

# **The Children's Museum – some important facts and a key exhibit**

**(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on June 8, 2010)**

I can't say enough for the help I have been given by Joyce Maienschein in keeping the history of the Children's Museum as accurate as possible. It is my goal to do justice to the factual history while including the impressions of those who have been close to the museum over the years. Both are valuable to the historical record.

Joyce writes, " Mrs. T. A. Lincoln (Pat) and Mrs. Lee Munz ( Ann) were leaders of Cadette Troop 316 and had nothing to do with the log cabins themselves. What they did do was significant, however. We found that a teachers' guide would be a valuable addition to the museum, for as school groups came through, CM docents were often not familiar with the contents of the cabins. Pat Lincoln had a daughter in Troop 69 who had helped with the cabins, and so knew of the need for such a book. "

"Being the leader of a Cadette troop with her second daughter, she suggested the possibility of her group working with ours to prepare such a teachers' guide. Troop 69 girls agreed there needed to be such a document, so prepared an application for a third Reader's Digest Grant in late 1975. They received that 3rd grant.

"The Cadette GS Troop 316 researched and wrote the draft for the contents of that book, but it was carefully edited, illustrated and published by Troop 69, with help from Bill Countess. It was formally presented to the Children's Museum at the Bicentennial Celebration held in 1976 at the CM.

"Dave Sharp (I was mistaken on his name and used "Doug" sorry!) didn't supervise the construction of the cabins - he only helped, along with some other gentlemen. Bill Countess and George Davis were the men who supervised the construction.

Joyce also said that Bill Countess and George Davis were responsible for the tool house, and they did travel to Georgia to visit the Foxfire folks, but not to learn how to put the cabin back together - they had already supervised the taking down and construction of the original cabins, but they went to learn more about the Foxfire oral history program for the Oak Ridge High School class.

Joyce's desire is to get the record straight on the early history of the Children's Museum and I want to help her do that. If any of you readers have ever attempted to capture history you surely appreciate the difficulty I face. While I do the very best I can, I have found that errors creep in regardless. Thanks to timely feedback from folks like Joyce, these errors can be corrected for the record.

I am equally indebted to the present staff of the Children's Museum of Oak Ridge. They have provided photographs and written descriptions of current exhibits as well as historical information regarding how these exhibits came to be included.

There are at least eighteen highly significant exhibits in addition to a "Birthday Room," several classrooms, a new teaching kitchen, a teaching garden, an after school room, the Regional Appalachian

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Library and of course, the great original gymnasium with stage from the Highland View Elementary School days.

I want to focus on the history of some of the exhibits, displays and other special features of the Children's Museum. We have already featured the history of the Appalachian Exhibit. The Waterworks exhibit is a favorite of the kids and we will now review its history.

Called a "relic of the 1982 Knoxville World's Fair," this most intriguing exhibit was built by the Tennessee Valley Authority for the fair. It consists primarily of a water flume representing a river. Water is pumped into a holding tank and flows downstream simulating a river with dams, operating locks and turbines.

When the World's Fair was over, two children's museums (Oak Ridge and Johnson City) wanted the model. So, TVA built an exact replica so each museum could have one. This is a great example of TVA's ability to help the region and its intent to fairly distribute resources across the area where its dams are located.

This water filled exhibit that allows kids to get their hands in the water is a favorite exhibit for them. They love to get wet and play boats, according to Gordon Fee, long time board of director member of the Children's Museum of Oak Ridge, who said, "about 10 years ago the Waterworks exhibit became in such poor condition that it had to be taken out of service and several folks had to raise the money to refurbish it. "

TVA agreed to provide the shops and labor to do the refurbishment if the Children's Museum could pay for the work (about \$5,000). Ultimately these funds were provided by Ingram Barge Company of Nashville. The exact same barge company whose real barges and tug boats work the river around Nashville and, more importantly, the Mississippi.

Frank Peishel, a volunteer at the museum, got the idea of building a scale tug boat that kids could play on. He has put a lot of time and effort into this creative "tug" that is located in the same area as the Waterworks display. Frank's attention to detail has enabled him to create a most realistic "tug boat" for the kids to explore.

Again, the Ingram Barge Company was contacted and agreed to donate an additional \$3,000 to help fund the purchase of materials for Frank's effort. The tug boat is nearing completion and is an amazingly well planned and excellently constructed interactive exhibit. Frank has done an exceptional job. I am sure he is proud of the result of his efforts, and rightly so.

Gordon concludes by saying, "Today, the Waterworks display again is nearing the time when it will have to be rebuilt. The constant flow of water and the exuberant play of children have led to some

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accelerated deterioration of the floor and wear and tear on the exhibit itself. The museum is going to have to again seek funding to refurbish the marvelous exhibit.”

While we have featured the Waterworks exhibit here, there are more wonderful exhibits we will visit in the future. Look for information on the World of Trains, The Dollhouse Room, The Rainforest Room, and of course the Ed Westcott Room and the Manhattan Project displays, the Coal Mine Room and the Caboose – a great story told as a “cloud with a silver lining” by my friend Maggie Allard.

I must thank Maggie for her untiring efforts in support of this series, along with other museum staff. She has provided many excellent photographs, two of which are featured today.

The history of the Children's Museum of Oak Ridge you are reading is truly a work of a most dedicated team of supporters, volunteers, staff and friends of the museum. I appreciate all the help being provided.



Kila, Ian and Evan Cline explore the Waterworks exhibit – a favorite with kids – photo by Maggie Allard

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Frank Peishel works on his masterpiece, a scaled size “Tug Boat” that kids can enjoy as a part of the Waterworks exhibit – photo by Maggie Allard