

**NEWS COVER STORY**

# New firefighting, 9-1-1 children's exhibit sparks imagination

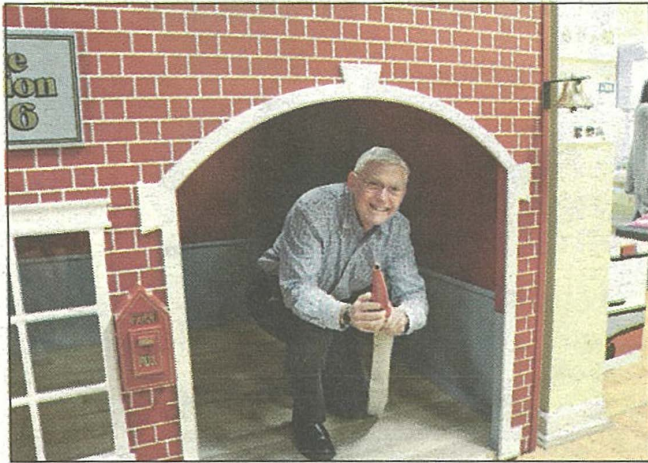
Child-sized fire station is complete with hose to put out fake house fires

AMANDA STOLL, Assistant Editor

"Think left and think right and think low and think high. Oh, the thinks you can think up if only you try!"

And perhaps now, with KidsWork Children's Museum's updated 9-1-1 exhibit, children will be doing more of what Dr. Seuss thought up in "Oh, the Thinks you can Think!" so many years ago.

Nicole Underwood, executive director at KidsWork Children's Museum in Frankfort, said the new exhibit was made possible



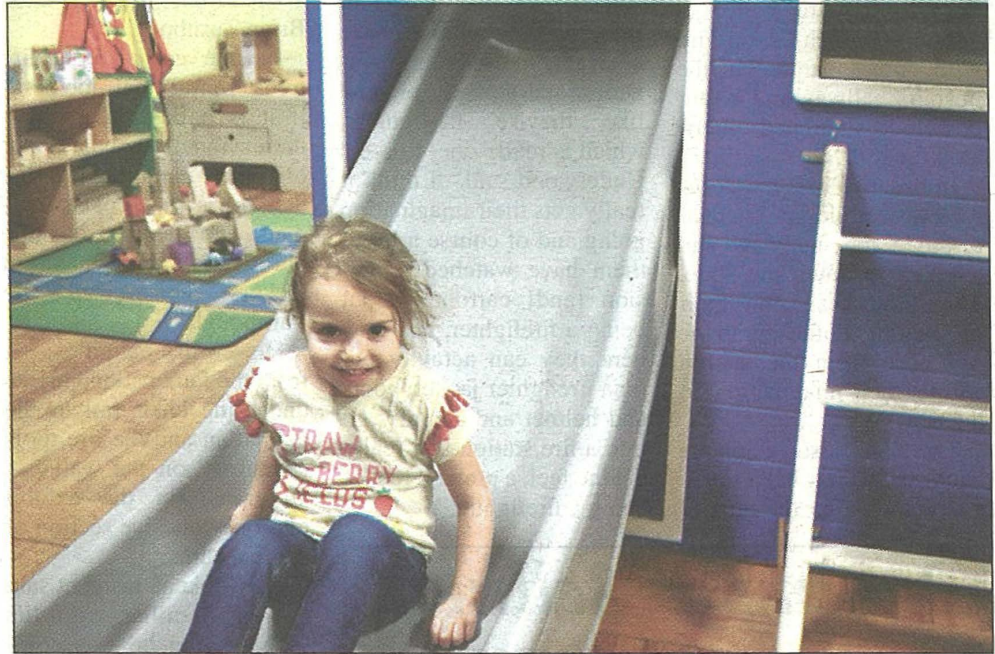
Mayor Jim Holland takes a turn with the fire hose in the new play fire station inside KidsWork Children's Museum in downtown Frankfort.

through donations from the museum's annual dinner. For the grand opening of the exhibit on April 12, many of those donors were there to celebrate and in-

vestigate the new features on their own.

Adults and children alike were climbing inside the

Please see **KIDSWORK**, 4



Abigail Feeland, 3, of Frankfort, was one of the handful of children who checked out KidsWork's newly revamped 9-1-1 exhibit on April 12 during the ribbon cutting.

PHOTOS BY AMANDA STOLL/22ND CENTURY MEDIA

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## KIDSWORK

From Page 3

child-sized firehouse to check out the firehose and peek out the windows. Next door to the fire station is a house, which is on fire with flames painted in the upstairs hallway and a fan-powered simulated flame atop the roof.

