Dear Friend of The Museums,

While it may seem obvious to you what “business” The Discovery Museums are in, it might surprise you to hear that it’s not “museum,” or “entertainment,” or even “education.” Simply put, the focus of our efforts—our reason for being—is “readiness.” We want kids to be ready: ready for school, ready for life, ready to confront challenges, and ready to seize the opportunities that will surround them as they grow and their worlds expand.

On pages 4-5 you can learn what a group of knowledgeable professionals—a doctor, a teacher, and an early childhood advocate—believes it means for a child to be “ready.” We know this is a question that every parent wants to have answered. Parents want to know that they have done everything in their power to prepare their child for both everyday happenings and transitional life events: the first playdate; kindergarten; overnight camp; peer pressure; the first big moral decision; driving a car; move-in day at college; choosing a job, a mate, a life path. Parents expose their children to different experiences, situations and choices in order to develop the emotional, social, behavioral, and cognitive skills that help create a solid foundation for life and its challenges. And yet, we all worry: will they be ready?

There is good news for parents. The professionals have researched the impact of parents on a child’s readiness, and the list of things parents need to “do” does not seem all that extraordinary: read to your child, spend time with your child, create and enforce routines, take time to talk to your child, encourage your child to think about the world around them, demonstrate respect and courtesy to others. This list feels pretty doable, right?

And yet we know that data indicates our children as a group are becoming less creative problem solvers. They are exhibiting more evidence of social and emotional challenges. The rates of issues with attention and focus have risen. Anecdotally, kindergarten teachers tell us that kids are less ready to learn. What is going on? The solutions to these problems are simple and yet we have not been successful in reversing these trends.

So back to our first point: our role. The Discovery Museums are all about creating and enabling experiences that reinforce those very basic principles about helping children to be ready. We are about family time. We are about shared learning experiences. We are about connecting with others to learn and do together. We are about kids trying new things, but also about seeing them grow and develop by being progressively more successful on each return visit. And we are about building confidence that a child is ready.

We hope you agree that every child needs and deserves the kind of rich, formative experiences they get when they visit The Discovery Museums with their family. As we end 2013 and begin 2014, we are poised to do even more to help kids be ready. To do that we will need your support in ways that will exceed even your already generous levels.

Thank you for your help and support.

Neil H. Gordon, CEO

Lees N. Stuntz, Chair, Board of Directors
Financial Year in Review

2013 Notable Achievements

- Served almost 172,000 people, our second most ever after our 30th anniversary year in 2012. Our number served has increased more than 35% since 2009.
- Increased membership by 70% since 2009, to more than 1,960 member families.
- Served more than 40,400 people—24% of the total—for free or deeply reduced cost through our Open Door Connections program, which provides opportunities for those who face financial, developmental, or cultural barriers to experiencing the Museums.
- Brought hands-on STEM programs to more than 27,000 pre-K through 8th graders in classrooms throughout New England through our Traveling Science Workshops program, now in its 21st year.
- Launched the Discovery Museums Speaker Series, bringing together expert voices for engaging community dialogs. In 2013, two MIT professors, a Yale Professor emeritus, and a leading pediatrician from Harvard Medical School spoke on topics that matter most to families.
- Opened our newest exhibit, AirPlay, developed in collaboration with three other museums as part of our IMLS-funded Exhibit Lab project (see back cover).
- Scientists from MathWorks, Tufts University, Brandeis University, Boston Children’s Hospital, Harvard University, Fitchburg State University, and Boston College participated in the inaugural session of our Portal to the Public program, becoming our first group of Science Communication Fellows.
- “Best of the Best,” Family Favorites Award, Boston Parents Paper.
- Best Museum, Wicked Local Readers Choice Awards.
- Museums for America grant, Institute of Museum and Library Services.

Operating Support and Revenue

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<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
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2013 Operating Support and Revenue

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<tr>
<td>Rental Income</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>74.06%</strong></td>
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Change in Net Assets from Operations Prior to Depreciation

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*Preliminary unaudited results
What Do Children Need To Be Ready?

