



**CHILDREN'S  
MUSEUM**  
of Southern Minnesota

2025

# PLAY BOOK



# BOARD OF DIRECTORS



## A note from **Shane Van Engen**

Board Chair | President, Frandsen Bank

I have witnessed firsthand the transformative power of play in a child's life. Play encourages exploration, creativity, and learning, while building confidence and social skills that last a lifetime. My daughter, Samantha (8), has spent countless hours at the Museum, exploring exhibits, asking questions, and discovering new ideas. Watching her curiosity and excitement grow reinforces my belief that all children deserve access to these experiences and serves as a powerful reminder of why our mission to ignite the natural curiosity of every child through the power of play is so essential.

The Children's Museum of Southern Minnesota is not only a place of learning and inspiration, but also one of the region's most valuable community assets. By hosting nearly 100,000 visitors each year and engaging families, educators, and local organizations, the Museum strengthens the social and educational fabric of our community while contributing to the vitality of the local economy. It is a place where curiosity is nurtured, confidence is built, and lifelong learning is inspired.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I extend my sincere gratitude to our stakeholders, donors, and volunteers. Your continued support enables the Museum to thrive, sustain its programs and exhibits, and provide unforgettable experiences for children and families. I am honored to serve as Board Chair and proud to witness the profound impact this institution has on our community, our families, and the generations to come.



**Linda Leiding**, Vice Chair  
Executive Director (retired),  
Harry Meyering Center



**Sheri Sander-Silva**, Exec. Comm  
Executive Director,  
Feeding Our Communities Partners



**Tara Torseth**, Treasurer  
CPA, MBT, Partner,  
Abdo



**Paul Shneider**, Secretary  
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**Heidi Boyum**  
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**Rick Halbur**  
Partner,  
Gislason & Hunter LLP



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



**Lindsay Hennek**  
Nurse Administrator,  
Mayo Clinic Health Systems



**Katie Keepers, M.D.**  
OB/GYN,  
Mankato Clinic



**Nate Mullikin**  
Enterprise Leader,  
Taylor Corporation



**Parker Skophammer**  
Director, Finance and Administrative  
Services, City of Mankato



**DQ Spencer, Ph.D.**  
Professor, College of Business,  
Minnesota State University, Mankato



**Heather Von Bank, Ph.D.**  
Chair, Dept. of Family and Consumer  
Science, Minnesota State University, Mankato



**Gwen Westerman, Ph.D.**  
Professor, College of Arts and Humanities,  
Minnesota State University, Mankato



## From the Chief Executive Officer

Museum Stakeholders,

At the Children’s Museum of Southern Minnesota, our mission is to ignite the natural curiosity of every child through the power of play in a dynamic, awe-inspiring environment. This past year, your support has helped bring that mission to life in countless ways. During a time of transition and growth, your generosity and belief in the power of play have reminded us that our community is deeply committed to the well-being of every child and family.

What makes our work truly unique is the strength of our partnerships. With the support of Impact Partners, which includes over 60 nonprofits and family service organizations, we can extend our mission beyond the Museum walls, creating experiences that inspire curiosity, learning, and well-being for every child and family.

Through these partnerships, we are thrilled to celebrate two new major exhibits: Pollinators at Play, powered by the CenterPoint Energy Foundation and Nidec Power Zone. These hands-on experiences allow children to explore science, nature, and energy in playful, awe-inspiring ways. Along with our signature programs — Ag Education Day, Teddy Bear Clinic, and Fire Safety Education Day — these events and partnerships show how collaboration and community support bring our mission to life every day.

I am deeply grateful to our community stakeholders, whose financial and in-kind support allows us to sustain and grow programs and exhibits that make a real difference for children and families. I am equally inspired by our Board, staff, and volunteers, whose dedication and heart make our mission possible.

It is an honor to lead the Children’s Museum into its next chapter. I am committed to ensuring that our mission guides every decision, partnership, and experience, so children can explore, families can connect, and curiosity can be sparked in awe-inspiring ways for all.

