

Jumping In!

2024 Annual Report



EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

Lessons learned from kids, puddles, and chickens

If there is one thing I've learned in the five years since becoming executive director of an emerging children's museum, it's that kids will always find a way to make the most of an environment. When we invited families to the museum construction site on June 18, 2024 for the obligatory "shovel" photo, the children did not disappoint!

After several days of rain (much-needed for our region but not-so-much-needed for construction!), we arrived at what looked more like a giant pond than the makings of a museum. The adults were like, "darn!" But, to borrow words from an E.E. Cummings' poem, our guests found the site "mud-luscious" and "puddle wonderful." As you can see by the photos here, their enthusiasm was contagious!

Charting our course to grand opening was an ongoing juxtaposition of downers and delights, but every day the urge to play and explore grew. Especially as the three-story steel structure to support our Climber to the Clouds took shape, or we received photos and videos of every exhibit component in production... from campers to bridges to logs and more.

Despite unexpected setbacks, I was proud to say that we were set to open in 2025. And with that, we invited all new surprises. What do I mean by that? Let me share one of my favorite memories from the last few years.

In 2020, we hosted a traveling exhibit featuring Curious George. It was the height of the pandemic, so we welcomed

small "COVID clusters" of families. In between each visit we'd deep clean exhibit components. The exhibit featured all sorts of fun activities to explore from a grocery store to an assembly line to a farmyard and even a mini-golf area.

We discovered after the first visit that the golf balls from mini-golf disappeared. After further exploration during our deep clean, we found the golf balls inside the chicken puppets in the farmyard. Some brilliant children decided the golf balls looked like eggs, and they brought them to the chickens to be laid in the coop.

From our first day welcoming guests into Great River Children's Museum, we will discover all sorts of interesting ways children and their caregivers play. Who knows what we will find at the top of the Climber to the Clouds, "frying" on the stovetop in the global kitchen, or floating downstream in Great Big River, and that's all part of the fun.

We don't ever expect things will go according to plan. That's why we work at a children's museum. As we head into our first year of operations, I look forward to the unexpected.

So jump in, explore, and play. We will be ready.

Cassandra Miles



PUDDLE WONDERFUL

It's been said that the most memorable days end with the dirtiest clothes. This was one day for the memory books! On June 18, 2024, families splished, splashed, and jumped into fun at Great River Children's Museum construction site. Much-needed rain in the region turned an historic groundbreaking shovel photo into a magnificent mud-filled adventure for everyone who came.



A FRONT-ROW SEAT TO AN AWESOME MUSEUM BUILD

I feel privileged to have had a front-row seat as Great River Children’s Museum became a reality.

We began 2024 approving a strategic plan to guide us through grand opening in 2025 and our first full year of operation.

Four main areas of focus emerged as a strategic framework:

1. Create a place that will wow
2. Raise funds for sustainable operations
3. Ensure a strong Board and
4. Build a positive visitor experience.

I will share a few highlights of this framework here.

Creating a place that will WOW

Creating a place that will WOW is no simple task.

Work in 2024 dramatically transformed the former Liberty Bank building into the museum complex. It was fun to watch the bell tower come down and the framing go up for the Climber to the Clouds exhibit. The back door to the bank became our main entrance, and the outdoor Oxbow Adventure area took over the former drive-through (see photos at right).

The team of Tom Grones, Mike Helgeson, Vince Miles, Nick Hasslen, Cassie Miles and myself met weekly, and I came to appreciate the complexity of this project. Incredible coordination is required to make sure space design and all components fit with exhibit pieces being fabricated. It was a team effort from the architects to the exhibit designers and fabricators to all the skilled tradespeople under the direction of the construction management team.

In October 2024, I visited Split Rock Studios to see exhibit fabrication. Seeing early design renderings become actual physical parts was amazing. We could finally see and touch the small camper for the toddler park in the Headwaters exhibit and learn about work done to ensure it is safe and durable for the museum’s littlest visitors.

