

BUSINESS TIMES®

July 13-19, 2018

Proudly serving Santa Barbara, Ventura and San Luis Obispo counties

Vol. 19, No. 18



COURTESY PHOTO

Kids play with a "flight lab" installation at a kidSTREAM pop-up event at the Wings Over Camarillo Airshow in 2017.

A home at last

Nonprofit science museum kidSTREAM renovating former library building

By Marissa Nall
Staff Writer

Ventura County is set to welcome a long-awaited recreational destination for kids, and nonprofit science museum kidSTREAM will get a physical address after receiving the nod from the Camarillo City Council.

Until now, the nomadic children's museum has hosted pop-up events and workshops throughout the county as it conducted fundraising feasibility and market studies to prove its viability.

With results showing the museum is able to raise \$15 million to fund its build-out and would contribute an expected \$9 million in annual economic impacts in the county, the City Council unanimously approved kidSTREAM's bid to buy the former library building at 3100 Ponderosa Drive.

"They wanted to have some data and some confidence that we'll be a success," said Meryl Chase, vice president of finance for the kidSTREAM board of directors.

The approved term sheet authorizes the nonprofit to purchase the 16,670-square-foot building, located on two acres, for \$900,000. In the meantime, it allows kidSTREAM to rent the library's community room and patio for the market rate of \$272 per month to begin hosting exhibits and events.

The \$15 million fundraising campaign will pay for the purchase of the building, including \$1.1 million needed to bring it up to

code and \$12 million in exhibits, installations and tenant improvements, with the goal of achieving LEED-certified status. The final \$1 million would establish an endowment to fund operating costs and overhead, and the nonprofit hopes to fund a majority of its costs through earned revenue from tickets and memberships.

It received a \$30,000 grant from the Ventura County Community Foundation June 27 to renovate the initial space, and additional funds from tourism marketing agency Visit Camarillo.

Characterizing the venture as a startup in its own right, Chase said kidSTREAM has reached out not only to city, county, nonprofit and community partners but to local businesses.

Project Manager Sean Leonard of S.L. Leonard & Associates in Camarillo has assisted with the due diligence and assessment process, she said, and will be integral in hiring contractors, master planners and architects.

MIG | Portico did the concept design for the proposal, and several other businesses have provided in-kind support in renovating the community room, patio and restrooms, putting them on the shortlist for the renovation of the 1974 building.

"We are definitely looking to the business community for support and also for mutual-beneficial opportunities," she said. "There are local companies that are manufacturing, there's biotech, telecommunications, sci-

ence-oriented companies. There's a lot of synchronicity and a lot of companies that are in the business of education."

An "Airways" exhibit where kids can send scarves and other items through clear tubing pathways, a wind tunnel where kids can design their own parachutes and an exhibit with movable gears and cranks that will sport donors' names will be among the early installations, said Phil Hampton, co-chair of programming and professor of chemistry at CSU Channel Islands.

New paint and carpeting offer "a small preview of what kidSTREAM will look like in the future," Hampton said. "It transforms kidSTREAM from being a dream to being a reality that we are going to succeed at this."

The "R" in STREAM could stand for reading or recreation, he said, while the "A" could incorporate arts and agriculture into the standard science, technology, engineering and math offerings.

Activities using a light table, water, clay and other supplies will showcase future possibilities at an event on Aug. 4, where 250 tickets sold out almost immediately.

The company hosted a "Giant Bubbles" outreach event at the Camarillo Library on July 10 and a STEM Day at the Santa Paula Boys & Girls Club on July 13.

In addition to supporting 53 jobs during construction and \$1.28 million in state and local taxes annually, the market study "formalized what we already knew, that there's not a lot of offerings" available in the county

for kids, Chase said.

Following the closure of the Gull Wings Children's Museum in January 2016 after 28 years at its downtown Oxnard location, the county has not had a similar recreational offering for children. Gull Wings served around 30,000 visitors a year prior to its closure.

"We need more activities for young families in Camarillo and in our region," Councilmember Tony Trembley said at the June 13 meeting. "I think this is a wonderful project that hopefully comes to fruition that supplies that."

The new space is perfectly located within the county, Chase said, and sits at an ideal spot on the edge of a 45-minute radius from the brand new MOXI: The Wolf Museum of Exploration + Innovation in Santa Barbara.

"We're right smack in the middle of Ventura County," she said. "We're equidistant and accessible to both East and West County."

It also caters to a slightly different market than MOXI.

"In their journey, they made a switch from a children's museum to a science and tech museum, which is a little bit of a different sweet spot than ours," she said, adding that kidSTREAM hopes to include outdoor offerings like a zipline, water installations, a fort building, a lookout tower and other "things you can climb."

"I can't think of a better use of an old library than taking that library and turning it into a new place of learning for kids," said Councilwoman Jan MacDonald.