Thank you for being part of our story. Together, we make our mission real, through the power of play.



*Kim Kleven*  
Kim Kleven

**Cathy Brown**  
PLAYWORKER

**Rachel Compart-Gemlo**  
DIRECTOR OF PLAY AND LEARNING

**Penny Conner**  
PLAYWORKER

**Krista Dinsmore**  
FRONT DESK ATTENDANT

**Ronald Evan**  
FACILITIES ASSISTANT

**Alyssa Hadler**  
EXHIBIT ASSISTANT

**Sarah Hamilton**  
GUEST ENGAGEMENT AND PLAY  
COORDINATOR

**Cheri Klecker**  
GUEST EXPERIENCE COORDINATOR

**Kim Kleven**  
CEO

**Annika Lowrey**  
PLAYWORKER

**Kim Luiken**  
DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS

**Katy Lyford**  
FRONT DESK ATTENDANT

**Mike McDougall**  
FACILITIES MANAGER

**Will McDougall**  
FACILITIES ASSISTANT

**Hallie O’Connor**  
EXHIBITS MANAGER

**Tasha Oliver**  
OUTDOOR EDUCATION AND  
ACCESS COORDINATOR

**Crystal Olson**  
DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT

**Heather Otto**  
VICE PRESIDENT OF OPERATIONS

**Kathryn Schumacher**  
PLAYWORKER

**Samantha Seifert**  
PLAYWORKER

**Jaci Sprague**  
VICE PRESIDENT OF  
DEVELOPMENT

**Sarah Strobel**  
PLAY AND LEARNING  
COORDINATOR



# 2025 YEAR IN REVIEW

**2,482**

Total active memberships.

**92,356**

Visitors to CMSM including members, guests, and group visitors.

**38**

Visitors have come from 38 other states.

**332**

CMSM welcomed visitors from 332 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

**756**  
**SCHOLARSHIP**  
**MEMBERSHIPS**

Scholarship memberships provided to families that experience barriers to the Museum. Qualifiers include EBT, Medical Assistance, Free/Reduced School Meals, WIC, Foster Care, and more.

*Total Value: \$127,764*

**690**  
**MUSEUMS FOR**  
**ALL ADMISSIONS**

*Museums for All is a nationwide program that offers discounted admission to those who qualify for public income-related assistance.*

*Total Value: \$21,020 In discounts*

**4**  
**SENSORY**  
**AWARENESS &**  
**ACCESSIBILITY**  
**PLAYTIMES**

Sensory Awareness and Accessibility Playtimes allow children and families with sensory challenges to experience the Museum when there are a limited number of visitors present.

*Total Value: \$2,000*

**50**  
**BLUE STAR**  
**MUSEUM**  
**FAMILIES**

Blue Star Museums is a partnership between the National Endowment for the Arts and Blue Star Families offering free admission to the nation's active-duty military personnel and their families.

*Total Value: \$1,924*

**5,074**  
**SCHOOL**  
**ADMISSIONS**

School Group Visits receive a 10% discount per student and 50% discount for chaperones and staff accompanying the experience.

*Total Value: \$12,820*

**128**  
**PARTNER**  
**ADMISSIONS**

CMSM collaborates with many organizations throughout the community to offer free and discounted admission for children and families. *More info on these partners on the following page.*

*Total Value: \$9,906*

## Gateway to Play

# IMPACT PARTNERS



Collaborative partnerships with child and family service organizations extend the Museum's impact throughout southern Minnesota

### 2025 KEY EVENTS AND PARTNERSHIPS:

- Welcomed 26 different organizations to our **3rd Annual Impact Partner Luncheon**
- 1000 Family Play Passes for **Feeding Our Community Partners** and 250 Family Play Passes for the **MVAC Backpack Community Fair** in Sibley County
- Free Admission for **YMCA Brother/Sister mentors & mentees**
- Engaged with **Teenage Parent Program (TAPP)**
- Participated in the **GMAUW Reading Festival**
- **Mankato Lions Club KidsSight Vision Clinics**
- Hosted "Single Caregiver of Children Resource Fair" with **LifeWorks Planning Center**
- Collaborated with **MSU Dental Hygiene** classes to offer Oral Health Care screening
- Drop off site for **Feeding Every Baby, inc.**
- Collaborated with **MSU's Center for Rural Behavioral Health Clinic** to support Social/Emotional programming

