



Local museum is giving kids an early dose of information technology

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Kids can record their own weather forecast with data they get from the weather station
Image Credit: Lauren Ingram



Visitors can practice putting together circuits using a diagram -- or their imagination
Image Credit: Michael Doud



In the geology exhibit, kids learn about the different types of rocks, stalagmites and stalactites
Image Credit: Lauren Ingram

State College's annual Festival of the Arts is traditionally kid-friendly, but it isn't just for budding art aficionados this year. Future meteorologists, astronomers and computer scientists can find plenty to do at this year's festival too, by visiting the Discovery Space of Central Pennsylvania.

Just a couple blocks from the main action, the Discovery Space offers many science and technology themed exhibits, along with special offers to coincide with Arts Fest. On July 10, children's admission is free when accompanied by a paid adult, and on July 11–13 admission is half-price for everyone. In addition, Penn State's Lunar Lion team will be making a special visit to the museum on July 10.

Young visitors to the museum will get an early start in learning some of the technologies that help shape their world. In the Penn State-Accuweather meteorology corner, a computer displays weather data it receives from a weather station perched on the building's roof. Graphs displaying the temperature, humidity, wind speed and atmospheric pressure scroll across the screen, while an adjacent meter picks up and displays to-the-second readings.

To the left of the station, an emerald-colored sheet draped against the wall functions as a green screen. Using information obtained from the meter, kids can step into view of the camera to broadcast their own weather forecast. The camera sends the video to a computer, which then uses Chromakey technology to remove the green pigments and superimpose the "mini meteorologist" on a background of their choice.

Across the room, visitors of all ages can observe the "ViewSpace," a screen programmed to automatically receive updates from the Space Telescope Science Institute, the home of NASA's Hubble Space Telescope. The screen cycles through images of planets, constellations and nebulae combined with the latest astronomy news and discoveries, and, with the flip of a switch, can be converted into 3-D.

"The ViewSpace has turned out to be very popular with not just kids but also adults," said Michele Crowl, director of education at the museum. "With the 3-D element, the experience becomes very immersive."

Penn State experts also had a hand in shaping the fledgling museum. Students participating in the Penn State Engineering Capstone program have built several of the exhibits—most recently, a pneumatic tube that uses air pressure to propel objects through a system of plastic tubes. Every year, the program



allows engineering students from the University to gain valuable real-world experience, while giving the museum an exciting new exhibit. In addition, a collaborative project between Penn State's College of Earth and Mineral Sciences and Accuweather.com sponsored the development of the museum's green screen meteorology broadcast studio.

"Inspiring learning in children is the best part of my job," said Crowl. "I love seeing kids not want to leave at the end of the day; it means we're doing our job."

To learn more about Discovery Space, go to <http://www.mydiscoveryspace.org/>. For kids of all ages who are interested in more science during Festival week, Davey Lab on University Park campus is hosting AstroFest from July 10 to July 13. To learn more, visit <http://www.astro.psu.edu/public-outreach/astrofest>.

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