



Kentucky Science Center celebrates a birthday, unveils new exhibit and secures grants — all in one day

By [ELI KEEL](#) | July 9, 2016 7:00 am



Mayor Greg Fischer checks out the new water table exhibit. | Photo by Eli Keel

A marching band and Mayor Greg Fischer helped kick off a month-long birthday party, celebrating several exciting announcements from the [Kentucky Science Center](#).

The July 7 event recognized the first year of operation of the [Science in Play](#) exhibit and revealed an exciting new water table feature at the museum. They also secured nearly \$350,000 worth of grants and gifts, which will help fund a statewide touring exhibit called "Science in Play To-Go."

Science in Play

“Science in Play was built off of next-generation learning standards (and) builds 21st century learning skills,” said Gil Reyes, senior manager of external affairs at the Science Center. He realizes that education buzz words can be underwhelming, so he boiled it down for Insider. “What the public needs to understand is that (it’s) hands-on learning, hands-on experimentation. Essentially, this is kids making a hypothesis and testing it out and seeing what happens next.”

It’s part of an educational shift to a kind of learning called “loose parts play.”

“‘Loose parts play’ is an industry term,” explained Reyes. “It’s just that idea of, ‘Put the pieces out there, don’t tell them what to do with it. Just let them figure it out.’”

This type of play is good for the brain, but it’s also fun.



The Science in Play exhibit opened a year ago. |
Courtesy of Kentucky Science Center

Few things are naturally as much fun to play with as water. When Science in Play debuted last year, the only older attraction that stayed in place was The Water Table.

“The old one had moving water, pieces that float, some faucets to turn off and on, you can splash around, you put on your little rain smock,” said Reyes. But the new water table has some new and mind-blowing features, many suggested by the Science Center’s Curious Kids Board.

Science in Play To-Go

During Thursday’s event, the Science Center’s executive director Joanna Haas announced an exciting new grant from Genentech and PNC Bank totaling nearly a quarter of a million dollars. With the money, Science in Play soon will hit the road.

The museum will work with the **Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives** (KDLA) to line up stops for the roving exhibit.

“It’ll take up residence in libraries for three to four months,” said Reyes. “We’ll hire somebody locally to run it and give them the tools to continue similar experiences

in the library after we go.” So the touring program hopefully will make lasting changes in communities all over the commonwealth.

Speakers from KDLA as well as PNC Bank and Genentech were on hand to contribute remarks, each expressing the Science Center’s importance to the community.

While there will initially only be one touring Science in Play exhibit, Reyes said they hope the program will be successful enough to spur the creation of more traveling exhibits.

Curious Kids Board

Throughout the event, the grownups, donors and the mayor frequently were joined on stage by members of the Curious Kids Board.

“It’s 11 kids between the ages of 4 and 9, and they submitted videos asking to be on the Curious Kids Board,” said Reyes, speaking of the board’s formation process last year.



The Science Center’s executive director Joanna Haas with the Curious Kids Board. | Photo by Eli Keel

While the children certainly made for cute photo opportunities, the Curious Kids had a real hand in the design of the new water table. The kids were brought in to play with the old table, and then led in a brainstorming session. Many of the features of the new table — like the fog apparatus and the jets of water that can be used to shoot ping pong balls — came directly from the kids.

What’s more, the initial designs for the new table were voted on by the board.

“Boss Display, the company in Ohio that built this for us, Skyped in to show them early designs,” said Reyes. “The kids voted with thumbs up to accept the water table designs.”

After the speakers concluded, the kids led everyone in a parade to the new table. Everyone got a chance to get their hands wet and have a little fun.

Haas noted that Mayor Fischer has been a longtime advocate for the museum, serving on the board for more than a decade before he became mayor.

Fischer concurred, saying, “I’ve been involved with the Science Center for over 20 years now, and they just continue to knock it out of the park.”

Fischer was quick to get in on the action at the water table, playing along with the children and discovering the exhibit’s many interactive features.

The new water table will be open to the public starting Saturday, July 9, and the birthday celebration continues on weekends throughout July.