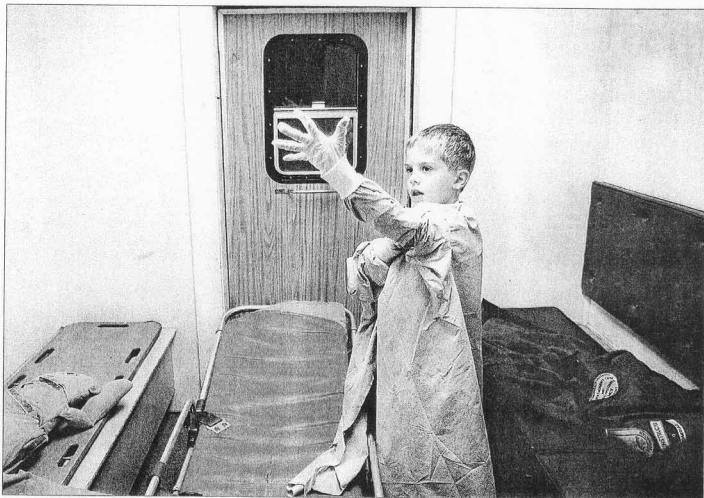


Field trips



Alec Tweedie, 6, from Fairfax dresses in scrubs in the makeshift ambulance room at the Shenandoah Valley Discovery Museum in Winchester, Va.

Photos by Henry Foster / The Washington Times

fun Discovery

Winchester museum can be educational, too

By Karen Goldberg Goff
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The conveyor belt carries a crate of apples up an incline. Buckets of the fruit swing along, carried by pulleys and levers powered by two preschoolers.

"I'll push," says one 5-year-old boy to another. "Then you pull, OK?"

The boys are having such a good time, they don't realize they are learning about cooperation, as well as the way simple machines work.

The pretend apple-packing plant is one of the many hands-on exhibits at the Shenandoah Valley Discovery Museum in Winchester, Va. The museum, founded in 1996, is housed in a storefront on Winchester's pedestrian mall on South Loudoun Street. The museum is a place for local families to create and learn, as well as a destination for residents around the Beltway, who can reach the museum with a 60-minute drive through the Virginia countryside.

"When we started the museum, we wanted to be an informal complement to the whole education picture in our area," says Peggy McKee, one of three co-founders of the museum and currently its executive director. "We had been in similar facilities in other places and knew it could be great. We saw it as a need here. There was nothing for families that mixed fun and education."

Mrs. McKee says the spirit of the Shenandoah Valley was kept in mind



John Cartmill with daughter June, 8, of Herndon tests the climbing wall.

when planning the museum. The apple-packing shed reflects a part of Loudoun County's economy. The Native American room represents its history. In this room, children can step inside a tepee or a full-size long-house. They can grind corn with a pestle and strap on a papoose board.

Winchester Medical Center has donated items for the hospital area, where children can pretend they are paramedics, patients and doctors. There is an ambulance, complete with gurney, as well as X-rays to view, scrubs to wear and a few EKG machines to pretend to use.

Part of the museum is straight-on science, though. Natural science is a running theme, from the python housed in a cage in the middle of the museum to the Discovery Room, where there are drawers containing learning materials on stinks, wasps, birds and other animals. Children can take the materials—which feature Beanie Babies, books, charts and other multimedia works—up the ladder to the "treeshouse." There, they can study the materials or just pretend they are out in the forest.

In the museum's storefront window is a Fossil Pit, where children

can watch a paleontologist in action, dig for fossils and examine models.

"Every time my grandson is visiting me, we either take a hike and then come here or come here and then take a hike," says Maureen Gorman of Winchester, who brought her grandson, Hunter Hardy, 5, of Ashburn. Physics is the lesson plan in the Raceways room. Visitors can roll a ball down a variety of contraptions to understand force, velocity, gravity and motion. Children-oriented physics books are in the room, too, to reinforce the topic.

In the back of the museum is a rock-climbing wall (also a lesson in physics, but just plain fun, too). This will appeal to the older children, but it is not too difficult for preschoolers to attempt. The wall is cushioned all around for safety by a pit of shredded rubber tires.

There are creative areas, too. One room is dedicated to castoff VCRs, computers, stereo equipment and tools. Here, children are encouraged to take things apart and put them back together however they please. One weekend a month, visiting artists set up shop at the muse-

When you go:

Location: 54 S. Loudoun St., Winchester.
Hours: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Mondays through Saturdays and 1 to 5 p.m. Sundays.
Admission: \$4 per person; year-long memberships are available.
Parking: On-street parking and metered lots are nearby.
Concessions: There are inexpensive restaurants nearby.
More Info: 540-722-2620 or www.discoverymuseum.net.



Georgia Cartmill, 7, of Herndon creates sentences from magnetic blocks of words at the museum.

um, encouraging children to work in different mediums. One recent Saturday, about two dozen children made earrings, boxes and hair clips out of scraps of wallpaper.

"This place is awesome," says Stacy Lechtman of Ashburn, who brought her son and daughter, ages 3 and 5. "I love that it serves the interests of both of my kids."