In order to exit the home safely, children crawl through the hallway and take a trip down the slide. Then, they can don their firefighting clothes, grab the fire hose from the station and let their imagination do the rest.

There is also a phone bank, which has been given a new look after the remodel,

where children can pretend they are a 9-1-1 operator and learn about what to do if they ever had to call for emergency help.

"Since we've had it installed, it has been a huge hit because the children have been able to use their imagination and actually pretend like they're firefighters, which is really cool to see," Underwood said. "I think it really gets their imagination going and of course a lot of them have watched television [and] cartoons about being a firefighter, and now here they can actually put on a firefighter jacket, boots and helmet and actually go into a fire station and really get the feel, a pretend feel of being a firefighter."

The house and fire station were purchased from Lilliput Play Homes, a company famous for their unique and elaborate playhouses, but the surrounding walls were a creation of mural artist Brian Turnbough.

In one corner is a fire truck mural that looks as if it is parked in a three-dimensional garage just off the exhibit. Nearby, the dress up coats, helmets and boots from the old 9-1-1 exhibit hang in lockers constructed by Turnbough.

His wall paintings — from the faux painted bricks under the chair rail to the dalmatian and the fire tools "hanging" on the walls — all transform the exhibit into one cohesive section of the museum.

The Mokena resident said he was familiar with the space before he was commissioned to work on the new exhibit. He combined some of the ideas the staff had for the exhibit with his own to create something he said he hopes will inspire imagination and play for the children there.

In addition to his mural painting skills, Turnbough used his woodworking experience to build and install chair rails and the lockers in the space. Creating a 3D locker on the wall also helped him to cam-



Some elements from KidsWork's previous 9-1-1 exhibit, including the dress up coats, helmets and boots, were incorporated into the new exhibit, which features a mural of a firetruck and three-dimensional lockers. PHOTOS BY AMANDA STOLL/22ND CENTURY MEDIA

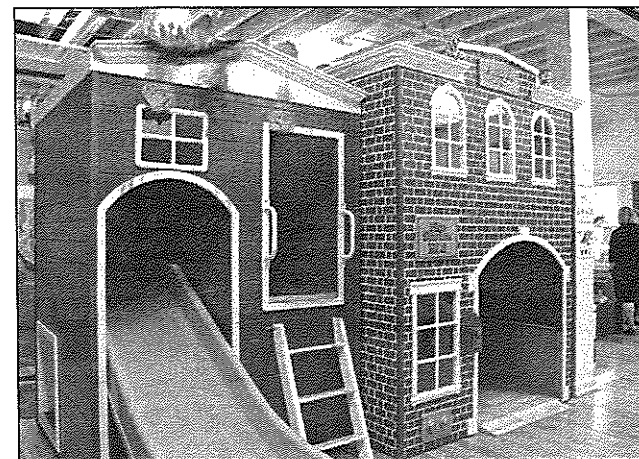
ouflage some of the wall's more mundane features like the thermostat and circuit breaker box.

Turnbough said he made an effort to see his work through the eyes of a child, which is why everything on the walls is best viewed by those about three feet tall.

For the best perspective on the dimensional mural, Turnbough said to stand close to the lockers and turn to view the mural straight on. Surprisingly, the mural was painted on canvas, then stapled to the wall.

After the staples are covered with a tiny piece of trim, Turnbough said most people will not notice it, and it gives flexibility both for him working on the piece as well as for the museum if they were to ever need to move it or do work in the building that could damage the artwork.

"I think it gives maybe a more immersive experience now than what was before probably," Turnbough said. "The fire house is so cool. We took inspiration from that with the color of the bricks and the color of the



KidsWork's updated 9-1-1 exhibit features a child-sized fire station (right) complete with a play fire hose and a house, which has a fake fire and slide.

wall. And then just kind of taking that as a seedling of an idea and growing it into something a little more complete."

Turnbough, owner of Walls with Imagination, is no stranger to the creative process himself and said he hopes his work can inspire imaginative play for the children who frequent the museum.

"You hope that kids play pretend and that they feel like they're a fireman maybe a little more than before because they're actually in

a firehouse, and there's a firetruck now, and there's a dog and there's tools on the wall," he said. "... You hope that it gives more of a complete feel of the inside of the firehouse, enough where the imagination can take hold a little bit quicker than it might have without all the cool artwork."

Underwood said in the future the museum plans to use the space for programming with area firefighters to learn about fire safety, and, of course, have some fun.

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