

A Center for Science

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Dr. Frankenstein, Dr. Jekyll and Dr. Evil all have one thing in common. Science. While these madmen manipulated science to do dastardly deeds, the average Joe might find the subject of science to be quite scary as well. But, at Science Central in Ft. Wayne, In., the study of science is meant to be anything but spooky.

In a renovated, old power plant lies Indiana's center of science - Science Central, a place dedicated to creating a haven for hands-on science.

From a two-story slide to a life-size piano to a chance to moonwalk, visitors are encouraged to partake in a number of educational, albeit fun, experiments.

"This is not your father's museum with guards and barriers and staff telling visitors to be quiet," said Judy Zehner, director of community relations at Science Central.

Where else could you ride a bicycle that is balanced on a rail two stories above the ground? Or speed down a slide that is two stories tall? Or actually experience what it's like to feel the pull of only 1/6 of the earth's gravity? These supervised exhibits are only a few of the things Science Central offers its visitors.

The center's Investigation Gallery allows families the chance to learn by doing. Inquiring minds need only explore this part of Science Central to satisfy their curiosity. Here, the visitor will learn how to lift him or herself into the air using ropes and pulleys, figure out what it takes for a building to withstand an earthquake, or even go cycling with a skeleton.

And, if you'd like to see how you measure up before you tackle the rest of the museum, Science Central's Measurement Gallery awaits. This gallery offers a device that checks your vertical and

horizontal body measurements. Also available is a platform that measures how many gallons of water are in your body. Step into a wave field to determine your exact height. Start up a treadmill that will count how many calories you are using. The Measurement Gallery offers, among other things, a chance to learn a little more about yourself.

If learning by observation is your cup of tea, the Observation Gallery is the place to go. Starfish, hermit crabs and other Atlantic Ocean creatures are available for examination. And, if you are musically inclined, you can play the piano without your hands or play a harp without touching any strings at all.

Science Center is a place for families, providing exhibits and galleries for all ages.

"Kids enjoy the more physical activities," Zehner said. "Toddlers enjoy the water table in Kids' Central."

Kids Central is a special area for children ages 2 to 7. Little scientists can enter Kids Central through a doorway sized especially for them. Exhibits include a puppet theatre, a captured shadow room, a giant bubble window where kid-size bubbles are created, and Fort Discovery, a multi-level playground.

Throw in the Swap Shop, a place for kids to trade their natural treasures, the Prediction Gallery, where you can pretend to be a real meteorologist, and the Mind's Eye Gallery, a gallery of mind-bending art and interactive puzzles, and you've got the whole of Science Central, a place not only for the young, but also for those who never grow tired of learning.

"Adults will learn something every time they visit if they open up and allow the curiosity to flow," Zehner said.

According to Zehner, Science Central was formed by teachers, scientists, business executives, engineers and others concerned about scientific literacy. Science Central was incorporated as a non-profit organization on May 28, 1987. In 1991, Fort Wayne's

old City Light and Power Plant was leased. After a successful capital campaign, enough money was raised to transform the historic building into a state-of-the-art science and math learning center. On November 5, 1995 Science Central opened its doors.

"In just eleven years we have engaged over 950,000 visitors through programs and outreach activities," said Zehner. "We serve over 200,000 a year and have become Fort Wayne's second largest attraction and the ninth largest attraction in the state."

The numbers and statistics, however, matter little in the mission of Science Central, whose vision is "to be a major catalyst for science, mathematics and technology education." The exhibits within the walls of the old plant are meant to teach, but also to create a love of learning.

"All exhibits are designed to stimulate the visitor's curiosity," said Zehner. "We do not provide answers. We encourage questions."

For more information, and to confirm times, dates or prices: www.sciencecentral.org.