

# BFK Rocket Report

 Play • Imagination • Inclusion • Connection • Integrity 

## Launchpad Playful Preschool

Preparing your child for take-off through play!

We're excited to announce that **Launchpad Playful Preschool**, powered by the Building for Kids, is coming to downtown Appleton in fall 2026! Built on more than 30 years of experience creating child-directed, play-based learning experiences in our community, this new preschool will make play a central part of every child's journey.

Decades of research show that play is essential to how kids grow and develop. Through open-ended, child-directed experiences, children build critical cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and creative skills. These holistic skills support not only future academic success, but also confidence, curiosity, and resilience in everyday life.

Launchpad will put this play-first approach into practice in a preschool environment intentionally designed for playful exploration. The space is built to be responsive and shaped by children's evolving interests, so it stays engaging and keeps play at the center. Additionally, the preschool will offer varying sensory environments to support both our care team and children's unique needs throughout the day.



**LAUNCHPAD**  
Playful Preschool

Powered by 

Launchpad learners can expect:

- Play-based learning led by a warm, playful care team
- Humor and laughter as tools for connection and confidence
- A focus on confidence and holistic skill-building
- A sensory-aware environment that supports wellbeing
- Immersive themes that deepen exploration, creativity, and learning

Launchpad will serve children ages 3–5 and will offer two 2.5-hour sessions five days per week. The preschool will be located on the third floor of the new Family Resource Center in downtown Appleton, right across the street from the Building for Kids—making it easy for preschoolers to take regular field trips to the museum.

Launchpad Playful Preschool is made possible in part by systems change funding from the Basic Needs Giving Partnership.

We can't wait to meet our first group of Launchpad learners and support their take-off into a strong foundation for lifelong learning!

### Interested in learning more?

Scan the QR code to learn more, indicate your interest, and share your family's preferences. Families who fill out the interest form will be among the first to receive registration details once enrollment opens.



# Generosity Journey

## Inspiring the Next Generation of Community Changemakers

The Building for Kids and Thrivent are teaming up to inspire the next generation of community changemakers—today's kids. Together, we created a new interactive installation that celebrates the important role generosity played in our history, while encouraging today's kids to see themselves as agents of change too.

The new installation includes History of Helpers, a physical display that honors the thousands of community members, volunteers, donors, and visionaries whose generosity helped build and grow the museum over the years. The display highlights key moments in the museum's story, from its founding by Paula Meyer and Rochelle Lamm to today. Through photos and short stories of generosity, History of Helpers shows how collective effort and community support have shaped the museum's impact and made new learning opportunities possible for generations of children.

The display also looks to the future by encouraging children to see themselves as part of this ongoing story—showing them that they, too, can make a difference in our community. The installation includes a digital component called Generosity Journey, a hub of family-friendly tools and resources designed to support families on their individual paths to generosity. On this digital platform, families can start with a fun quiz to find a cause to support, then explore simple, family-friendly ways to give to that cause. The process helps kids learn how to make a difference in a fun way, giving them a sense of confidence, agency, and responsibility that can carry into adulthood.

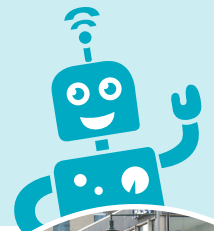


## Match Opportunity

Thrivent is offering a dollar-for-dollar match, up to \$10,000, with a maximum of \$500 per household for donations made through the Generosity Journey process! If you're looking to donate to the Building for Kids or other local nonprofits this year, Generosity Journey is an opportunity to get your donation matched!

## What Does Your Generosity Journey Look Like?

Inspire the next generation with us by exploring our Generosity Journey platform with the kids in your life! Scan the QR Code to gain access!



# 17th Annual BFK Children's Parade

Presented by ThedaCare | Wednesday, July 22

Become a part of this annual tradition by registering to participate in the 17th Annual BFK Children's Parade presented by ThedaCare! During this free celebration of kids in our community, children and their grown ups are invited to stroll through downtown Appleton together, showcasing their creativity with themed costumes, props, and non-motorized floats. Costumes can be simple or elaborate—many families repurpose Halloween favorites, while others enjoy spending weeks working together to design a one-of-a-kind creation.

The parade kick-offs in Houdini Plaza at 6pm. The celebration continues after the parade with an after party in city park with food trucks, free activities, and entertainment. There will also be an award ceremony to celebrate the groups with the most creativity, imagination and confidence.

Sign up as a family or form a group from your school, sports team, or any other organization! Registration is free but required.



Register:



## U.S. Venture Children's Week

July 19 - 25, 2026 • [AppletonChildrensWeek.com](http://AppletonChildrensWeek.com)  
Join us for a week of free or reduced-cost family activities with organizations across our community!