"Children deserve hands-on play regardless of someone's financial situations. In our case, with multiple children and their ages, they deserve a hands-on situation to take their mind away from their day-to-day. In our home, we take in children of various ages, and I know they would love to get out of the house and play. Children form bonds, they learn to play, and giving them that at a young age is important. I truly feel that children's museums are a gateway for families of young children to be able to experience that. I believe that my children can benefit from that."

-Foster Family Parent

# 2025 CORPORATE PARTNERS

## Directly supporting Gateway to Play

- 3M - New Ulm
- Abdo
- All American Foods, Inc.
- Alltech
- APX Construction Group
- Bolton & Menk, Inc.
- City of North Mankato
- CLA
- Connoisseur Media
- Crystal Valley
- Federated Insurance Co.
- Frandsen Bank & Trust
- Gislason & Hunter LLP
- Fidium
- ISG
- Jarraff Industries Inc.
- Jones Metal Products, Inc.
- Kato Moving & Storage
- KFMC, KSUM, and KEMJ Radio
- KNUJ
- Knutson Construction
- KOWZ/ KRUE
- MacLean Power Systems
- Mankato Clinic
- Mankato Motor Co
- Mankato Screw Products
- Mayo Clinic Health System
- MEI Total Elevator Solutions
- Midwest IT Systems, Inc.
- Minnesota State University, Mankato
- Minnesota Valley Federal Credit Union
- Minnesota Valley Pet Hospital
- Monarch Healthcare Management
- Nidec - Kato Engineering Inc.
- Oak Terrace Assisted Living
- Radio Mankato
- River's Edge Hospital
- Scheels
- Schwicker's Tecta America
- SERVPRO of Mankato/Owatonna
- Sign Pro Mankato
- Snell Motors
- Taylor Corporation
- The Orthopaedic & Fracture Clinic, P.A.
- United Prairie Bank
- Vanderberg Clean
- WEB Construction
- Workspace on 3





“Pollinators at Play is a living example of what happens when a community comes together around education, nature, and play. The smiles and curiosity of children exploring this space show why these partnerships matter.”

—Kim Kleven, Children's Museum of Southern Minnesota CEO



# POLLINATORS AT PLAY

powered by CenterPoint Energy Foundation

## Behind the Scenes: Pollinators at Play, Powered by Community Partnerships

The Museum is deeply grateful to CenterPoint Energy Foundation, whose leadership and support were pivotal every step of the way. Their belief in the power of play and environmental education helped shape an exhibit that blends stewardship and STEAM learning in a way that truly resonates with our community.

This exhibit, powered by the incredible support of the CenterPoint Energy Foundation, was also made possible thanks to the remarkable collaboration of Complete Construction, Total Lawn Care & Landscaping, APX, and Evenson Concrete Systems. These community partners stepped up in truly meaningful ways, lending equipment, expertise, and time—even as they were navigating their peak business periods.

We are truly thankful for their willingness to help bring this vision to life, despite the pressures of their own demanding schedules. Their flexibility,

generosity, and commitment to community partnership turned challenges into opportunities and made the space more vibrant, welcoming, and functional than we could have imagined.

This kind of collaboration, especially during the busiest times of year, is a true testament to the strength of our community and the shared belief in the importance of creating beautiful, educational, and inspiring experiences for children and families.

We also want to celebrate our incredible Museum team, especially Mike McDougall, Facilities Manager and Tasha Oliver, Butterfly House Coordinator. Their creativity, attention to detail, and hard work were instrumental in turning ideas into reality. Watching them cut the ribbon at the grand opening was a proud moment for all of us, a symbol of the teamwork and dedication behind this success.





