



Architect Peter Stampfl illustrated the Bucks County Children's Museum as it could appear in a converted local barn.

Bridget Wingert: Happy to Be Here

A vision gathers momentum

Energetic best describes the parents who want to build the Bucks County Children's Museum.

They have pulled together some of the most influential names in the county to help with their endeavor and most of them were at the Inn at Blueberry Hill last week to hear about the parents' vision.

Kelly Krumenacker, daughter of a professional football coach, has lived in many places throughout the country. She has seen what cities can do for children and she wants to offer more for Bucks County's children – learning as fun, as movement, as discovery through play. She taught elementary school in Pennsauken, N.J., until a few years ago. Now she has three children and lives in Doylestown.

Kelly, president of the group, has recruited a substantial board of directors, which includes a museum professional, Anne Richtarik, who serves as vice president and secretary.

"Children need to develop actively in order to have a greater understanding of themselves and the world around them," Kelly says. "With over 70,000 young children in Bucks County, and parents who are eager to keep them active, a local children's museum will provide a place for young learners to engage in interactive exhibits that will celebrate Bucks County's rich history and culture."

Anne described some of the attractions – an archeological dig, a scale-model farm, an early American town, regional land forms showing examples of the topography, miniature waterways and watersheds, an arts section to demonstrate the theatrical, literary and visual arts that have flourished here, and a history exhibit.

"We want to gather the best that Bucks County has to offer under one roof, make the subjects come to life for children 0-8, and create an atmosphere and an experience that's fun for ages 0-99," Kelly said. "We hope to partner with like-minded museums and organizations that are so prevalent in the area."

David Weitzel, the Central Bucks School District's assistant superintendent for elementary education and a Children's Museum board member spoke about the advantages of play in children's learning. "If you support children's play, you build lifelong confidence," he said.

Kenn Keller of Univest described the "bricks and mortar." The group is searching for a museum site – it could be space for a

new building but and old barn would work well, especially if the surrounding land can accommodate outdoor activities.

"We need about 10,000 or 15,000 square feet," Keller said and the group envisions the museum that is accessible to residents and tourists, possibly along the Route 202 corridor.

Buckingham architect Peter Stampfl of Stampfl Hartke Associates did a conceptual drawing of possibilities for the Lindquist property. It shows what a barn could become as a place for children to explore.

"Accessibility for local families and schools, as well as tourists, is of the utmost importance in site selection," said founding board member and museum spokesperson Eric Hopkins. "Of course we'd welcome a donation of land or an appropriate building, and the donor of such a generous gift would realize substantial tax benefits. In this scenario, we'd be able to realize our dream much sooner."

Now the difficult part of building the museum begins. It will take the generation of a significant amount of money with a major capital campaign.

"When it comes to raising money for the museum, we're sensitive to financial pressures imposed by the present economic environment," Kelly said. "The museum hopes to continue its momentum and employ a grass-roots approach to heightening community interest, fostering partnerships and gaining funding for the early stages of museum development."

Before the museum opens the group wants to create a mobile museum that can take its contents to local schools and libraries and bring its special programs to community events.

An exhibits committee is meeting with local elementary school teachers to determine what mobile museum exhibits their classes would find fun and interesting. Brenda Flicker, a kindergarten teacher at Cold Spring Elementary School in Buckingham says, "It is magical to see the looks on children's faces when they explore and discover new knowledge. The Bucks County Children's Museum will allow young learners to use their senses to experience this area's past, present and future."

Ideas for a site are welcome at info@buckskids.org. Hopkins can be reached at 215-348-1660.

The board's goal is to open the Children's Museum in 2011.

See photos on page 29.