

BFK Rocket Report


 Play • Imagination • Inclusion • Connection • Integrity
 

New Exhibit: Power Up Sponsored by

Opening Spring 2026

At the Building for Kids, we believe in the singular opportunity that is play. By playing in our intentionally-designed hands-on exhibits, kids not only develop important skills like collaboration and problem solving, but they are also introduced to complex, real-world topics. From physics and finances to health and food systems, each of our exhibits opens the door to a new world of discovery.

Soon, visitors will have an exciting new space to explore the world of energy and sustainability. We're excited to announce that we'll be expanding our first floor to include Power Up, a brand-new energy-focused exhibit sponsored by U.S. Venture. Construction is already underway! Power Up will be open for visitors in late Spring 2026.

This vibrant exhibit features several interconnected components that introduce visitors to energy systems, sources, and how their decisions impact our community.

Highlights include:

Appleton City Model: At the center of the exhibit is a dynamic city model of Appleton, complete with recognizable landmarks such as the Building for Kids, the Fox River, and the 222 Building. As families interact with stations throughout the exhibit, they'll see the city come to life—buildings lighting up, vehicles moving, and other exciting reactions that show how energy flows through a community.

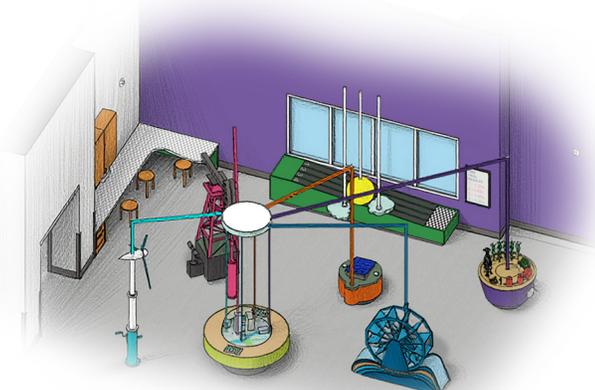


Energy Stations: Power Up includes five different energy stations, all connecting to the Appleton city model. In the different stations, children can activate a wind turbine, clear clouds away from the sun to power a solar panel, and turn cow manure into renewable natural gas, exploring how the different energy sources help "power up" the city.

Transport Time Trial: Assemble a car, race it down a track, and see what makes it go! In this part of the exhibit, kids experiment with different design choices and variables to explore how the optimal solution can change depending on the situation and environment.

Circular Economy Decision Tree: In this choose-your-own-adventure style activity, visitors explore how to sustainably turn waste into a marketable product. Families will explore questions like, what can you do with used tires?

In addition to introducing families to the role of energy in a community, Power Up encourages innovation and teamwork as kids collaborate to activate the city. Through play, they experience firsthand how every energy choice has an impact on our world and how communities rely on many energy sources working together every day.



Summer Explorer Camps

Full day, morning, and afternoon camps for 4K - 4th grade

Get ready for this year's Summer Explorer Camps, an 8-week series of themed drop-off camps for students who have completed 4K - 4th grade! Featuring expert-led programming and child-directed play throughout the museum, camps help students build skills, make friends, and explore new interests. Each week of camp engages students in a different theme, including photography, music, STEM, cooking, and more.

Summer Explorer Camp is designed to be flexible to fit your family's schedule, with full day, morning, and afternoon options running Monday through Friday each week of July and August. Choose to register for the weeks that work for you or sign up for all 8 weeks at a discounted rate!

Summer Explorer Camp Schedule:

- Improv Adventures Camp: July 6 – 10
- Music Makers Camp: July 13 – 17
- STEMpowered Camp: July 20 – 24
- Culinary Creations Camp: July 27 – 31
- Focus on Photography Camp: August 3 – 7
- Scientists in the Making Camp: August 10 – 14
- Rising Musicians Camp: August 17 – 21
- Jr. Chefs Camp: August 24 – 28

Learn more about a typical day's schedule, prices, and how to register at buildingforkids.org.



2025 Recap: A Year of Growth & Memory-Making

2025 was one for the memory books! From an exciting traveling exhibit to unique events and opportunities, 2025 was another great year of play-based learning and discovery. Check out just a few of the highlights from the year:

The Amazing Castle™

Over 30,000 visitors enjoyed The Amazing Castle traveling exhibit which took families on a medieval adventure in a castle village!

BFK Children's Parade

The 16th Annual BFK Children's Parade showcased the imagination and creativity of almost 1,000 kids and their grown-ups.

Member Appreciation Month

September marked our first Member Appreciation Month, filled with special discounts, hours, and events for members.

Teen Programming

We expanded enrichment opportunities for teens by launching our first Teen's Night Out event and creating a teen-led advisory group.

The Space Station

We revamped our quiet room, increasing the availability of sensory resources and giving families a space to unwind.



Fun Fore All: A New Golf-Inspired Exhibit

Green grass and warm, sunny days may feel far away, but our newest temporary exhibit is ready to transport you to a beautiful day at the golf course!

