

PLAY BOOK

2023



**CHILDREN'S
MUSEUM**

of Southern
Minnesota

BOARD OF DIRECTORS



A note from **Christi Wilking**

Board Chair | Community Relations Officer, Mayo Clinic Health System

As I reflect on 2023, a surge of excitement and gratitude fills the air at our beloved Museum. This past year has been nothing short of exhilarating, with record-breaking activity that leaves us proud, having served the lives of thousands of families throughout our region.

As my time as Board Chair ends – I reflect on the cherished moments of my own children exploring, learning, and playing within these very walls. Their laughter and growth have been woven into the very fabric of this institution, and my heart is filled with pride as I recall those precious moments. The smiles on their faces as they construct, discover, and create will forever be etched in my mind.



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Director, Finance and Administrative Services, City of Mankato



Katie Heintz
Director, Culture, Recreation & Quality of Life, City of North Mankato



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Retired Technology Director, Le Sueur/Henderson School District



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Heather Carlson, D.O.
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Assistant Vice President, United Prairie Bank, New Ulm



Chastity Valvick
Communications Consultant, Compeer Financial



Rick Halbur
Partner, Gislason & Hunter LLP, New Ulm



Sheri Sander-Silva
Executive Director, Feeding Our Communities Partners (FOCP)



Gwen Westerman, PhD.
Professor, College of Arts and Humanities, Minnesota State University, Mankato



From the CEO

As I celebrate my four-year journey as CEO of the Children's Museum of Southern Minnesota, I find myself saying, "Wow!" What an incredible ride it has been, and none of it would have been possible without the support, dedication, and passion of our remarkable CMSM community.

CMSM has evolved into a regional community asset and an inspiration of play and learning. With this role comes the responsibility to align even more closely with our mission and our community's needs. How can we work more collaboratively with other organizations to create a brighter future for our region's children? How can we lead in areas where others may not have the capacity or expertise? How can we become even more inclusive, ensuring that all children, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds, are welcomed and inspired within our walls? I have unwavering confidence that the CMSM community is not only ready but eager to embark on this transformative journey.

As we reflect on 2023 and my last four years, I extend my deepest gratitude to the entire CMSM family - our outstanding staff, visionary Board of Directors, dedicated committees, cherished members, generous donors, and all the enthusiastic visitors who have made this journey memorable and the driving force behind our numerous accomplishments.

Together, we have achieved so much through a collective vision characterized by confidence, generosity, excitement, and the essence of PLAY. Our mission to "Ignite the natural curiosity of every child through the power of play in a dynamic, awe-inspiring environment" is not just a statement; it's a daily reality. The impact we make on children and families is a testament to our commitment to this mission.



Louise C. Dickmeyer

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Ellie Aita
FRONT DESK

Donna Bengtson
PLAYWORKER

Sarah Bjorklund
GUEST EXPERIENCE COORDINATOR

Cathy Brown
PLAYWORKER

Kathleen Burns
DIRECTOR OF MUSEUM
EXPERIENCE

Rachel Compart-Gemlo
DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMMING

Louise Dickmeyer
CEO

Ron Evan
FACILITIES SUPPORT

Sarah Hamilton
PLAYWORKER

Cheri Klecker
GUEST EXPERIENCE COORDINATOR

Kim Kleven
VP OF PLAY AND LEARNING

Izzy Linden
PLAYWORKER

Annie Lindenberg
GUEST EXPERIENCE COORDINATOR

Annika Lowrey
PLAYWORKER

Kim Luiken
ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

Courtney Malone
DIRECTOR OF MARKETING

Mike McDougal
FACILITIES MANAGER

Storm Novak
PLAYWORKER

Tasha Oliver
PROGRAM FACILITATOR

Crystal Olson
MARKETING & MEMBERSHIP
MANAGER

Claire Queensland
PLAYWORKER

Amanda Rueter
GUEST EXPERIENCE COORDINATOR

Samantha Seifert
PLAYWORKER

Jaci Sprague
VP OF DEVELOPMENT

Heather Ungerer
VP OF OPERATIONS

Sadie Williams
PLAYWORKER

Daniel Young
CAFE & ADMISSIONS MANAGER



2023 YEAR IN REVIEW

2,900

Active memberships through November 2023, up from 2,329 at the start of 2023!

