

Children's Museum to call New Hope home

TEXT SIZE

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 GRAPHIC

The Bucks County Children's Museum is planning to move into the Union Square shopping complex.

It appears to be a natural fit.

The Bucks County Children's Museum, a vision that's been growing for more than two years, has secured a deal to move into the former New Hope branch of the James A. Michener Art Museum in the Union Square shopping complex.

Kelly Krumenacker, founder and president of the children's museum, said Thursday she is working out details of a lease with New Hope developer George Michael, who owns Union Square, just off Bridge Street.

"Thanks to the generosity of George and his son Brad, we will have a children's museum in New Hope," said Krumenacker.

George Michael said he's happy to be able to help and sees Union Square as an ideal location for the museum.

"This museum is going to be another Sesame Place," said the developer, and the large retail center has "the perfect place for buses and school visits."

The actual opening of the museum is still at least a year or more away as organizers work to raise money for the ambitious project. Krumenacker said only that the museum's board will need "under \$1 million."

As fundraising continues, Krumenacker said the museum will begin using the 5,000-square-foot space for community events and informational meetings.

Geared to young children up to 8 years old, the museum will stress interactive displays, including an architectural dig, a scale-model farm, an Early American town square and a water exhibit re-creating the culture of Bucks County's rivers and canal along with many other county-inspired activities. The museum is also intended to be fun and engaging for parents and grandparents, said Krumenacker, adding that museum officials are working with a team of educators in an effort to make the exhibits reflective of Pennsylvania educational standards. Part of the national Association of Children's Museums, the nonprofit Bucks County museum will have reciprocal agreements with children's museums across the country,



The Bucks County Children's Museum will be moving into the former James A. Michener Art Museum satellite in the Union Square shopping complex on Bridge Street.

Krumenacker said. That means a membership to one, allows families to visit other similar museums.

"We're really excited about partnerships," said the Doylestown mother of three, a former elementary school teacher.

The New Hope location means closer access to schools and programs in New Jersey too, Krumenacker said, and cross marketing with the New Hope-Ivyland Railroad is a possibility.

The historic riverside town, known for its arts and entertainment, is typically considered more an adult-centered community, with an abundance of restaurants, bars and boutiques, but Glen Stephan, president of the Greater New Hope Chamber of Commerce, said the children's museum will add to the town's eclectic offerings.

"We are more of an entertainment town, but we also have the (Bucks County) playhouse and the train," said Stephan. "The museum will only add to daytime activities for families."

He said New Hope can take a page out of Disney World's book, where "there's plenty for children during the day and Paradise Island for adults at night."

The James A. Michener Art Museum's satellite opened in 2003, striking a rent-free agreement with Michael. It had hoped to attract new visitors and display traveling exhibits.

The branch closed in 2009, citing poor attendance that dropped from a peak of 24,400 in 2004 to a low of 15,000 in 2009.

Krumenacker said museum supporters are confident their market is far different than the art museum. "Children's museums are destination spots with a unique audience."

Feasibility studies have projected the children's museum seeing 25,000 visitors annually, with 30 percent of those people coming from outside the area, said Krumenacker.

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