

Program Targets Those At-Risk

Discovery Museum Focuses on Being More Accessible to Community

By CHARLIE JACKSON
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The Shenandoah Valley Discovery Museum is initiating a program, partnering with the local religious and philanthropic community, to better serve "at-risk" populations, Jan Kirby, director of education and programs for the museum, said Monday.

The move comes less than two weeks after Winchester's City Council added a caveat to the Discovery Museum's funding — stipulating that the \$25,000 allocation be held in reserve until museum officials submit a written plan, ensuring accessibility of the museum to disadvantaged children, particularly those in the Douglas Community Learning Center neighborhoods.

"This is something we've been thinking about for awhile," Kirby said. "[City Council's decision] certainly brought it to a head.

"We're excited about being able to make the museum more accessible to the community. We have worked hard over the years to make it everybody's museum."

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Kirby said the plan is to work with 14 religious and non-profit groups that deal closely with at-risk populations. The Discovery Museum will be offering free family memberships to families applying at one of the 14 outlets.

The membership will last for one year and will allow admission to 220 other museums across the country.

Councilor Philip E. Pate, who introduced the amendment to the Discovery Museum's funding, said the new program is a step in the right direction.

"It sounds like a wonderful start," he said. "The whole council is interested in these kids. We have to be interested in these kids for moral, social, and pragmatic reasons. It's the beginning of what

I really hoped I would see of the Discovery Museum."

Kirby said the museum has been offering free admission to the regional Head Start programs, Stepping Stones, the Winchester Day Nursery, and the Freemont Street Nursery since 1996.

According to a memo from Kirby, the Discovery Museum "feel[s] that the screening process for families in need of this opportunity belongs in the hands of those closest to the families we want to serve."

Kirby said the museum has reached out to the Boys and Girls Club of the Shenandoah Valley, the Child Parent Center, the Coalition for Racial Unity, Edgehill Recovery Retreat Center, Freemont Day Nursery, Head Start Apple County, Highland Memorial Presbyterian Church, the Latino Connection, Mount Caramel Baptist Church, Stepping Stones, and the Winchester Day Nursery, among others.

Most outlets, Kirby said, have responded positively.

"Our goal in initiating the program is to make the museum accessible to the entire community," Kirby said.