A 24.5% increase since 2022.

91,276

Visitors to CMSM so far this year, including members, guests, and group visitors.

17

Visitors have come from 17 other states.

let's get SOCIAL

Data pulled from Meta Business:
November 1, 2022 - September 30, 2023

 **36,523**

Page Visits +134.1%

 **229,212**

Page Visits +30.6%

 **2,176**

Page Visits +105.3%

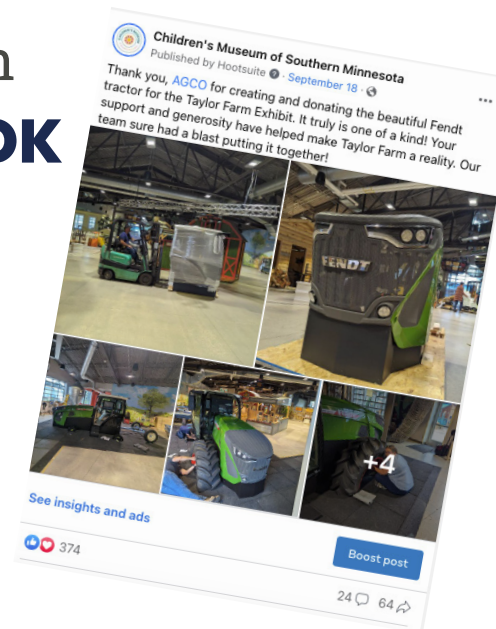
 **7,007**

Page Visits +4.8%

top post on FACEBOOK

68,232

Post Reach
Avg. 529-1,635



985 Post Reactions | Avg. 3-19

83 Post Comments | Avg. 0-3

64 Post Shares | Avg. 1-2

EW

165

CMSM has
welcomed visitors
from 165 cities
throughout
Minnesota



gateway to

PLAY

opening the door for ALL children to experience the joy of learning through the Power of Play at the Children's Museum

53

IMPACT PARTNERS

Gateway to Play Impact Partners serve as connectors, fulfilling a crucial role in linking CMSM to families that may not have had the opportunity to visit yet. Whether it is through a W.I.C. visit, a well baby check up, or an intake visit with a social worker in the region, those opportunities help to expand our reach to new families.

Here are two examples of these partnerships:

COPAL is a local non-profit that leads social impact initiatives to improve the quality of life for Latin American families. They expressed a desire to introduce CMSM to more of the families that they serve as a fun and safe place to play. To engage families, they hosted an immunization clinic in conjunction with helping to connect families with membership opportunities.

Feeding Our Community Partners collaborated for the second year with the Summer Pack Food Program. CMSM provided a One-Day Family Free Pass for each of the 1,000 food packages distributed in June. Over 350 individuals have been able to access the Museum and enjoy a day of play so far from this years partnership.



932

GATEWAY TO PLAY MEMBERSHIPS

2023 is on track to provide more Gateway to Play memberships than ever before. Gateway to Play memberships are available to children and families facing barriers to play at the Museum.

144

FREE FAMILY PASSES

Free passes redeemed through Gateway to Play Impact Partners as of October. Many of these families have then become Gateway to Play Members or return to play again.

4

SENSORY AWARENESS & ACCESSIBILITY PLAYTIME

Sensory Awareness & Accessibility Playtime are special events for children with sensory challenges or other special needs and their families to experience the Museum – FREE of charge.

4

FAMILY SUPPORT MEMBERSHIPS

Children's Museum of Southern Minnesota provides a safe and neutral space for home visitors or family support professionals and families to meet for assessments or supervised visits.



Immersive agricultural experience revolves four key elements: AGCO – Fendt Tractor, Pigs on Wheels, the Barn, and a Corn Field.

Earlier this year, the Glen A. Taylor Foundation and CMSM united to unveil a groundbreaking exhibit – Taylor Farm! This exhibit is the result of a business-education partnership that seamlessly merges innovative learning with regional needs.

