



Groundbreaking

2023 Annual Report

OUR MISSION

To shine a bright light on the **power of play to spark** children's learning, **strengthen** families, and **build** community connections.

Its dynamic, interactive environments and experiences are a **gateway to the world** and its people for children and families of all backgrounds.

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HIGHLIGHTS & HIGH ENERGY IN 2023!

2023 was an incredible year for us, filled with milestones and partnerships that are paving (and landscaping!) the way for an even brighter future. The museum team and our incredible group of volunteers raised additional funds to overcome rising construction costs. The generosity of individuals, businesses, and organizations fuels the progress of our building project and reinforces the value of investing in the future of our children. In 2024, we look to raise critical funds to staff, develop programs, and pack your new museum with all the amenities for an equitable, inclusive, and joyful play experience!

In lock step with our construction and fundraising efforts, our museum team and volunteers brought the energy to an impressive 70 outreach events throughout Central Minnesota – attended by more than 8,000 kids and caring adults! Meeting families in our service area and sharing news of the children's museum has created a buzz throughout the region that we know will continue to grow. And our interactive pop-up exhibit experiences at regional libraries have ignited young minds' curiosity and passion for play and learning.

Another highlight of the year was the visit from Minnesota's Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan to our construction site. It was an honor to showcase our vision and progress, and her presence underscored the significance of our mission to enrich the lives of children across Minnesota. In May 2023, the State Legislature awarded Great River Children's Museum a cash grant for construction costs. With both private and public funding, we are fabricating exhibit spaces that will be unique amongst the universe of children's museums.

And with that, I have to share how lucky we were to engage with Native Skywatchers Design Studio (NSDS) to create moving art that will be projected on the ceiling of our Headwaters exhibit. NSDS is led by Annette Lee, an astrophysicist and professional artist, who shares her profound understanding of the movement of the stars and the stories that the constellations hold through visual art. The experience she is molding will surely be a highlight for the dreamers and the peace seekers who visit the museum. We cannot wait for you to experience it.

We are filled with gratitude for the unwavering support of our community, volunteers, staff, and donors. Together, we are laying the foundation for a brighter, more vibrant future for the children of Central Minnesota and beyond.

I am personally grateful for the love and exuberance that our community shares. With each milestone we achieve together, we come closer to realizing our vision of a world where every child and caring adult has access to the magnificent power of play!

Thank you for being a part of this incredible journey, and for helping us chart the course to opening day!

Cassandra Miles



Cassie Miles
Executive Director



PIECE BY PIECE

Building a children's museum is a lot like putting together a puzzle! Each piece represents a unique aspect of the project—architectural and exhibit design, educational programming, community engagement.

The process requires careful planning, creativity, and collaboration, ensuring that, when all the pieces come together, they form an engaging space where children and families can play and explore together!

Summertime by George!
Kiddos built their own creations piece by piece using waffle blocks and their imaginations!



Jill Amsberry
Pediatrics Specialist
CentraCare



Becky Coborn
Community Advocate



Jane Ellison
Infant Mental Health
Specialist
Ellison Center



Heidi L. Everett
Professor of Strategic
Communication
*St. Cloud State
University*



Tom Gronos
GeoComm
Founder and Board
Member

Not Pictured

Kate Flynn
Interim Principal
Early Childhood
Family Education
District 742

Not Pictured



Naima Hussein
Social Worker
*Hennepin County
Human Services*



Buddy King
COO
*HigherWorks
Collaborative*



Sara McKeever
Parent Educator
Early Childhood and
Family Education
District 742



Vince Miles
Licensed
Psychologist
*Miles Psychological
Services, LLC*



Mardi Noyes
VP of Human
Resources
Microbiologics

Greg Palm
Retired Dean of Early
Childhood & Family
Studies *St. Cloud State
University, Author*



Greg Reigstad
Retired Administrator
*St. Cloud Technical &
Community College*



**Monica
Sequra-Schwartz**
Community Advocate
Bid Specialist
Entrust Corporation



Jerry VonKorff
Attorney
*Rinke Noonan
Attorneys at Law*

2023 GRM BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Building Block(s) Party!

At our Groundbreaking Ceremony on October 7, 2023 kids got an up close look at real construction vehicles with our Touch-a-Construction Truck activity!



How do YOU Quantify Fun?

