

Founders Interview

Paula Meyer & Rochelle Lamm



1. What inspired you to start a children's museum in Appleton?

Rochelle: We were both recruited to Appleton to build new mutual fund companies for two different insurance companies. We traveled a lot for work and noticed that other cities had used children's museums as a way to revitalize a downtown. Since Appleton has always been a family-friendly place and since downtown Appleton had a high vacancy rate in the early 90s, we thought a children's museum would be the perfect solution. Plus, it would be something meaningful and fun to do together.

2. Can you share what starting a children's museum was like?

Paula: Children's museums were not very common when we first started considering the idea. We both had senior executive-level business experience but neither of us had started a non-profit before, so we learned a lot as we went. Fortunately, we had a large group of volunteers, each with their own skill set, who put in so many hours and truly brought the museum to life.

R: I have memories of us painting at 11:00 at night with our own young kids sound asleep in the Pierce firetruck exhibit. From volunteers to partner organizations to our early financial supporters, it took a whole community to create the museum.

3. What role do children's museums play in a child's growth and development?

R: Children's museums are special because they are founded and rooted in the conviction that children learn through play. This was a guiding force for us when we were designing exhibits. We wanted kids to go home having learned something. At a children's museum, kids could become the instigators behind their own learning.

4. Why are children's museums important to our community?

P: Children's museums are a community asset. Just like you need bike paths, parks, sports fields, and so on, a children's museum is something a family-friendly community should have.

R: Parents are incredibly busy. Having a fun and creative place that provides an educational backdrop that guides and encourages parents to engage with their kids is critical. A children's museum already has everything set up and in place, so all you have to do is show up and play. Plus, Wisconsin winters can be tough on families. We wanted to create a space that would provide learning opportunities year-round.

5. Do you have a favorite memory from starting the Children's Museum?

P: I have many favorite memories. My oldest daughter wrote a poem called "I Hate Cheese." We framed it and hung it in the museum. She was so surprised. I also remember during our first winter open, we took part in Appleton's Holiday parade. We created a big float with our seesaw logo on it and our families, volunteers, and board members participated to help us promote the newly opened museum. One other favorite memory was our decision to bring in a traveling animatronic dinosaur exhibit to help us launch the museum. Appleton had never seen something like that before, so it was a huge deal.

6. What is your dream for the BFK over the next 30 years?

P: I am so grateful to the community for taking good care of the museum all these years. I hope the museum can continue to be an important community asset for generations to come.

R: I would love to see the museum used as a platform for causes that affect the Fox Valley. I specifically think it would be wonderful to install exhibits that make an impact, not just for one visit, but for a lifetime.



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