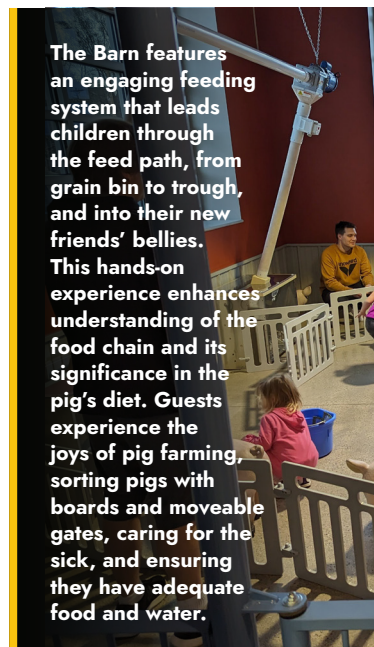
The need for agricultural education in the region was identified through collaborative discussions involving the Museum, the Glen. A. Taylor Foundation, and GreenSeam Director Sam Ziegler. Recognizing the gap in understanding modern agriculture practices, the partners harnessed their collective insights to create an experience that addresses this crucial need. The exhibit's design is centered around an engaging and interactive modern farm environment.

By providing children with hands-on experiences in modern agriculture, the exhibit ignites curiosity and sparks imaginations. The impact ripples through the community, as children and families engage in meaningful learning experiences that foster a profound appreciation for the region's robust agricultural economy.



Within the heart of this new exhibit lies a dedicated group known as "**Okodakiciye**," (pronounced "o-ko-da-kee-chee-yay"), which is a Dakota word meaning "a gathering of people who help one another." Known as the "Okies" for short, they think of themselves as a sewing support group for the Museum. Their dedication to authenticity and creative collaboration has played a pivotal role in shaping the immersive and realistic Taylor Farm exhibit. They have meticulously constructed **700 corn leaves and 17 corn cobs** – a feat of creativity that accounts for an astonishing 328 hours of sewing and projecting over 500 hours.

The Barn features an engaging feeding system that leads children through the feed path, from grain bin to trough, and into their new friends' bellies. This hands-on experience enhances understanding of the food chain and its significance in the pig's diet. Guests experience the joys of pig farming, sorting pigs with boards and moveable gates, caring for the sick, and ensuring they have adequate food and water.





The transformed full-size AGCO - Fendt Tractor is perfect for climbing, driving and farm make-believe. Visitors are able to climb into the cab for an immersive experience from three vantage points: front, side, and back.



The Corn Field features lifelike corn plants that are mounted on a sturdy structure, carefully designed for visual and sensory impact. Visible roots become conversation starters, initiating discussions about water absorption through roots.

“This exhibit represents a captivating blend of modern agriculture, interactive exploration, and cultural heritage. By enabling children to engage with the essence of agricultural practices, we hope to inspire a profound appreciation for our region’s farming legacy and the vital role it plays.”

—Glen Taylor, Chairman and Founder of Taylor Corporation



*Now Open
for Play!*





play hub

Loose Parts are a natural occurrence in childrens play. The Museum has been formulating this idea for sometime now, to have a space just for Loose Parts Play. A space to invite guests to discover new or familiar items in new ways. A button is just an everyday object until there are 500 of them

all together. And maybe they are offered with glue or playdough – they suddenly have a new purpose!