The Discovery Museums have assembled a team of experts from the fields of neuroscience, informal learning, early education, and accessibility to advise us on a multi-year project to create a playful yet purposeful early learning space focused on healthy brain development. We asked three of the experts from our Early Brain Development Advisory Group to discuss the topic of readiness in young children.

What does the term readiness mean to you?

**Sunindiya**: When we talk about readiness, we want to ensure that every child starts out on a strong foundation for learning, school success, and citizenship.

**Cheryl**: As a Kindergarten teacher, readiness to me means more about the social than the academic. Our year both begins and ends working on social issues and preparing students in that arena. Some things parents could think about when considering if their child is ready for kindergarten would be whether the child has self-help skills: can he put a coat on by himself? keep track of her own materials? pack up at end of day? Is she “socially” ready? Can he follow teacher directions and live within classroom rules? Most 4-5 year olds are very egocentric, but in order to function within a classroom setting, they must be able to think outside of themselves.

**Kevin**: To me readiness means that children feel “at home” with themselves—safe, valued, listened to, respected. Readiness is built through relationships: if the child’s relationship with his parents is strong, then he will be comfortable exploring the world of places, people, and ideas without fear of making mistakes. By valuing both their child’s mistakes and accomplishments, a parent provides the scaffolding for a child to feel secure enough to learn and grow.

Do you think that the expectation of readiness has changed over the last few years? If so, what do you see as differences?

**Cheryl**: From my perspective as a teacher, I don’t think readiness has changed—to me it’s all about social development, and the academics will come after. But parents now seem to think that readiness has changed, and that there is an academic expectation for their children. Many parents want to know “what should my child know before coming to kindergarten?” My response is always that there are no academic requirements!

**Kevin**: I think expectations may have changed. Today there is a huge focus on the importance of the early years of a young child’s life, which has brought both benefits and burdens to children and parents alike. While very young children are now given more opportunities for learning and exploration, parents may—unwittingly—overstimulate and overwhelm the child with developmentally inappropriate information and stimulation. Parents should be able to take delight in their child’s discoveries and enjoy the changes a child goes through naturally, and still allow the child to learn from mistakes. Our expectations need to match a child’s style and aptitude at any given time.

**Sunindiya**: We’ve always known that the interactive influences between children’s genes and environment shape the way that their brains develop. We also know that young children naturally reach out for back-and-forth interactions (also known as “serve and return” relationships) that actually “wire” the brain by creating neural connections. Recent research highlights the importance of these interactions as well as access to engaging environments in children’s social, emotional, and language development and their overall readiness for school and life.

When we talk about kindergarten readiness, we usually talk about what is needed by the child. But what does kindergarten readiness mean for a caregiver and when does it begin?

**Kevin**: Caregivers need to keep the perspective that a child’s age matters less than their true social and emotional developmental readiness. We need to keep expectations appropriate for each child. If the caregivers have been in tune with a child’s need to feel valued, listened to, and respected from the beginning, the child will feel free to explore and learn. It all begins at home, and early relationships are key.

**Cheryl**: For parents/guardians, it is important to provide your child with self-help skills and work towards independence. You need to be as comfortable with your child going to kindergarten as they are! For example, part of coming to school is taking the bus. Parents need to be able to “let go” and allow their kids to grow up in a typical way. If you are uncomfortable with the bus, try not to transfer that fear to your child. How you feel and view the school experience is noticed by your child. If you are anxious, they will be as well.

**Sunindiya**: Caregivers are the ultimate brain builders. A caregiver’s back and forth interactions—cooing, speaking, touching, and making eye contact—begin building brain architecture from the moment a baby is born. As a young child grows, these interactions
and experiences create connections that wire the brain for future success. They also lay the foundation for the next phase of learning, such as reading and math, and a lifetime of school success. Whenever children are nurtured and engaged in an interactive, enriching environment at home or in the community, that’s brain building in progress!