I am grateful to everyone for their creative problem-solving on unanticipated issues to keep the project moving forward and to create a space that will WOW.

Raise funds for sustainable operations

Fundraising is essential to create a sustainable financial foundation for the museum. To that end, we welcomed Kelly Doss as development director in August. Kelly hit the ground running with a successful 1st Annual Game Night Gala in November 2024, which attracted more than 200 people and raised almost \$200,000 for the museum. Thanks to event sponsors and volunteers who made this an awesome event.

Ensure a strong board

New committee structures were established for our transition from a working board to a governing board. We began leadership succession and recruitment of new board members as most original board members’ terms expire in the coming years. We added five new board members—Gina Acevedo, Kelly Gully, Jessica Najarian Bell, John Waletzko and Sahur Hussein—and welcomed Tom Grones and Heidi Everett as vice-chair and secretary of the Executive Committee. Thanks to Buddy King and Monica Segura-Schwartz for their leadership in these roles for two terms.

Build a positive visitor experience

The board discussed operational policies to put in place to create a positive visitor experience. The Education and Experience Committee examined ways to evaluate visitor experiences and planned for soft openings to better understand how the museum exhibits and environment impact visitors. Are we a welcoming environment for all? Are we providing playful learning experiences through our exhibits, enriching parent-child relationships, and building new community connections among our visitors? This focus will require ongoing vigilance to ensure we are living up to our mission and values.

I also want to acknowledge our staff in 2024, Kylie Conover, Hailey Thielen, and Heshini Diaz, and the many volunteers who continued to support outreach activities. Their work to engage the community and build anticipation for museum opening was essential.

A heartfelt thanks to Cassie Miles for her leadership and her capacity to manage the complexities and uncertainty around construction, finances, supporting and building a staff to launch a museum.

We finally, with certainty, moved beyond the question, “When is it going to open?” to the statement, “Welcome to our awesome museum”.



Glen Palm
Museum Co-founder
Board Chair



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BUILDING ON A LEGACY OF FAMILY AND INNOVATION

SCR (formerly known as St. Cloud Refrigeration) knows family—it's been at the heart of their business for over six decades. What started with the Fitch family in 1957 has grown into a company driven by generations of expertise, quality, and service. Today, the third generation of the Fitch family, second generation of the Welty family (SCR's first salesperson), and a dedicated team of long-time employees, continue to shape SCR's success.

From humble beginnings—selling and repairing appliances, maintaining bulk milk coolers and soda fountains—to evolving into an industry leader, SCR has embraced innovation. SCR expanded in the '70s with heating, ventilation, and cooling. The company further pushed the envelope in the '80s and beyond with custom sheet metal fabrication, comprehensive food service solutions, and building automation.

At its core, SCR is about more than just business—it's about people. It's about families supporting families, whether in the workplace or the greater community. That's why SCR is proud to sponsor the Tinker Workshop at Great River Children's Museum.

Introducing Tinker Workshop: Where Kids and Families Build Big Ideas

There's no shortage of imagination at Great River Children's Museum, and Tinker Workshop is where creativity gets hands-on. This dynamic maker space is packed with tools, materials, and endless possibilities—giving kids the chance to build, experiment, and, of course, tinker! Under the guidance of their caregivers and trained staff, children will use real tools to bring their ideas to life in a safe and supportive environment. More than just crafting, Tinker Workshop helps kids develop confidence, problem-solving skills, and fine motor abilities, all while having a blast.

What's in Store at Tinker Workshop?

From building cardboard cities to launching with marshmallow catapults, this space will be a hub for field trips, camps, and independent exploration, reinforcing classroom learning with real-world skills.

Generations Learning and Growing Together

For SCR, family is everything. And in Central Minnesota, family is more than just a group of people—it's a community that teaches, models, and fosters growth across generations. By supporting Tinker Workshop, SCR is investing in the innovators of tomorrow, ensuring that creativity, collaboration, and hands-on learning continue to thrive at home and beyond.