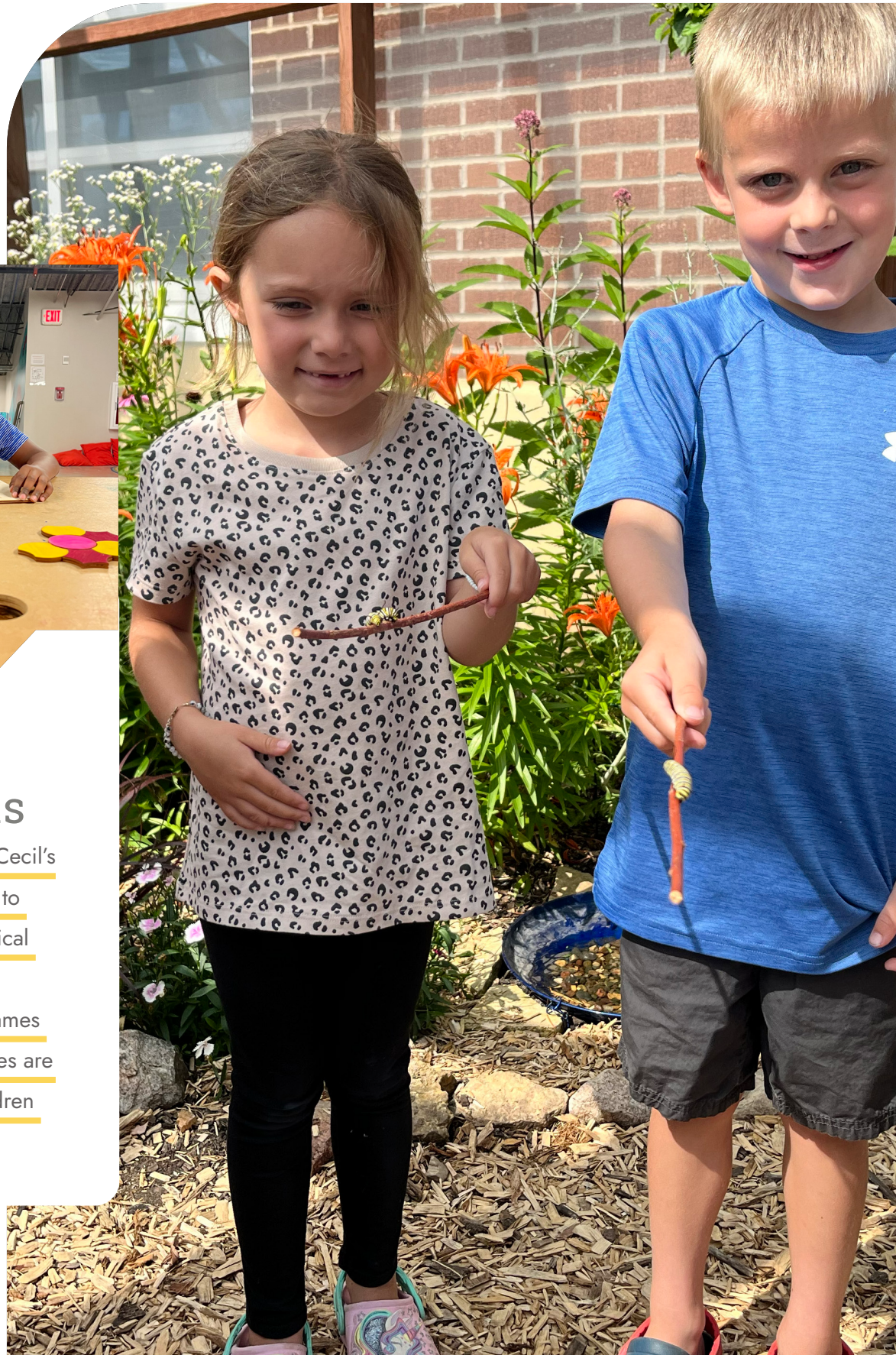
This Loose Parts Play Hub will be a creative programming space similar to Cecil's Imagineering Loft but will focus more specifically on loose parts. Our Facilities Manager has been working hard to enclose the barn by adding a front wall with two beautiful barn doors and two windows. This space will also offer a warming area during the winter while we are open year-round! Inside there will be wall easels, a table, sensory bin, light projector, documentation wall to showcase the work of the children, materials storage, and staff prep space.





Math Happens

Guests join us in Cecil's
Imagineering Loft to
explore mathematical
thinking through
puzzles, crafts, games
and more. Activities are
designed for children
aged 2 and up.



Programming & Events

The Programming team at the Museum strives to engage and inspire our guests. Here are some key highlights:

Early in 2023, we worked with author and musician **JIM GILL** on a special book project called *May There Always Be Sunshine*. Guests of all ages were able to create a page for the book which Jim then turned into a song that he presented at his live concert in May 2023.

June marked the planting of vegetable and sensory gardens as well as the pollinator experience, resulting in tasty snacks for Museum guests to sample.



The Butterfly House was very busy this summer, raising **583 CATERPILLARS** and tagging and releasing 85 butterflies! We also started a **MONARCH LARVE MONITORING PROGRAM** where guests learned to count and tally eggs, larva and caterpillars.

Working together with **MAYO CLINIC HEALTH SYSTEM**, CMSM hosted 3 summer events — *Healthy Habits all Summer Long*. These programs included obstacle courses, nature and art exploration, and healthy food options right from our very own garden!

