



The mission of the IDEA Place is to awaken in both children and adults the excitement of learning by doing. Central to our philosophy is the belief that real objects, direct experiences, and enjoyment promote learning. Children, their families, and their teachers are given the opportunity to study and investigate the wonders of the world around them through the interactive exploration of scientific phenomena. We believe that these experiences, along with more formal learning approaches, will stimulate curiosity, motivate further explorations, and increase appreciation and understanding in the areas of science and mathematics

Introduction

Background

The IDEA Place is a hands-on science museum that was approved by the Louisiana Board of Regents in 1991 as part of a science and technology education center (SciTEC) that was being developed at that time. The Idea Place opened its doors on April 23, 1994 with approximately 500 in attendance. Since that time, over 40,000 K-12 students have visited the IDEA Place from across north Louisiana and south Arkansas. Attendance has grown each year with last year's attendance approaching the 10,000 mark.

What began as an abandoned gymnasium in Woodard Hall, was transformed into a wonderland of childhood educational exploration. Initial funding for the project came from private donations and a great deal of community support. In addition to a small grant from the Chamber of Commerce, the Jaycees held a five-ring circus and donated the proceeds to the IDEA Place. Their efforts resulted in the carpeting of the floor in the facility. Later, Toyota USA awarded a grant in the amount of 65,000 dollars with which the Starlab Planetarium, computers and other exhibits were purchased. Toyota also arranged for the use of a van for one year, which was used to take various exhibits directly to area schools. The program, "Ideas on Wheels," offered area students hands-on math and science activities and was a great success.

The museum continues to grow as new exhibits are added. In 1999, the Trailblazer Rural Development Institute awarded us a grant to construct a recycling exhibit as a part of the North Louisiana Recycling Project. The exhibit was constructed using as much recycled material as possible including carpet made from coke bottles and lumber made out of plastic shopping bags. As part of the project that year, a thirty-minute presentation was made to over 1,000 area sixth-graders about recycling. The presentation included a short video that a local television station helped us to produce and a papermaking activity. This activity actually involved students recycling old newspapers into new paper. In addition, a recycling curriculum guide was developed, printed and distributed to all sixth grade teachers in the five-parish target area.

Thanks to a gift from McDonald's Restaurants, we were able have a 250-gallon saltwater aquarium (dubbed the McQuarium) set up in the IDEA Place. One year after the saltwater aquarium was installed, McDonald's also provided a freshwater aquarium for the IDEA Place.

A 1926 model Autocar truck that was donated to the University back in 1972 dominates the center of the museum. The truck was used for several years in parades and university events and was then retired to a surplus property warehouse. We were able to convince the University to allow us to display the truck in the IDEA Place. As an added bonus, an antique calliope stands in the bed of the truck and has been restored to operating condition. Children can climb stairs into the back of the truck and play the calliope as they try to determine how it works.

Again with funds provided by the Trailblazer Rural Development Institute, two new exhibits were added to the IDEA Place last year. First, an anti-litter exhibit was installed

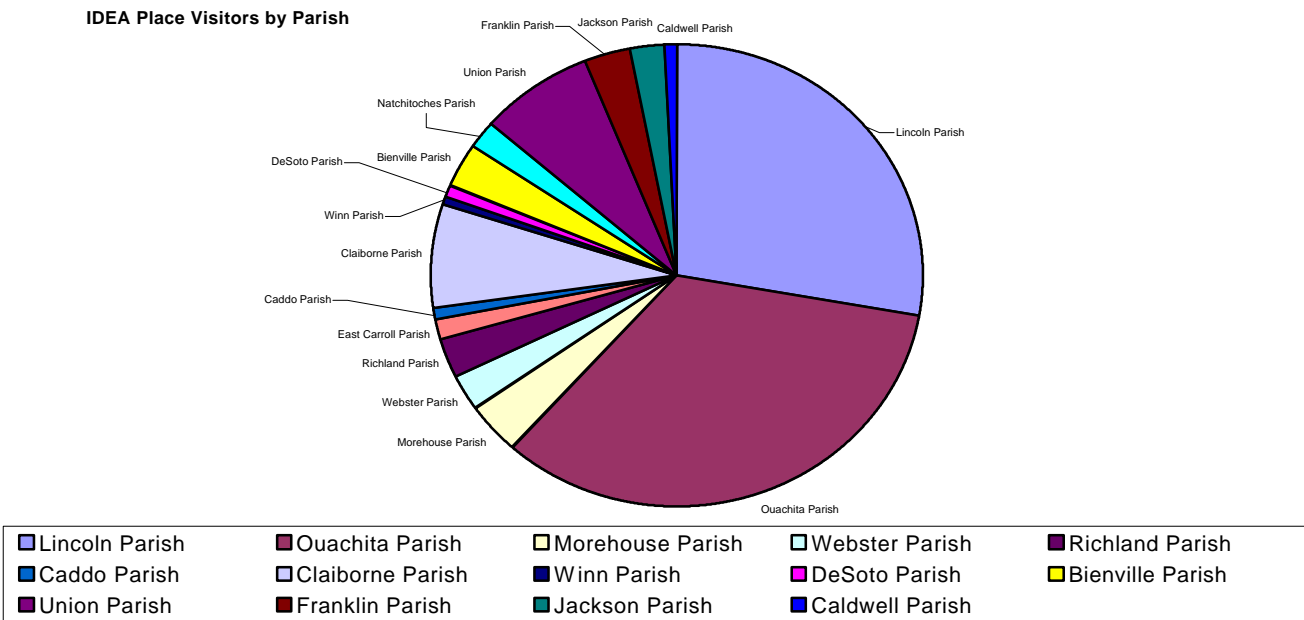
and presentations were made to area K-5 students encouraging them to participate in Governor Foster’s Kid Pledge Program. In addition, our first outdoor exhibit, *Bayou IDEA*, was constructed. This exhibit features a working model of the Sparta Aquifer and presents information about water conservation.