Fun Fore All is a golf-inspired exhibit designed to encourage experimentation, support gross motor development, and spark curiosity in kids of all ages. Visitors can explore a mini golf course, test their skills on a putting green, experiment in a golf ball physics playground, and more.

A few times per year, we refresh our Exhibit Gallery with new and returning rotating exhibits. Fun Fore All will be open through the end of August, so be sure to check it out during your next visit!



Director's Digest

Since my very first visit in 1992, it was clear that the Building for Kids is, and always has been, a dynamic and responsive institution, one that grows and evolves based on the needs of our kids and the dreams of their grown-ups. The museum was ever changing, with more and more space being rented from the old Avenue Mall to bring in additional exhibits and program spaces every year. Our earliest visitors might remember some of those spaces, such as our birthday party room or our traveling exhibit gallery, which hosted memorable experiences like Backyard Monsters, a larger-than-life bug-themed exhibit.

So when I started here as a staff member over 20 years ago, it came as no surprise that the museum was doubling down on its commitment to kids in this community. Recognizing the need to grow our physical space in order to expand our reach and strengthen our community impact, we purchased and expanded to the first floor of our building in 2006. This large expansion project allowed us to increase our capacity to serve families and add new exhibits, such as our two-story Discovery Tree, which continues to sit at the heart of our building to this day.

With many updates and exhibit renovations in between, we grew our overall exhibit floor square footage again in 2016, this time in response to a community-identified need to build STEM confidence from an early age. That 900 square foot expansion led to what is now The Lab, a space designed to help kids and families explore the scientific method through play.

We are so excited to carry that momentum forward into 2026 as we expand our museum by another 1,000 square foot with the opening of Power Up sponsored by U.S. Venture this Spring. After extensive research and collaboration with U.S. Venture, this exhibit has been designed not only to make learning about energy fun, but to authentically reflect how energy functions within our own community. Visitors will get to explore how energy moves through systems, how individual



actions contribute to larger outcomes, and how innovative efforts collectively power communities like ours.

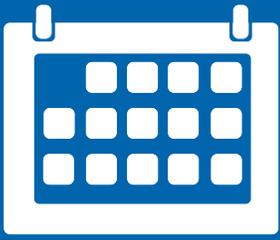
As someone who has witnessed multiple eras of growth within the organization, I'm incredibly energized for what lies ahead. Each expansion—from 1992 to today—has strengthened our ability to serve families and fuel impact in our community. We continue to remain one of the largest children's museums in Wisconsin because of the support of all those who believe in our mission and in the importance of having an intentionally-designed space for families to grow, explore, and play together.

We hope you'll join us for what promises to be another exciting and transformative year at the Building for Kids!

Thank you and see you soon,

Oliver Zornow
President
ozornow@buildingforkids.org





Upcoming Events

Character Playdate with Curious George

Friday, March 6: 5-7pm

Curious George is going on an adventure to the BFK! Join us for after-hours play, pizza, storytimes, themed activities, and lots of opportunities to meet Curious George.

Outer Space Day

Saturday, March 14: 9am-4pm

Blast off into an out-of-this-world adventure during a space-themed day featuring activities inspired by planets, stars, and our solar system.

Building for Grown -Ups: Roaring 20s

Saturday, April 10: 6-9pm

Step into the razzle dazzle of the 1920s at our next adults-only event, featuring themed activities, dancing, a cash bar, and more. It will be the cat's pajamas!

For more information about these and other upcoming events, visit buildingforkids.org.



Member Spotlight

The Benckendorf Family

Members Since 2024



How does your family engage with the Building for Kids?

Our family loves the variety of activities, such as Jr. Explorers, Summer Explorer Camp, all of the fun character events, the Children's Parade, and so many more! We've celebrated birthdays and New Year's at the BFK multiple times. We also love to just stop by for a little bit and then head over to the library. We feel so lucky to have it so close to us.

What has your family gained from participating in our programs at the BFK?

From participating in Summer Explorer Camp, we've gained a sense of community, opportunities to meet new friends, exposure to new ideas/learning, and life-long memories! It's so exciting to see new interests and hobbies form after a week of coding or cooking during summer camp. Our kids are always meeting a new buddy and making friends of different ages.

Why is the BFK important to our community?

The BFK is important in our community because it offers safe spaces for children to foster life-long curiosity, learning, and confidence! With the free infant and toddler programs and wonderful summer

camp, there are learning opportunities for everyone.

What has the BFK meant to your family?

The BFK is so special to our family because of the educators and staff who connect with us, inspire new ideas and interests, and help bring people together. This is such a warm, welcoming, interactive place because the staff make it so.

Do you have a favorite memory from the BFK?

We have so many to choose from! Birthday parades with bubbles, playing hide and go seek in the castle, freestyling during music week of Summer Explorer Camp, getting caught in the torrential downpour this summer after the Children's Parade, and exploring the BFK with flashlights when there was a power outage. It's really hard to pick our favorite.

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