

Mississippi Children's Museum Provides Perfect Opportunity

by Amanda Box

MFA was formed in 1938 to guard and grow Mississippi's forests, and that is still our goal today. Since 1938 MFA members have been the leaders in forestry conservation, management and education so that we can use our state's greatest natural resource for our needs today and ensure that the forests will be in better condition for future generations. We go to great lengths to educate and inform Mississippians about forestry because if we don't, all the knowledge, innovation, and progress will be lost.

Many of our education efforts go towards children. As responsible conservationists, MFA members want children to continue the legacy of responsible forestland conservation for many generations to come. It is also a priority to inspire children to appreciate the forestland that provides such abundant benefits for Mississippians.

MFA is not alone in our concern for educating children. Started by the Junior League of Jackson and joined by many partners, the Mississippi Children's Museum (MCM) will use Mississippi's richness and diversity to reach children in a unique way. "If we can help children develop a passion for learning, they are going to want to understand how things work and how to make them work better. For Mississippi to advance in the science and technology fields, it will begin with children becoming excited about learning, and this is the fundamental mission of a children's museum," said Dr. Mark Horstemeyer, a professor of mechanical engineering at Mississippi State University, and a member of the museum's community advisory board.

Children's museums are fun gathering places where families can learn and play through diverse exhibits that develop motor and cognitive skills in children. They are inclusive, non-judgmental environments where kids can be kids and lifelong learning is nurtured. The Mississippi Children's Museum will empower and inspire all our state's children, regardless of their social, educational or economic backgrounds, to discover their potential through tapping their curiosity and creativity. This will be done through engaging exhibits and programs that teach specifically about the following: literacy, health and nutrition, the arts, and the world at work. These areas are key to helping our children mature into healthy and productive adult learners.

While we agree that all of these areas are important, MFA is especially excited about the opportunities presented by the World at Work exhibit. A great deal of all work in Mississippi is related to forestry with nine percent of the workforce employed in forest related occupations and an annual economic impact of 13 billion dollars. Museum designers have already begun to design learning activities that focus on forestry. This is the very reason that MCM provides the perfect opportunity for the forestry community in Mississippi. Feasibility studies for MCM project that 117,000 visitors will go to the museum during the first year. That is 117,000 thousand

people that we can reach in one year that most likely have little current accurate knowledge of forestry.

Representatives from MCM have formally requested input on the design of the forestry segments of the museum. The MFA Communications Committee, chaired by Foster Dickard, has been working with MCM representatives to decide what ideas and concepts are important to include in the exhibits. Misty Booth, MSU Coordinator of Forest Operations, compiled the ideas of the MFA Communications Committee in order to communicate to museum designers crucial forestry teaching points.