All of the exhibits in the IDEA Place fit into one of four broad categories; Gadgets and Gears; Progression of Life; Math and Technology; and Light, Lasers and Sound. Each category has its own area in the museum and related exhibits are grouped accordingly.

In 1999, the Ruston-Lincoln Convention and Visitors Bureau awarded us a \$10,000 grant to help publicize the facility. This money allowed us to produce new full-color brochures for the IDEA Place. In addition, it will helped pay for new signs for the front of the building, signs placed on the Interstate, and directional road signs that will aid travelers in finding the IDEA Place.

The Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development toured our facility and designated it a local attraction. This designation allowed the DOTD to include IDEA Place signage on the blue attraction signs on I-20 at the Tech exit. Three additional road signs have been placed along Tech Drive and Hergot Streets that will bring visitors directly to our parking lot.

During its years of operation, the IDEA Place has enjoyed an excellent association with the local media. Several television and newspaper stories have featured the IDEA Place and the programs associated with it. The chart below depicts IDEA Place visitors by parish.



Programs

The IDEA Place offers a variety of programs for K-12 students including:

- Recycling Presentations
- Litter Presentations
- Sparta Presentations
- Space Day
- Space Camps
- Summer Science Institute

The Planetarium

Located on the campus of A.E. Phillips Laboratory School, which is adjacent to the College of Education, the Planetarium has been a popular facility for over thirty years. The planetarium seats 120 people under its 40-foot diameter dome. The equipment in the facility is capable of projecting the sun, moon, and planets as well as about 3,000 visible stars, giving a correct and realistic simulation of the celestial view.

Programs presented in the Planetarium are tailored to the age/grade level of the audience. Schools from all over north Louisiana have made field trips to this facility and have left with a better understanding of, and appreciation for the beauty and enormity of our solar system. Again, the purpose of the planetarium is to support and enhance classroom instruction.

Management of the planetarium was recently assigned to the IDEA Place, enabling teachers to schedule field trips to both facilities with one phone call. We are in the process of seeking funding to complete a \$90,000 renovation of the planetarium that will enhance and modernize the capabilities of what is already an excellent resource for teachers.

The NASA Educator Resource Center

In 1999, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) selected Louisiana Tech University as host of the NASA Educator Resource Center (ERC) for Louisiana. This honor came about as the result of a competitive proposal process. Institutions in Shreveport, Lafayette, Baton Rouge, New Orleans, and Lake Charles were also considered.

The ERC provides teachers with access to all of the resource materials developed by NASA. This includes posters, educator guides, CD-ROMs, videotapes, lithographs, and other materials featuring NASA missions and aligned with national math, science, and technology content standards.

ERC staff is also available to conduct workshops and classroom presentations. All of the materials and services available through the ERC are provided as a public service to educators in Louisiana.

Current Projects

The IDEA Place Mystery Zone Litter Project

This project, funded by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), is being designed for fourth grade students. The project allows students to design and implement an experiment to determine the effectiveness of an advertising campaign developed by the students. At the conclusion of the experiment, they will present their findings to area police juries.

Internet Based Earth Systems Science Course

Louisiana Tech University will offer an Earth Systems Science course for teachers tuition-free for the next three years. The courses are designed to provide in-depth content knowledge and to model effective teaching strategies for science teachers. Funding for tuition and materials is provided by a grant from NASA and the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies. Initial funding for this project will allow for six offerings of the course over the next three years.

Substitute Teacher Training Program

In partnership with the Lincoln Parish School District, Louisiana Tech University has developed a ten-hour training program for substitute teacher candidates. The course includes instruction on policies and procedures, classroom management, lesson planning, and effective teaching strategies.

The Experiment Gallery

The Opportunity

The Experiment Gallery was designed and constructed by the Science Museum of Minnesota with support from the National Science Foundation. Originally designed as a traveling exhibit for use by major science centers around the country, the Experiment Gallery will complete its tour in the fall of 2002. At that time, the exhibit will be available for purchase.

Purchasing the Experiment Gallery and housing it in the IDEA Place will:

- Provide an ideal setting for professional development in physical, earth, and space science
- Provide an opportunity for preservice teachers to develop lessons and activities that they can present to K-12 students
- Provide K-12 students with an opportunity to investigate and explore scientific phenomena
- Provide teachers with an exciting, low cost, educational field trip opportunity that addresses content standards they are required to teach
-