# Camp BFK

## Overnight Lock-In Event

June 19 at 5pm to June 20 at 7am

Pack your sleeping bags because we're hosting a camp-style lock-in event at the Building for Kids! During **Camp BFK**, you'll get to spend the night inside the museum, while enjoying a pizza dinner, themed activities, and classic camp games. After a full evening of adventure, you'll choose a cozy place in the museum to set up your campsite and settle in for the night



Scan the QR code to learn more and register!



## Director's Digest

Spring always brings renewed growth and excitement. This year at the Building for Kids is no different. With the expansion of the museum and opening of our new Power Up exhibit sponsored by U.S. Venture, kids and their grown-ups are exploring brand new topics and play patterns here at the museum.

Beyond the daily museum experience enhancements that are being put in place, the team at the Building for Kids is excited about the growing partnerships and systems change efforts underway to address needs identified in our community.

One of those efforts is in conjunction with our recently opened History of Helpers display and Generosity Journey platform. When eye-opening data from a survey of nearly 400 local elementary and middle school students showed that kids are feeling a lack of agency to make positive change in their world, our team responded by creating tools to inspire families to reflect on and enhance their own Generosity Journeys. The tools help them identify the causes they care most deeply about and find ways to volunteer as a family or make a financial contribution to organizations doing that work here in the Fox Cities. Donations made to any of the five featured partners through this platform are currently being matched by Thrivent. I encourage you to explore the resources and inspire agency in the kids in your life by scanning the QR code on page 2.

Another responsive partnership is the creation of a child-directed play-based care model and the piloting and evaluation of Launchpad—a playful preschool powered by the Building for Kids. After extensive research and advocacy, the Building for Kids will be implementing a child-directed play care environment to help support better outcomes for kids, better outcomes for educators, and better outcomes for families in the midst of the current childcare crisis. This work is rooted in our deep belief that child-directed play is a singular opportunity to build holistic skills among young learners.



In addition to a lot of new, we are bringing back something that many parents (including my wife and I) grew up with at the Building for Kids—overnight lock-ins. Whether it is camping out in the tree house or settling in to bed in the back of the fire truck, these overnights are an opportunity to build core memories as a family or with friends.

Thank you for your support in helping make this community a great place to grow up!

Oliver Zornow  
President  
ozornow@buildingforkids.org





# Member Spotlight

## The Rittman Family

Members Since 2024



### How does your family engage with the Building for Kids?

Our family visits at least once a week for Early Explorers or just to play! We love taking a day and focusing a few hours on a special interest that we have that week. A favorite for us is always the different art projects set up by the staff in The Studio. We also enjoy meeting all of our favorite book characters while enjoying a pizza party and playtime during the character events!

### What has your family gained from being members at the BFK?

Membership at the Building for Kids has provided us with the opportunity to bond as a family and learn more about the world around us.

### Why is the BFK important to our community?

The community benefits from the BFK's safe environment to explore. It is amazing having a meeting space in our community for playdates that families with multiple age groups can all easily enjoy. The staff also always seem as excited for the exploration environments as we are, which fosters a positive relationship with the community as well.

### What has the BFK meant to your family?

The BFK has meant a lot to our family. It has allowed our children to learn independent play, problem solving, sharing, and how to build friendships. It has also provided a unique hands-on view of different careers through the various exhibits. Our family has fostered relationships with staff through the years, which makes visiting feel like we're spending time with friends.

### Do you have a favorite memory from the BFK?

Our favorite memory from the BFK is probably meeting Llama Llama! It was our first character event and we had a blast. Having a pajama party while meeting one of their favorite characters is something our family still talks about.

## Summer Explorer Camps

Calling all 4K – 4th graders—join us this July and August for Summer Explorer Camps! These week-long, full day camps help kids explore new interests, make friends, and learn through play. Here are just a few of the camp themes we offer:

• • •

### Improv Adventures

July 6 – 10

Enjoy a week of hilarious and interactive activities facilitated by the Zadak sisters from **This is Improv!**

### Focus on Photography

August 3 - 7

Join us for a week of picture-perfect fun with **Photo Opp** as you explore the world of photography!

### Rising Musicians

August 3 - 7

Step into the spotlight for an '80s-inspired week of music with local musicians!

Spots are limited, so register for Summer Explorer Camp today!

• • •

Learn more and register for Summer Explorer Camp here:



## Board of Directors

**Ethan Haas**, *Chair* - Amcor

**James Fenlon**, *Vice Chair* - U.S. AutoForce

**Hayley Leisgang**, *Treasurer* - Wipfli LLP

**Amanda Chavez**, *Secretary* - Go Valley Kids

**Kristen Trimberger**, *Past Chair* - Reach Counseling

**Bob DeKoch** - Limitless, LLC

**Alicia Frank** - United Way Fox Cities

**Barb Gonnering** - Wipfli LLP

**Debra McDowall** - Community Leader

**Zeb Rutter** - SECURA Insurance

**Timber Smith** - City of Appleton

**Dr. Abby Smolcich** - ThedaCare

**Dr. Carrie Willer** - Appleton Area School District

**Garrett Zimmerman** - School District of Shiocton

