at the museum during the fair; and Mariska Hargitay with her children, Amaya, Andrew and August.



Ross Cole (Hargitay), Children's Museum of the East End/Getty Images (3)