2,000 pounds of sand, 177 gallons of oobleck, and 300 water balloons, of course!

On October 7, more than **1,000 people** from **13 counties** and **35 zip codes** helped us celebrate a historic milestone, breaking ground!

At our Building Block(s) Party, families celebrated with hardhats and endless smiles. They even used Wrecking Ball Balloons to “knock down” the museum walls, making for a true groundbreaking!

 **2,000**
Pounds of Sand

177 
Gallons of Oobleck

300 
Water Balloons

40 
Gallons of Ice Cream



"It's the things we play with and the people who help us play that make a great difference in our lives."

Fred Rogers
American Children's Television Host

WELCOME TO THE POWER OF PLAY

Legendary children's program host Fred Rogers once said, "It's the things we play with and the people who help us play that make a great difference in our lives." This sentiment gets to the core of Great River Children's Museum.

Our mission is to shine a bright light on the power of play to spark children's learning, strengthen families, and build community connections.

Here's what we mean by that:

The Things We Play With Spark Children's Learning

Research has shown time and again that when children play, they are learning and developing invaluable skills that will be used throughout their lifetimes.

These skills include cognitive development, like concentration, problem-solving, and creativity. You can see this in action when a child constructs tall structures that may wobble and topple in an impressive crash as they sort out the physics and structural integrity of their structures and they begin again.

Through play, children hone social skills, including collaboration, communication, and understanding different perspectives. Whether challenging one another to a race to the top of our future Climber to the Clouds exhibit or asking, "What are you eating?" in the Community Connections Global Kitchen, every encounter can be with new friends just waiting to be discovered.

Great River Children's Museum will help foster physical and emotional development too, as kids meander from exhibit to exhibit to find their favorite activities or hop around on stumps in our outdoor adventure area. Some activities will delight and inspire. Others may puzzle or frustrate. With thousands of square-feet of exhibit and program areas to explore, each child can choose their preferred path as they wander through different play spaces.

Finally, play has the power to unleash creative expression and innovation as kids' exercise their innate curiosity. So many memories will come from acting on the simple question, "What if we did this?"

Sharpening these skills at Great River Children's Museum and beyond will instill a sense of confidence in children as they continue to make sense of the world around them.



Glen Palm
Museum Co-founder
Board Chair

Those Who Help Us Play Strengthen Families

Great River Children's Museum is focused on creating a quality, joyful experience where families build memories together. To that end, we are creating an environment where kids and their caregivers can have fun and learn in a variety of ways.

Playful learning happens on a spectrum from free play (where children choose what they want to do and how to do it) to guided play to structured play (with instructions). Caregiver icons will be located throughout the museum experience to help facilitate play. These icons include prompts and roles caregivers can join in while at the museum, so children feel safe and secure while they are free to explore.

These roles that caregivers try out include:

- **Encourager:** To support exploration and free play
- **Observer:** To watch and learn about your children in a museum environment
- **Playmate:** To enjoy learning, having fun, and being silly together
- **Emotion Coach:** To support social interactions and emotional regulation
- **Facilitator/Guide:** To ask questions, share stories, and add information

Great River Children's Museum recognizes that sometimes caregivers are unsure how to support or facilitate play. We also recognize that sometimes caregivers just need a break during their visit. The caregiver icons will help ensure all visitors can make the most of their play time at the museum.

Those Who Help Us Play Build Community Connections

Our region is a rich tapestry of family experiences and cultural traditions that Great River Children's Museum celebrates throughout its inclusive environment. We are committed to all families feeling welcome and able to play when our doors open.

Great River Children's Museum's core exhibits foster awareness and understanding of our larger community through Meet Your Neighbor stations, diverse art work, the Global Cafe & Market, symbols and various languages on museum signage, and integration of traditions that make our region unique.

We also strive to provide accessible spaces and programming, so all children can engage fully in exhibits and activities, promoting social integration and mutual understanding.

By embracing inclusivity of backgrounds, traditions, and learning styles, Great River Children's Museum empowers all children to explore, learn, and play together, fostering a sense of belonging and enriching their educational experiences.

All of this is what we mean by the power of play. And we can't wait to open our doors and welcome you all to the exciting world of playful learning.