## POLLINATORS AT PLAY

With generous support from the CenterPoint Energy Foundation, Pollinators at Play took flight in new ways this year. The season opened with a special release of live butterflies in the Butterfly House, setting the stage for months of hands-on learning and wonder.

Guests explored every stage of the monarch life cycle, from tiny caterpillars to shimmering chrysalises to graceful butterflies, and discovered the important role pollinators play in our ecosystem.

In September, the season concluded with the annual monarch tagging event. Families joined Museum staff to gently tag wild monarchs from our prairie gardens before releasing them to begin their migration south. Each participant received a certificate to follow their butterfly's journey, helping our community feel connected to a wider story of conservation and discovery.

We are very appreciative to the CenterPoint Energy Foundation and to every guest who helped make this season an inspiring celebration of pollinators in action.

## BUTTERFLIES RAISED

**170**

**MONARCHS**

**155**

**PAINTED  
LADIES**

**13**

**EASTERN BLACK  
SWALLOW TAILS**





// “At Nidec, we believe in the power of innovation and hands-on learning to inspire future engineers and builders. The Nidec Power Zone reflects our commitment to fostering curiosity and discovery by giving children a playful yet meaningful way to engage with energy concepts. We’re proud to partner with the Museum to help inspire the next generation.”

– Lori Schlueter,  
Senior Director of Operations,  
Nidec Power





## Power Up for Play: Nidec Power Zone Brings Energy and Innovation to the Children's Museum

In 2025, the Children's Museum of Southern Minnesota proudly launched the Nidec Power Zone, an immersive exhibit that brings energy, motion, and engineering concepts to life through hands-on, play-based learning. Made possible through a partnership with Nidec Power, a global leader in motor and power generation solutions, the Nidec Power Zone reflects a shared belief that today's curious children are tomorrow's engineers, builders, and innovators. Together, CMSM and Nidec Power created a dynamic environment where children and caregivers explore how energy works, not through lectures or screens, but through meaningful play.

At the heart of the exhibit is the Power Tower, where children generate

electricity by turning a crank, watching lights glow, fans spin, and objects lift into the air. Through this simple yet powerful interaction, abstract concepts like energy transfer and motion become tangible and exciting. Nearby, the Air Cars station invites young innovators to design and test wind-powered vehicles. Children experiment with shape, weight, and airflow, learning firsthand that problem-solving often requires trial, adjustment, and persistence. It is engineering in its most accessible form: playful, experimental, and confidence-building.

The exhibit also includes a rotating space featuring beloved Museum favorites such as Rigamajig®, Blue Blocks, Light Play, and the Wind Tunnel. Children test aerodynamics by launching scarves, parachutes, and other materials into swirling air currents, transforming curiosity into discovery. The Nidec Power Zone is an immersive space where children explore energy, engineering, and problem-solving in ways that are both fun and meaningful, inspiring creativity, resilience, and a sense of possibility.

“Thanks to our partnership with Nidec Power, the Nidec Power Zone is an immersive space where children can explore energy, engineering, and problem-solving in ways that are both fun and meaningful. We’re excited to see the creativity and confidence this exhibit inspires.”

—Kim Kleven, CEO of the Children's Museum of Southern Minnesota

# Programming & EVENTS

A Year of Playful Discovery



The Children's Museum of Southern Minnesota continued to grow as a vibrant hub of play, learning, and community connection throughout the year. Across seasons and school calendars, the Museum invited children and caregivers into experiences that blended curiosity, creativity, and real-world content in joyful, hands-on ways.

Signature annual events transformed familiar spaces into immersive learning environments. **AG EDUCATION DAY** brought the region's strong agricultural heritage to life through interactive displays, large-scale equipment, and sensory-rich play zones that helped children understand where their food comes from and how farming shapes daily life. **FIRE SAFETY EDUCATION DAY** welcomed families to explore fire trucks, meet firefighters, and participate in engaging safety demonstrations, turning important preparedness lessons into memorable, child-centered experiences.



