



from  
Providence Children's Museum

Come play, come learn!

# PLAY POWER!

By Janice O'Donnell, Executive Director

I'm worried about children's play. Their unstructured free time is dwindling. Schools, concerned about kids testing well, are eliminating or reducing time for recess. To keep them safe and give them extra opportunities, children are increasingly enrolled in structured out-of-school lessons and sports. Television and computer games, with their predetermined outcomes, claim huge amounts of kids' time. Toys marketed to kids come with a Web or movie-based tie-in.

So I'm worried and I'm not alone. More and more books, articles and research describe what is lost when children do not have ample opportunity to create their own fantasies, work out their own conflicts, make their own rules and play just for play's sake. The American Academy of Pediatrics reported that child-driven play is essential in every way to kids' healthy development. *The New York Times* noted, "If you look at what produces learning and memory and well-being, play is as fundamental as any other aspect of life..." In a National Public Radio story, "...playing make-believe actually helped children develop critical cognitive skills."

At Providence Children's Museum we've always held the conviction that play is essential. With our newest exhibit, *Play Power*, we decided to tackle this situation head-on. We envisioned an environment filled with open-ended, powerful play experiences for kids that would also have an important message about children's play for adults.

To bring this idea to fruition, we paid close attention to the children playing

around us. We watched groups of kids in *Water Ways* building channels and dams, calling out ideas and trying a variety of ways to control the flow of water. We noticed joyful explorations of sound at the junk music sculpture and careful experiments with blocks in *Shape Space*. The colonial cottage and the packet ship were scenes of constantly evolving pretend play. We saw kids set challenges for themselves – and achieve them. We were armed with cameras and clipboards but the kids were too absorbed in their play to care. When their parents noticed our noticing, they often joined us as fascinated observers, perhaps with increased appreciation of their kids' creativity and capabilities.

Our observations affirmed what the experts are saying. Those kids were solving problems, discovering principles of physics, creating stories with characters and plot, and mastering a wide range of skills while just playing. *Just playing?*

*Play Power* offers intriguing new ways for kids to engage in open-ended play: an artfully-designed pipe organ for playing with sound, giant air tubes for floating balls and scarves, a magnetic wall with moveable pieces for creating intricate mazes for balls to traverse. Especially for adults, there are books and literature about the benefits of play, plus the results of our observations on the "Notice Board" and video. Our hope is that parents and other caregivers will find their children's play as delightful and inspiring as we do and join us in ensuring that it is safeguarded and celebrated.

Photo by Susan Sancambi

## New *Play Power* Exhibit Opens!

### Play Fest • November 23 • 1:00 - 4:00 PM

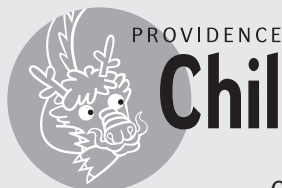
Celebrate play! Families get creative as they explore open-ended activities and games galore. Ages 3 - 11

### Air Play • November 28 • 1:00 - 4:00 PM

Kids investigate the awesome power of air as they build flyers that float and soar. Ages 3 - 11

### Junk Music • November 29 • 1:00 & 2:00 PM

Families jam with the Junkman, Donald Knaack, on 100 percent recycled materials as he creates grooves guaranteed to rock your socks off! Ages 3 - 12



Children's  
museum

Come play, come learn!

Visit [www.childrenmuseum.org](http://www.childrenmuseum.org) for a full calendar of events.

Providence Children's Museum is open Tuesday - Sunday and Monday holidays, 9 AM - 6 PM, and selected Fridays until 8 PM.

Admission is \$7.50. Members are always free.

100 South Street, Providence, RI 02903 • (401) 273-5437 • [www.childrenmuseum.org](http://www.childrenmuseum.org) • RideRIPTA to the Museum