SCR (formerly known as St. Cloud Refrigeration) is proud to sponsor the Tinker Workshop at Great River Children's Museum.



ENGINEERING STARTS WITH CURIOSITY

“Innovation starts with curiosity. We are proud to support a space where kids can build, test, and discover the exciting world and learn in their own way!”

- Tom and Joyce Schlough



Tom and Joyce Schlough are proud sponsors of the Everyday Engineering exhibit at Great River Children's Museum.

Engineering is all around us. From the roads we drive on, to the electricity that powers our devices, and even to the countertops where we make our meals or finish homework. And engineering innovation has been the cutting edge – quite literally --for Park Industries since its founding in 1953.

With innovative thinking, problem solving, and invention, Park Industries has developed the Hydrasplit stone splitter, diamond saws, CNC routers and more to become North America's largest stone and countertop equipment manufacturer.

The St. Cloud based company is in its third generation of family ownership. Tom and Joyce retired in 2014 and are proud sponsors of the Everyday Engineering exhibit at Great River Children's Museum.

In this play space, kids discover the principles and concepts behind engineering, starting with a focus on creative thinking. At the heart of this exhibit is the freedom to innovate, experiment, and improve.

What will you build today? The exhibit's construction site is just waiting to be turned into something spectacular.

Kids will also test their ingenuity on the magnetic gear wall and gain a new appreciation for all that gears make possible.

How does the shape of a slope affect how fast a car goes? Kids will experiment with a racetracks to see which slope produces the best result. And long after they've resolved the scientific questions, the racetrack continues to provide endless entertainment.

Plus, kids will find ample opportunity to manipulate colorful wave lengths, predict and test pulley strength, and have a blast with air tubes.

“Innovation starts with curiosity. We are proud to support a space where kids can build, test, and discover the exciting world and learn in their own way!” Tom and Joyce Schlough



A Fitting Tribute Filled with Grace



Great Explorations exhibit will be a haven for our littlest visitors to climb, roll, wobble and tumble amongst the soft trees, stones, grassy knolls, bridges and more.

While toddler nests are embedded throughout the museum, Great Explorations is an exhibit just for our littlest learners, up to age three. It features a hollow tree for exploring. Padded surfaces to aid balance and dexterity (and soft places to land!). And curious children can delight in the surprise of seeing what's behind a curtain, in the magic of a mirror, or the cause-and-effect relationships when they engage with buttons, spinners, and peek-a-boo doors. Caregivers can join in the thrill of discovery while learning more about their children's development.

It's just the type of place Macy Grace, daughter of Matt and Aimee McDowall, and granddaughter of John and Cherie McDowall, would've loved.

Macy was a joyful child who brightened every room. She loved to jump and dance. Her specialty was rearranging the dishwasher. And, she loved to tag along on adventures with her two big brothers.

To celebrate the life and spirit of Macy Grace, the McDowall's are proud sponsors of Great Explorations. And within the exhibit, a vibrant, whimsical space bears her name.

McDowall Company's history has spanned 127 years and five generations. The company is known for providing high quality innovative solutions, customized service, and support in commercial HVAC, commercial roofing, and architectural exteriors, installation, and service.



Murals in Macy's Place
by Andrea Burris and
Shelly Chambers.



