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## **JAHA plans new children's discovery center**

*Facility to be built in Heritage Discovery Center's  
"mothballed" space*

The Johnstown Area Heritage Association is planning a 7,000-square-foot children's discovery center, which will be built in the unused space of the Frank and Sylvia Pasquerilla Heritage Discovery Center. The capital costs of the Johnstown Children's Discovery Center, including architectural enhancements, exhibits and planning, total about \$3.15 million, and the facility is expected to open in late 2007.

The Johnstown Children's Discovery Center will help JAHA realize its overall mission of preserving and interpreting the nationally significant historic heritage of the Johnstown area, and developing heritage tourism as part of Johnstown's economic diversification plans. The facility will also enhance the quality of life in the Johnstown area by providing a resource for children and families.

The project was originally suggested by Curt and Julia Goldblatt, who went to the Community Foundation for the Alleghenies with the idea. Foundation officials approached Richard Burkert, executive director of JAHA, which had been considering various options on developing the Heritage Discovery Center's unused space. Serious discussions began, and a community advisory committee of about 25 people was formed.

### **About the Johnstown Children's Discovery Center**

The Children's Discovery Center will be the most visible element of Phase II of the Frank & Sylvia Pasquerilla Heritage Discovery Center's development. Phase I opened in 2001 with a permanent exhibit, "America: Through Immigrant Eyes," which focuses on the lives of

immigrants and their families. That exhibit, a gallery used for temporary exhibits, and a museum shop only take up about 30,000 square feet of the 60,000 square feet available. Phase I was a \$6.1 million capital investment and included many physical improvements to the building, which means that the budget for architectural modifications and construction of the children's museum is substantially reduced.

The goal of the Johnstown Children's Discovery Center is to engage visitors in exploring the history and characteristics that make Johnstown a unique place, fostering a sense of belonging in its residents. The exhibits are designed around the overarching theme of "A Sense of Belonging," which is broken down into four main sub-themes:

- **Bringing the community together.** The exhibits supporting this theme will replicate the city of Johnstown, including such things as a replica of the Inclined Plane for kids to explore and play on; "The Mine Climb" and "Steeling Away," replicas of a coal mine and steel mill; and more.
- **Our natural identity.** The exhibits supporting this theme focus on Johnstown's natural environment, and how nature has impacted Johnstown throughout its history. An art studio and workshop, a simulated dam and a rooftop garden are planned, along with an oversized "Picture Frame" that kids can step into and manipulate, designed to reflect the Scalp Level painting movement.
- **Our industrial lifestyles.** This area will feature replications of indoor and outdoor environments, including a steel mill's account office, a Johnstown home, a streetscape, a store and "Uniform O'Rama," which displays uniforms from Johnstown's industries for kids to try on.
- **Same environment – changing values.** This area explores the region's land and cultures, and how they have changed over time. It includes "The Drama Box," where kids can role-play using uniforms and other costume pieces from different periods, and a "Mix/Master Studio," where visitors can experiment with sound effects, music and language.

In addition to the exhibits, the Children's Discovery Center will feature regular arts and science programs with an emphasis on hands-on activities.

Other improvements will include:

- **A café.** This café will be placed on the first floor of the Heritage Discovery Center. Administrative offices currently located on the first floor will be moved to the second floor.

- **Multimedia theater.** This new multimedia theater will be equipped to show a broad variety of videos and films, and will also be suitable for lectures and presentations. In a future project, JAHA hopes to create a film on Johnstown's industrial past using several hours of high-definition film shot inside the steel mills of Johnstown before they closed.
- **Rooftop terrace.** This terrace, home to the rooftop garden exhibit, will allow visitors to enjoy a wonderful view of Johnstown and will be available for rental.
- **Classroom space.** Classroom space will allow museum educators to conduct enrichment programs with visitors.
- **Architectural improvements.** Although Phase I included renovation of much of the building, there are some improvements necessary. These include significant additions to the heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems, as the third, fourth and fifth floors are not currently air conditioned; additional restrooms; expanded electrical and lighting systems; and expanded sprinkler, fire alarm and security systems.

#### **Projected attendance and impact on the community**

Cambria and Somerset Counties are considered the primary and secondary markets for the proposed children's discovery center, and annual attendance from these markets has been estimated at 25,000.

Benefits to the Johnstown community include:

- **Economic development benefits.** Museums generate direct and indirect economic activity locally, and increase competitiveness as a location for new businesses or expansion of existing businesses.
- **Image enhancement benefits.** Heritage-themed museums can change how outsiders regard Johnstown while affecting how Johnstown views itself.
- **Educational benefits.** Children's museums help youth and families interact with other and stimulate their curiosity, ignite an innovative response, and generate ideas. They can be a resource for area schools and educators.
- **Bringing money into the community.** Children's museums capitalize on previous investments and generate additional federal, state and private funding.

#### **Project funding and timeline**

In addition to the \$1.5 million funding announced on Thursday, April 22, funding for project planning, including detailed business plan, was provided by the Westsylvania Heritage Corp. and the Community

Foundation for the Alleghenies. An anonymous private donor has provided matching funds.

JAHA expects to begin building modifications and exhibit construction late in 2004, with the goal of opening the facility in the fall of 2007. During the time the Johnstown Children's Museum is under construction, the existing exhibits of the Heritage Discovery Center will remain open.

### **Project consultants**

- **Pawlowski & Haman, Architects PC:** This local firm is responsible for architecture, building plans and the rooftop renderings. Pawlowski & Haman was the lead architect on the renovation of the Johnstown Flood Museum and managed the construction on Phase I of the Frank & Sylvia Pasquerilla Heritage Discovery Center.
- **Exhibit A Design Group:** This New York-based firm has been retained for exhibit design and renderings. Clients include the Brooklyn Children's Museum, the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian, the Long Island Children's Museum and the Visitor Center for the Cumberland Island (Ga.) National Seashore.
- **Economic Stewardship, Inc.:** This firm, headed by Elaine Carmichael, has completed market and financial analysis for the project. The firm provides consulting services to public sector entities in need of tourism development strategies, market demand and feasibility analysis, economic action plans, and community revitalization. Clients include the States of Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Maryland and West Virginia, as well as a broad variety of museums and cultural organizations.
- **The Magic Lantern:** Based in Pittsburgh, The Magic Lantern is responsible for the design of the proposed theater. The firm has a specialization in museum work and has completed projects for the Carnegie Museum of Art, the Pennsylvania State Museum and many others.

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The Johnstown Area Heritage Association is a non-profit, membership-based organization dedicated to preserving and showcasing Johnstown's unique history to the nation through high-quality educational, cultural and recreational experiences. In addition to the Johnstown Flood Museum and the Frank & Sylvia Pasquerilla Heritage Discovery Center, JAHA produces the FolkFest, a 3-day free music and food festival held annually over Labor Day weekend; flood commemoration events; a spring lecture series; and a wide variety of additional cultural programming.