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Kids learn physics at new Children's Museum Exhibit

BY ANNA EGELAND | JULY 26, 2012 6:30 AM

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Kids of all ages waited eagerly with red baskets as scarves and plush balls shot through the clear plastic pipes zigzagging up the wall of the Iowa Children's Museum. The pipes are part of the newest addition to the "Take Flight" exhibit, the largest exhibit at the museum in the Coral Ridge Mall, which features everything from remote control flight simulators to a paper airplane flight cage.

The new addition to the exhibit, aptly called "Amazing Airways" opened Wednesday at noon. The display gives kids the opportunity to experiment with the properties of moving air by sending objects through tubes of moving air and changing the path using diverter boxes.

Deb Dunkhase, executive director of the Iowa Children's Museum, said the museum wanted another interactive display to help kids understand forces and to complement the rest of the "Take Flight" exhibit.

"The aviation exhibit really helps kids understand the forces of flight," she said.

Dunkhase said the exhibit will help kids learn through first hand experience.

"It's going to be rollicking great fun for kids of all ages," she said.

Evan Swartzendruber, 10, said the exhibit is his favorite one at the museum and he likes to experiment with putting lots of objects in the tube at one time.

When one of the tubes was jammed with scarves and balls, the kids crowded around and speculated about how to move them through.

"This is the beauty of the project," Dunkhase said, gesturing to the blocked tube. "Because now they get to problem solve."

Kim Humpal, 25, who was baby-sitting Swartzendruber, said she usually comes to the museum once or twice every summer.

"We've come before, and the boys saw in the paper there was going to be a new exhibit so they were excited to see what it was all about," Humpal said.

Humpal said she thinks kids can learn about pressure from the exhibit.

"They can get a lot from it," she said.

Mary Hall Reno, the head of the University of Iowa physics department, said learning about physics teaches kids about the scientific method as well as how to approach problem solving.

"It's important [to learn about physics at an early age] because it gives you a different view of the world," she said.

Dunkhase said the museum will be building a kid-size wind tunnel, which she hopes will be open by mid-September, to help kids gain even more first-hand experience.

While the museum usually designs and builds all exhibits itself, Dunkhase said this part of the exhibit is unique because Mindsplash, LLC, created the structure. The exhibit, which cost \$44,000,

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Peggy Allman, a UI alum visiting from Virginia Beach, VA, returned to the museum Wednesday with her daughter, Grace Allman, 10, after visiting one and a half years ago.

"It also helped that it was going to be 103 degrees and it's a cool place for a hot day," Peggy said.

Grace said she likes catching the objects as they shoot out of the tubes because it's more challenging than putting them in the tubes.

"[I like] how it goes in and comes out in a different area and it goes through all those twisty things," she said.

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