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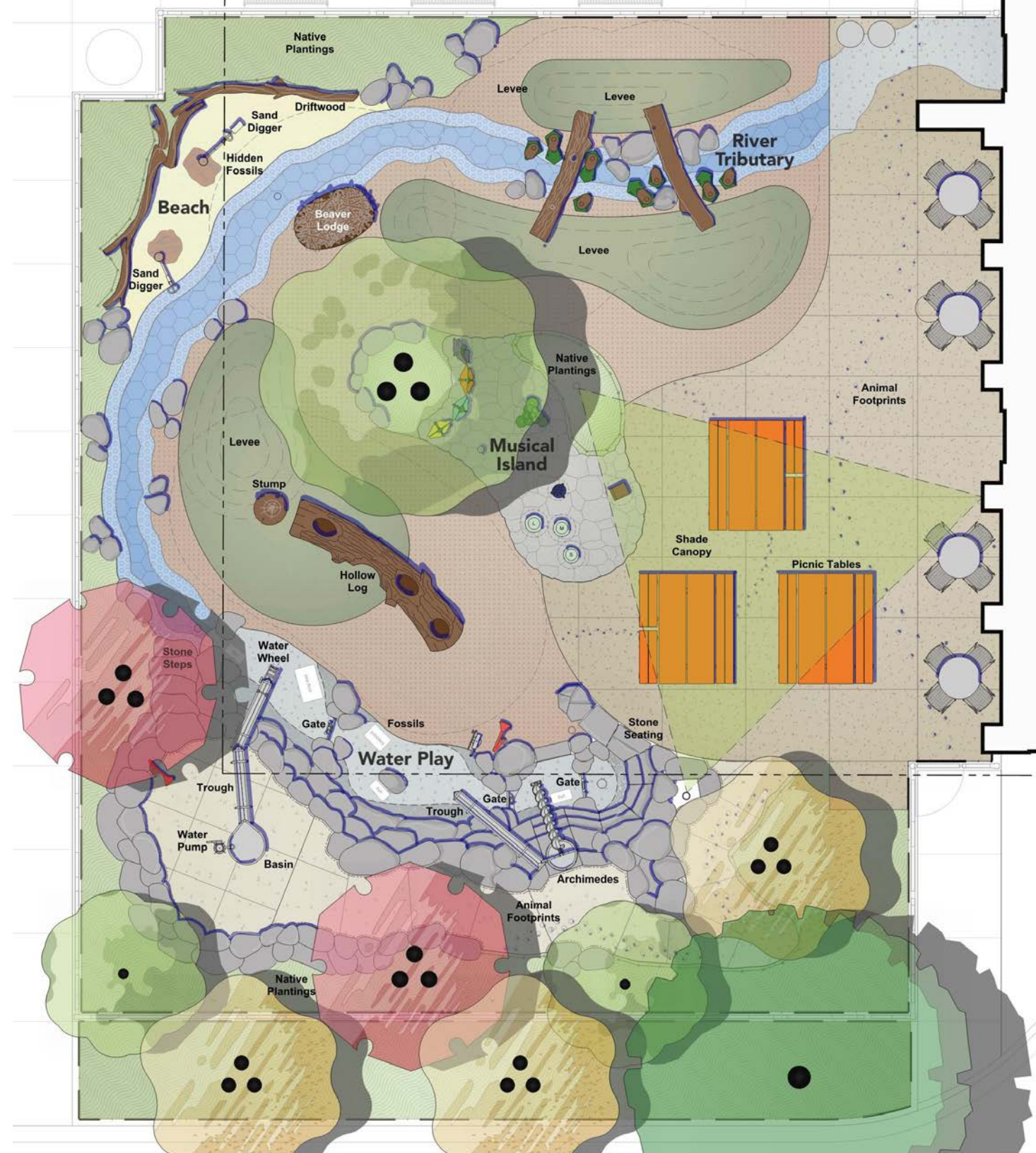


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Not pictured: **Kate Flynn** Interim Principal Early Childhood Family Education



OXBOW OUTDOOR EXHIBIT

Ox-bow (noun):
A U-shaped bend or
wide river meander

Great River Children's Museum teamed up with Damon Farber Landscape Architects and Fireflies Play Environments to create our Oxbow Outdoor Exhibit. This playscape will be filled with native plants, sandy beaches, and rocky shores.

Kids will navigate giant, 14-foot cattails, stretching up to the sky! They can crawl over, under, and through a fallen log and beaver den or delight at the process of moving water with an Archimedes screw.

This will be an ever-changing sensory experience to explore again and again.



