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For more information, contact:  
Shelley Johansson, Marketing Manager  
Johnstown Area Heritage Association  
P. O. Box 1889  
Johnstown, PA 15907-1889  
814-539-1889  
sjohansson@jaha.org  
[www.jaha.org](http://www.jaha.org)

## **JAHA breaks ground on Johnstown Children's Discovery Museum**

*Facility to be built in Heritage Discovery Center's  
"mothballed" space; lead donors are Sidney & Rae Goldblatt*

Nov. 13, JOHNSTOWN, Pa. -- The Johnstown Area Heritage Association today broke ground on the Johnstown Children's Discovery Museum, which is being built in the unused space of the Frank and Sylvia Pasquerilla Heritage Discovery Center. The groundbreaking marks the official start of construction on the project.

The capital costs of the museum, including architectural enhancements, exhibits and planning, total about \$4.4 million, and the facility is expected to open in fall 2007. The project will result in a 7,500-square-foot children's museum themed on the Johnstown region. Additional improvements to the building include a multimedia theatre exhibit on Johnstown's steel history, classroom space, and rooftop terraces.

The Johnstown Children's Discovery Museum will help JAHA realize its overall mission of preserving and interpreting the nationally significant story of the Johnstown area, and developing cultural 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 museum's lead donors are Dr. Sidney and Mrs. Rae Goldblatt of Johnstown. Their \$1.5 million gift was matched by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania; the match was announced in an April 2004 press conference held by Gov. Rendell at the Heritage Discovery Center. Since that time, project planning has been underway with professional consultants, local businesses and a community advisory committee.

Several exhibits in the Children's Discovery Museum have been developed in cooperation with regional industries.

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

The Johnstown Children's Discovery Museum 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 and a museum shop are located on the first floor of the building, and the second floor is a gallery used for temporary exhibits and rentals. However, the first and second floors only take up about 30,000 square feet of the 60,000 square feet available in the building. 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 Museum 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. A simulated dam and a rooftop garden are planned.
- **Same environment – changing values.** This area explores the region's land and cultures, and how they have changed over time. It includes "Watson's Store," where kids can role-play using uniforms and other costume pieces from different periods, a "Mix/Master Studio," where visitors can experiment with sound effects, music and language, and an exhibit on wind energy.

In addition to the exhibits, the museum will feature regular arts and science programs with an emphasis on hands-on activities.

Other improvements as a part of Phase II development will include:

- **A café.** This café will be placed on the first floor of the Heritage Discovery Center.
- **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. JAHA is also creating a film on Johnstown's industrial past, tentatively titled "Mystery of Steel," using several hours of high-definition film shot inside the steel mills of Johnstown before they closed.
- **Rooftop terrace.** This terrace will allow visitors to enjoy a wonderful view of Johnstown and participate in gardening activities and the study of native plants.
- **Education center.** 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; an additional staircase; renovated and expanded administrative office space; 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 each other and stimulate their curiosity, ignite an innovative response, and generate ideas. They are 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 timeline**

The current construction is on the architectural modifications to the third, fourth and fifth floors of the Heritage Discovery Building, and is expected to be completed in summer 2007. Plans for the exhibits have been completed, and construction on the exhibits will begin when architectural modifications are concluded. The projected opening of the new museum is fall 2007. During all phases of the construction, the existing exhibits on the first and second floors of the Heritage Discovery Center will remain open. Additional fundraising is expected as the project moves forward.

### **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. JAHA's existing museums include the Johnstown Flood Museum, the Frank & Sylvia Pasquerilla Heritage Discovery Center and the Wagner-Ritter House & Garden. In addition, JAHA produces the AmeriServ Johnstown FolkFest, a three-day free music and food festival held annually over Labor Day weekend; flood commemoration events; and a wide variety of additional cultural programming.