The weekly **S.T.E.A.M. FRIDAYS** were an absolute blast over the summer months, featuring slime, messy art projects, rocket making, and even a grape festival!

We wrapped up our summer line-up with the fabulous **FIRE SAFETY EDUCATION DAY**. New this year — a raffle with fire safety gear!

As summer turned into fall, **AUTUMN ADVENTURES** returned as one of our favorite times of year. 84 bales of hay and over 40 pumpkins transformed the Dotson Back 40 into a playscape of fall fun!

This winter, we are looking forward to continuing **OUTDOOR PLAY** by staying open all year long! We are excited to offer sledding, a winter snow kitchen, fort building, and more daily activities.

Literacy Explorers

A time to foster early literacy skills through play! This program is designed as a come-and-go experience that is child-led based on their interests. Guests experience literacy through signing, talking, reading, writing, and playing!

IGNITE SOCIETY



161 members!

The Ignite Society was created to show our most invested donors the impact they provide through a variety of recognition and engagement opportunities. With special events and advanced notice about new exhibits, we hope the Ignite Society will deepen our donors' relationship with the Museum and encourage more support for the Museum in the future.



2023 Corporate Partners

Corporate Partners support the mission of the Museum and its community outreach programs that underwrite the cost of Gateway to Play memberships which provide access to families facing a variety of barriers.

Abdo
AGCO
All American Foods, Inc.
APX Construction Group
Bolton & Menk, Inc.
City of North Mankato

CLA
Crystal Valley
Dotson Iron Castings
Federated Insurance
Frandsen Bank and Trust
Gislason & Hunter

2023 Grants Received

The Greater Minnesota Children's Museum Coalition completed an aggressive legislative agenda this year. Representatives from all coalition museums spent time in St. Paul calling on Congress members, testifying in hearings – you name it! Our BIG WINS included:

LEGACY GRANTS

Despite the Coalition Museums lobbying for direct appropriation for each member organization, the Legacy Committees instead increased the amount in the grant pool by \$475K per year. In total, \$2.2M is now available for grants to children's museums for this biennium.

MN DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (MDE) GRANTS

CMSM has tried unsuccessfully for years to secure the same MDE funding other children's museums have enjoyed since the 1990's. During this last session, however, all Coalition Museums were successful in securing base funding for their access initiatives.

Grants of \$50,000 per year will be awarded to CMSM to reimburse expenses related to our access programs. Our primary access program is the Gateway to Play Membership given to families at no cost. The value of these memberships is \$129,500 alone. Discounts for school groups and free admission days are examples of other access initiatives.

MDE GRANT FUNDS WILL ALLOW CMSM TO:

- Provide at least 200 Gateway to Play memberships.
- Collaborate with impact partners to expand reach.
- Engage families and community members with non-school day or early out day programs.
- Offer new programs focused on S.T.E.A.M. learning.
- Create Pollinators and Monarch life cycle programming.
- Host camps on a variety of subject areas aligned with Minnesota State Standards of Learning.

ADDITIONAL GRANTS RECEIVED IN 2023:

- Amcor Cares
- Compeer Financial
- Consolidated Communications Community Fund
- Mankato Clinic Foundation
- Mayo Clinic Health System Foundation
- Minnesota Corn Growers Association
- Olseth Family Foundation
- Carl & Verna Schmidt Foundation
- Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation
- U.S. Bank Foundation
- Walmart Foundation
- Xcel Energy Foundation

ISG
Jarraff Industries
Jones Metal, Inc.
KOWZ 100.9
Mankato Clinic
Mankato Motor Co.

Mayo Clinic Health System
MEI Total Elevator Solutions
Midwest IT Systems, Inc.
Minnesota State University, Mankato
Minnesota Valley Pet Hospital
Monarch Healthcare Management

Nidec - Kato Engineering
The Orthopaedic & Fracture Clinic
Radio Mankato
Scheel's
Schwickert's Tecta America
SERVPRO of Mankato/Owatonna

SignPro
True Facade
United Prairie Bank
West Bank
Widseth
Workspace on 3



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PLAY.
IT'S WHAT WE DO.



2023

PLAY BOOK