WELL, CHUTE! THAT WAS FUN! 1st Annual Game Night Gala - A Winner

Whether spinning on the dance floor or taking a spin for the life-size game board, attendees at our 1st Annual Game Night Gala were all winners.

On November 16, more than 200 museum fans gathered at Granite Innovations and more than **\$200,000** was raised for operations, programming, and access. **Whoop! Whoop!**

Sponsors were treated to a hard-hat tour of the museum construction sight. Plus! They got a sneak peek at the captivating, multi-sensory art being created by Native Skywatchers for the museum. Native Skywatchers teaches that Indigenous people traditionally practiced a sustainable way of living and engineering through a living and participatory relationship with the above and below, sky and earth. The ceiling artwork being created for the sky of our Headwaters Exhibit will capture the imagination of museum goers as it cycles through a 24-hour period of sights and sounds every 20 minutes.

Plans are underway for the 2025 gala. What game will inspire us this time?



BIG THANKS TO OUR GAME NIGHT GALA EVENT SPONSORS AND IN-KIND DONORS

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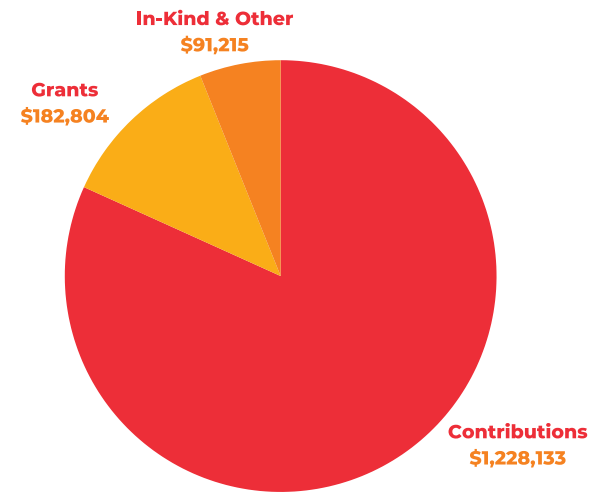
FINANCIALS SNAPSHOT

FROM DECEMBER 31, 2024

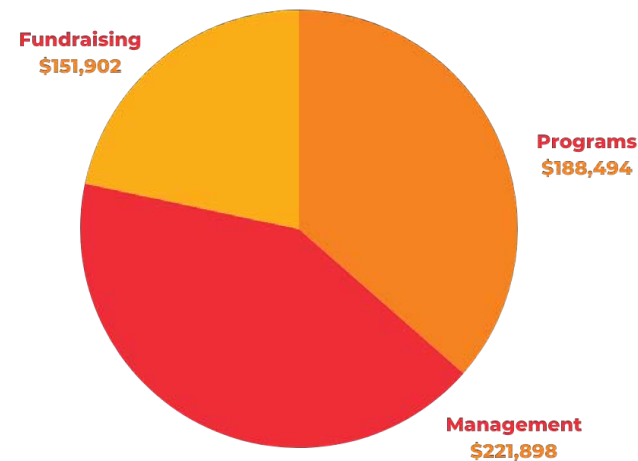
For brevity, the financial information presented here is excerpted and does not include the statement of cash flows and footnotes that provide a detailed picture of Great River Children's Museum's financial position.

Cash, Receivables, and Prepaids	\$1,807,789
Cash Restricted to Capital Campaign	\$304,936
Contributions Receivable	\$2,263,063
Property and Equipment	\$12,963,842
Total Assets	\$17,339,630
Current Liabilities	\$2,880,827
Net Assets without Donor Restriction	\$3,552,132
Net Assets with Donor Restriction	\$10,906,671
Total Net Assets	\$14,458,803
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	\$17,339,630

Public Support & Revenue



Expenses



HONOR ROLL OF DONORS

* Exhibit Sponsor
^ In-Kind Contribution

Great River Children's Museum is grateful for the support of those who share our vision. On the next few pages, we recognize everyone who pledged to our capital campaign and gave support for start-up costs from 2020 through December 31, 2024.



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



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.

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