



Margaret "Peggy" McKee (center), executive director of the Shenandoah Valley Discovery Museum, helps unveil the design for the new museum during a late-afternoon ceremony Wednesday in Jim Barnett Park. Star Photo by Scott Mason

## New Discovery in City Park

Shenandoah Valley Discovery Museum Unveils Building Plans

By STEPHANIE M. MANGINO  
The Winchester Star

Chuck Swartz talks about the new Shenandoah Valley Discovery Museum like it is a living and breathing thing, rather than bricks and mortar.

And, in some ways, it is. The building, which will sit atop a hill just north of the Christianson Familyland playground in Jim Barnett Park, will be created from its intentions and surroundings, he said.

It will, metaphorically, "listen to the exhibits, and the kids, and the

sun, and the park," as it comes to life through architectural design and imagination, said Swartz, of Reader/Swartz Architects PC of Winchester, which is performing the main design work.

The roof of the more than 20,000-square-foot structure will be home to flowers, grasses, and trees, he said. Energy-capturing panels will snag power from the environment and channel it into the museum.

The 3.5-acre site will also feature a tower from which children can gaze at the distant mountains or concentrate on the plants and wildlife right next to them.

The fund-raising capital campaign for the museum aims to raise \$8 million for the project, according to an informational packet produced by the museum. Construction of the museum itself will cost about \$6 million of that amount, said museum Executive Director Margaret "Peggy" McKee at a Wednesday event announcing the museum's progress.

While the campaign is still in its quiet stage, \$1.7 million has been pledged toward the new facility, McKee said.

Designers and museum officials

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sounded almost giddy as they described plans for the hands-on learning center for children, which will replace the 7,500-square-foot museum located at 54 S. Loudoun St. in downtown Winchester.

"It's instructional and the right thing to do," said Swartz of the environmentally sensitive building.

Landscape architect Pete O'Shea, principal of the Charlottesville firm Siteworks, said the intention is for the structure to generate as much of its own power as possible.

But even at a bare minimum, the solar roof panels can provide children with lessons on how energy is generated by the sun, Swartz said.

The design will allow for a blurring of the boundaries between the structure and the park, he said.

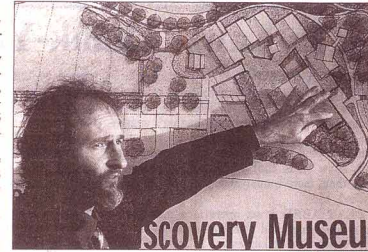
It will be a beautiful space without symbolic or physical fences between it and the rest of the park, O'Shea added.

But it will draw the eye, enliven its section of the park, and entice visitors, Swartz said.

"I defy you to see this building and not want to go in," he told those gathered for the announcement.

McKee expressed similar excitement as museum officials prepared to unveil a marker at the museum's future location, which features an early design drawing.

She couldn't even fully explain the new museum, descri-



Star Photo by Scott Mason

Chuck Swartz of Reader/Swartz Architects PC of Winchester discusses the design plans for the new Shenandoah Valley Discovery Museum scheduled for construction in Jim Barnett Park.

ing the plans as being "the likes of which this town and our region ... well, you'll be pleasantly surprised."

"It's going to be pretty fantastic," O'Shea said.

But that isn't surprising, considering the nature of the task, he said. "When kids are involved, it's hard to go wrong."

The environmentally sensitive ethos of the building has infused the entire project.

Civil engineer Tim Painter of Painter-Lewis PLC of Winchester said a line of trees next to the park road and the facility's prospective parking lot will be preserved. Additionally, the grading of the land will create new play space, and will possibly replace the amount of recreational land lost with the parking lot.

Painter, who also sits on Winchester's Parks and Recre-

ation Board, said the board and the museum have worked hard to make sure the facility and the park will blend together.

Cooperation has been key to the museum's early development. Winchester's City Council decided in March to lease the park land to the museum for \$1 a year for 40 years.

Even with so much excitement propelling the museum's development, it will be a little while before any major movement occurs at the site.

Designs have to be finalized before contractors Howard Shockey and Sons Inc. of Winchester begin to construct the building, and McKee said groundbreaking is probably a year away.

For more information on the Shenandoah Valley Discovery Museum, call (540) 722-2020 or visit it online at [www.discoverymuseum.net](http://www.discoverymuseum.net).