2023 BY THE NUMBERS

While the construction of Great River Children's Museum was in progress, you experienced an exciting year with our team of staff and volunteers hitting the road again with pop-up experiences!

This year, you helped Great River Children's Museum Programming and Outreach set a new record. From farmer's markets to art fairs to local festivals, you saw us participate in a total of **53 community events** across Minnesota.

Your smiles and interactions were cherished by us every step of the way. You also enjoyed our pop-up exhibits at **27 branches** of Great River Regional Library. Your support was incredible, with **175 volunteers** contributing **2,897 hours**. At our Building Block(s) Party alone, you put in over **1,000 hours!**

Thanks to you, we had over **8,000 interactions!**



LOOSE PARTS, SOLID DREAMS: Museum Charts Course to Grand Opening

Public Phase of Capital Campaign Launches

Did you know that a children's museum is made up of thousands of loose parts?

While you'll see significant changes to the outside structure of Great River Children's Museum building in 2024, this is just one part of the journey to grand opening. At the same time, a lot is happening to prepare the inside.

State funding awarded from the Minnesota Legislature in the 2023 session – combined with millions of dollars secured from generous donors – allowed Great River Children's Museum to begin construction of the museum. This exciting milestone also allowed us to pivot and focus on filling the museum with all of those loose parts.

Each of our eight core exhibits will offer an array of interactive elements, ensuring there's something for everybody to explore and enjoy. To help support these interactive elements, Great River Children's Museum launched the public phase of its capital campaign in July 2023.

As we Chart the Course to Grand Opening, community members are invited to grab an oar (or paddle!) and help navigate downstream. With everyone's support, Great River Children's will fill exhibits with loose parts that will ignite the imagination of kids and their caring adults in our Central Minnesota Community!

Every dollar helps:

\$50 - Will stock the kitchen in Loon Landing Apartment with all the items to whip up a culinary adventure!

\$100 - Will provide tools for two families to cook a meal together in our teaching kitchen!

\$150 - Fills our Headwaters exhibit with native Minnesota fish plushies that you can catch again and again!

\$200 - Adds hand-crafted items from around the world to our Community Connections exhibit!

\$350 - Puts props and real musical instruments on stage in our North Star Theater!

\$500 - Fills our Great Explorations Quarry with rocks and blocks!

Plus, gifts to the campaign will support access to the museum. Access and inclusion are core to providing children and families of all backgrounds with opportunities to play, follow their curiosity, and discover their potential. Donations will provide families access to play by offering scholarships and offsetting admission costs, hosting sensory friendly times and activities, and creating specially designed programs to meet the needs of our shared communities.

Just like the loose parts that make up the inside of the museum, every donation to Chart the Course adds a unique piece to our journey. Whether you're stocking a culinary adventure or filling our theater with props, your contribution helps create unforgettable experiences for children and families in Central Minnesota.

Together, let's build a playground of possibilities where curiosity knows no bounds!



Chart the Course
To Grand Opening!



Donate Today!



“What a **gem** this is going to be for your community. This is truly going to be a space for **community connection.**”

- Peggy Flanagan Lt. Governor of Minnesota

Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan (pictured left) visited the future home of Great River Children's Museum April 7, 2023 as part of a state funding request project site tour. She was joined by local State Representative Dan Wolgamott. GRCM was awarded \$7 million in state funding. Allowing the museum to begin construction.

