

Discovery Museum Marks 10 Years by Still Inspiring

By Erica M. Bush
The Winchester Star

It was spelled out in yellow-frosted cupcakes sitting inside a tent on the Loudoun Street Mall Sunday afternoon — “10.”

For 10 years, the Shenandoah Valley Discovery Museum, located on the Loudoun Street Mall, has ignited creativity, sparked curiosity, and inspired learning for those who have passed through its doors.

On Sunday afternoon, the museum celebrated its birthday with popcorn, ice cream, art projects, balloon animals, hats, and face painting.

A band, bubble gum chewing contest, dancing, and a rendition of “Happy Birthday” sung by those in attendance also completed the observance.

The Shenandoah Valley Discovery Museum first opened its doors on the Loudoun Street Mall in April 1996.

Its rock climbing wall followed in February 1997, and the Andy Warhol Myths Series and Studio opened as the first temporary exhibit in October 1997.



“It’s hard to believe its has been 10 years,” Peggy McKee, museum executive director, said Sunday.

McKee, who is one of the creators of the Discovery Museum, said she thought she would be associated with the museum for five years when it opened.

Ten years later, she remains a fixture at the facility that offers hand-on experiences to families, focusing on the sciences, mathematics, humanities, and arts.

As McKee and the museum’s other two creators — Mary Bruce Glaize and Martha Wolfe — danced to the music playing on the Loudoun Street Mall Sunday afternoon they

recalled the times they spent traveling to museums along the East Coast to see what exhibits the facilities had to offer and to take note of what kids did and didn't like.

Glaize said the museum started with one exhibit — a bubble machine — on the Loudoun Street Mall.

Today, the museum boasts a paleolab, simple machines exhibit, a selection of mind-bending puzzles and games, and a rock-climbing wall, among other features. "Every experience in the museum is authentic," Glaize said.

The three women joke that their own children have grown up in the Discovery Museum.



Terry Whitmire, Dixie Rhythm Band drummer, plays under the shade of a balloon hat Sunday afternoon during the 10th birthday celebration for the Shenandoah Valley Discovery Museum. (Photo by Scott Mason)

"It [the museum] has tested the limit of our husbands' generosity," McKee also said.

Nearly 500,000 children have passed through the Shenandoah Valley Discovery's Museum since its opening 10 years ago, they said.

Jan Kirby, the museum's director of programs, said about 10,000 school children a year visit the museum.

Wolfe said the museum's creators knew the facility was successful when the women could leave the museum and it could still function without them. She said that was about five years ago.

All three women also chalk up the museum's success to the volunteers and staff who have made its operation possible.

So what's next for the future of the Discovery Museum? "To the park," Glaize said.

Construction on a new 20,000-square-foot building is slated to begin in Jim Barnett Park in 2007.

The new Shenandoah Valley Discovery Museum, which will replace the 7,500-square-foot museum located at 54 S. Loudoun St., will be situated on 3.5 acres north of the Christianson Familyland playground in the park.

The museum's features will include a log house, an art studio, a paleontology exhibit, a machines exhibit, and a Trombe wall that will allow kids to feel thermal energy as they climb it.

Roofs that collect solar energy and features to collect water runoff are among the efficiency strategies the museum will incorporate on the outside of its structure.

"You can't imagine what this will be like in another 10 years," Kirby said.