2025 SNAPSHOT

664

PROGRAMMING  
HOURS

27

CURIOSITY  
CAMPS

49

SPECIAL  
EVENTS

## CURIOSITY CAMPS

This summer, the Museum offered 11 weeks of themed, three-day camps that encouraged children to dive deeply into play, projects, and discovery. Each week built on ideas and learning through creativity and exploration.

Alongside summer camps, the Museum continued its popular Early Out camps, inspired by MAPS Early Out days and open to all interested children. These sessions have cultivated a wonderful group of returning campers!



Led by highly qualified Museum staff who are Minnesota Licensed Educators, each camp ensured a high-quality experience for all participants, combining developmentally appropriate content with an emphasis on creativity and enjoyment. Feedback from families was overwhelmingly positive, with parents praising the camps as valuable experiences that allowed children to return home full of stories, new knowledge, and friendships.

Throughout the year, layered programming deepened impact and extended learning. Sensory-based offerings helped children build language, math, fine motor, and social-emotional skills through play that is accessible and inviting. Special experiences such as the **KID'S ART SHOW**, an **INSTRUMENT PETTING ZOO** with the Mankato Symphony Orchestra, **CLAY DAYS** with pottery wheels, and pollinator-focused activities tied to **POLLINATORS AT PLAY** gave children opportunities to create, experiment, and participate in both science and the arts.

Strong partnerships with local organizations, sponsors, and supporters made all of this possible, expanding access and keeping experiences welcoming and inclusive. Together, these efforts showcase a Museum that is full of life, rooted in community, and dedicated to inspiring learning through discovery.





**Nidec Power**  
First Place



**ISG**  
Second Place



**CenterPoint Energy**  
Third Place



**Kiwanis Holiday Lights**  
Top Fundraiser & People's  
Choice Award



**Jennifer Wanderscheid**  
Best Dressed



## IGNITE THE NIGHT

### Garden of Wings

The Children's Museum of Southern Minnesota welcomed the community to an evening in full bloom at its annual fundraising event: Ignite the Night.

Presented by **TAYLOR**

This year's Ignite the Night theme, *Garden of Wings*, inspired an evening of color, creativity, and celebration. The event brought together community members, local businesses, and friends of the Museum for an evening of play, connection, and friendly competition. The spirit of collaboration and generosity was evident throughout, reflecting the Museum's mission to inspire learning through discovery. Thanks to the creativity and dedication of the event committee, referees, and judges, the evening was seamless and full of joyful engagement. Plans for next year's *Power Up!* theme promise even more excitement and inspiration!

#### 2025 TEAMS:

- Brennan Companies
- CenterPoint Energy
- Degroods
- First National Bank
- ISG
- Kiwanis Holiday Lights
- Mankato Clinic
- Nidec Power
- Orthopaedic and Fracture Clinic
- Schwickert's Tecta America
- Walmart Distribution Center



**200 GUESTS**



**\$66,888 RAISED**



**11 TEAMS**



Ignite the Night MC's:  
Jessica Blais and Mollie Fisher



Ignite the Night Committee: Becky Wagner, Carrie Kijenski, Heather Von Bank, Jamie Jacobs, Jenny Benzel, Josh Mazur, Nicole Bardon, Jessica Wolfe, Jenna Worrell.



Ignite the Night Refs



“We are incredibly grateful to our Ignite the Night committee, one of many who put in tireless hours to support the Museum. This team spent countless hours sorting through loose parts, planning, decorating, and laughing to bring this event to life. We were proud to partner with our presenting sponsor, Taylor Corporation, and introduce our new Garden of Wings theme, which aligned beautifully with our mission and our Pollinators at Play exhibit. Support from sponsors and volunteers like these makes Ignite the Night a meaningful and successful fundraiser for the Children’s Museum of Southern Minnesota.”

—Jaci Sprague, Vice President of Development





**CHILDREN'S  
MUSEUM**

of Southern Minnesota

Children's Museum of Southern Minnesota  
224 Lamm St  
Mankato, MN 56001

**PLAY.**  
IT'S WHAT WE DO.

2025

# PLAY BOOK



**CHILDREN'S MUSEUM**  
of Southern Minnesota