FINANCIALS

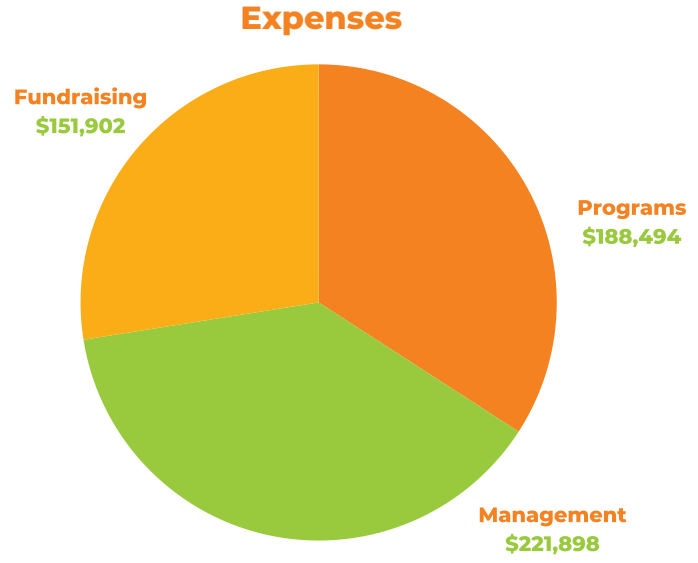
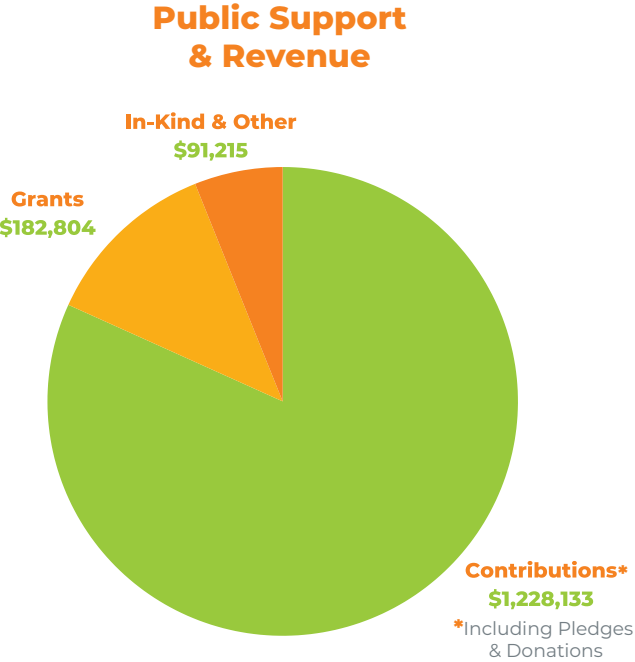
FROM DECEMBER 31, 2023

Cash, Receivables, and Prepays	\$2,831,013
Cash Restricted to Capital Campaign	\$2,473,440
Contributions Receivable	\$2,421,489
Property and Equipment	\$3,554,717
Total Assets	\$11,280,659

Current Liabilities	\$181,842
Net Assets without Donor Restriction	\$2,520,595
Net Assets with Donor Restriction	\$8,578,222
Total Net Assets	\$11,098,817

Total Liabilities and Net Assets	\$11,280,659
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For brevity, the financial information presented here is excerpted and does not include the statement of cash flows and footnotes that provide a detailed picture of Great River Children’s Museum’s financial position.



HONOR ROLL

Great River Children’s Museum team is grateful for the support of those who share our vision. On the next few pages, we are recognizing everyone who has pledged to our capital campaign and given support for start-up costs from 2020 through December 31, 2023.

Legacy Circle
\$1,000,000+

Barbara & Rollie Anderson*
Coborn Family Foundation*
Cross Works Foundation*
John & Cherie McDowall*

Leadership Trust
\$500,000 to \$999,999

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BCI Construction, Inc.^
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Country Hearth Breads
Don Helgeson & Sue Shepard*
Dr. John & Joyce Matsuura*
Initiative Foundation
Minnwest Bank
Sysco

Adventure Guides
\$50,000 to \$99,999

Bob & Lisa Neitzke
Charles Ehlen
Dick & Mimi Bitzan Family Fund of Central Minnesota Community Foundation
Glen Palm & Jane Ellison
Granite Charitable Great River Children’s Museum Fund
Todd & Kyoko Zaun



This work is funded in part with money from the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund created with the vote of the people of Minnesota on November 4, 2008.



Thank you to Liberty Bank for the generous donation of their building.

Creators Club
\$10,000 to \$49,999

Anonymous
Donna Kuhl
Dorothy Gorecki
Elizabeth Brunsvold
Farmers & Merchants State Bank of Pierz
Greg Reigstad
Jeff & Melinda Gau
John & Mary Weitzel
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Theodore & Andrea Truitt
United Way of Central Minnesota
US Bank
Xcel Energy Foundation

* Exhibit Sponsor
^ In-Kind Contribution

Great River Supporters

\$1,000 to \$9,999

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Kelli Mrozek
Kelly Gully
Kendra & Michael Norton Dando

Kensington Bank
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Kirk Jeffrey & Frances Long
Kristine Smith
Kyle & Natasha Chapman
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To Grand Opening!

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