

The Journal News

Q&A: Tracy Kay, executive director of the Westchester Children's Museum

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The Westchester Children's Museum is on its way to becoming a reality — construction began last week on the Rye Playland bathhouses. In 2008, Westchester County approved spending \$8.8 million to renovate the dilapidated buildings, with the county agreeing that the museum can use the space if it raises enough money to fix the interior and maintain it.

Tracy R. Kay, former executive director of the Rye Nature Center, became executive director of the Westchester Children's Museum in November 2008. He talked with us about why people should be excited about the learning center and how the museum is faring with reaching its \$14 million fundraising goal.



Tracy R. Kay, executive director of the Westchester Children's Museum at the Playland Bathhouses.

Q: What will make the Westchester Children's Museum so special?

A: It's a combination of factors - the place, the space and the people. Rye Playland is already a site for family-oriented activities, and the backdrop of amusements and the surrounding natural environment provides the inspiration for many of the experiences planned for the museum. ... **Creation of the first and only children's museum in Westchester will effectively enhance the Playland campus by adding an educational and cultural aspect, and will be an economic boost to the park and the county.** ... If all goes according to plan, the museum will be open year-round prior to the start of the 2011 amusement park season.

Q: With the museum located in Rye, how do you hope to attract children and families from all over the county?

A: The intention of the museum is to serve children and schools all over the county, with a particular focus on those families who have not had prior access to the kinds of experiences a children's museum can provide. The site itself is accessible by a network of public transportation and major roadways; the content will complement grade school curriculum in language, math, science, art and social science and so will provide an outlet for teachers; and it will serve as a safe and vibrant community gathering space. Support for the museum already stretches beyond Rye. **At present the museum operates its Museum Without Walls program, an educational program providing out-of-school time activities and learning experiences to underserved children throughout the county.**

Q: What are your fundraising goals, and has the recession slowed down your efforts?

A: The Campaign for the Westchester Children's Museum has raised over \$7.7 million in cash and pledges toward our ultimate goal of \$14 million. Economic times have had an impact, but the museum's mission remains strong and is still very appealing to donors. In fact, over \$1.1 million has been added to the campaign during the recession.

Condensed from an e-mail interview.