**The President’s Council of Advisors on Science and Technology recently expressed concern that “Despite our historical record of achievement, the United States now lags behind other nations in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) education at the elementary and secondary levels.” How can caregivers create an environment for young children that promotes STEM thinking?**

**Sunindiya:** Despite leading the nation in innovation and education, Massachusetts along with the rest of the United States is behind in giving young children a strong start in STEM education. Caregivers and early education programs can and should create an environment for young children that promotes STEM thinking and learning. Children are naturally inquisitive, and activities such as building, matching, and blowing bubbles are easy ways to foster these important skills and abilities.

**Kevin:** The issue is knowing the child and what he actually needs. Parents and caregivers need to know the child’s aptitudes, and respect them. We can ask lead questions but the child should be in the driver’s seat and be the leader, the architect of their own development. We cannot usurp the child’s sense of discovery or pleasure, but allow them to engage without fear of failure, without fear of being corrected, and so enjoy the satisfaction and delight that comes from making new discoveries.

**Cheryl:** It’s all about inquiry. Provide them opportunities to explore nature, experiment in the kitchen (there is lots of science and math in the kitchen!), let them problem-solve on their own (with guidance). All of these opportunities help to create a world where children learn to think.

**How do different family circumstances affect readiness?**

**Cheryl:** Certainly families who have the opportunity to spend time with their children, expose them to rich experiences such as visiting The Discovery Museums or living in an area where nature is right out the back door, and hold meaningful conversations provide them with the tools they need for readiness. Young children need guidance to become independent—this is something that comes from home.

**Sunindiya:** We know that chronic stressful conditions such as extreme poverty, neglect, or severe maternal depression—what scientists now call “toxic stress,”—disrupt the architecture of the developing brain. This can lead to lifelong difficulties in learning, memory, and self-regulation. That’s why connecting families with resources and engaging, enriching, and interactive environments is so important. By promoting increased interactions between children and caregivers, we can give a strong start to all children.

**Kevin:** Coming from very different cultural backgrounds, every child needs to have his or her cultural values and unique mode of thinking and feeling respected. The world of the family and the world of the school can sometimes be too different—even discrepant—for children; they need coherence between the values found at home and in educational settings. Children need to know and respect their own cultural backgrounds, and caregivers must appreciate the richness of that background. We must embrace the cultural differences in people and be open to being enriched by those differences.

**If you could say one thing to parents about readiness, what would it be?**

**Kevin:** Know your child—it is the key issue. Talk to your child. Know your child’s threshold for being overwhelmed or overstimulated. Listen to your child, with no preconceptions about how he or she should develop. Let their curiosity and interests shape how you respond to them. Every child is different and unique, but it can be hard for parents to appreciate this. We have models, based on ourselves and our own childhood experiences, which shape our expectations. But we cannot pigeonhole children into a mold; we must allow them to experience new opportunities that are unique and challenging—for them.

**Sunindiya:** We are not really asking parents to do anything new. There are many opportunities in their everyday lives to make any moment a brain-building moment: by asking questions, engaging children in play, and accessing engaging environments in the community such as museums and libraries. Brain building can happen anywhere and at any time, such as counting the stars, finding letters on a street sign, or making a homemade card.

**Cheryl:** Don’t rush your child—let them grow at their own pace. There is no “one way” in which children develop, they are all individuals. Enjoy their growth and celebrate their accomplishments with them. Value play in their daily lives. Let them be kids!!!

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**Sunindiya Bhalla** is Community Impact Director for Healthy Child Development at United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley; she also manages the Brain Building in Progress campaign, a public/private partnership of the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care and United Way of Massachusetts Bay.

**Cheryl Beaudoin** is a Kindergarten teacher in the Acton Public Schools.

**J. Kevin Nugent, Ph.D.,** is Director of the Brazelton Institute at Boston Children’s Hospital; Emeritus Professor, University of Massachusetts at Amherst; Lecturer, Harvard Medical School.
Our Supporters

We gratefully acknowledge the individuals, corporations, foundations, organizations, and government agencies whose generosity and goodwill provided critical support for The Discovery Museums in 2013. It is a special honor this year to recognize those who have shown their loyalty to the Museums by giving for many years consecutively (see key).

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$250-499
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Patricia and Don Chisholm
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Beth and Todd Cook
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$100-$249
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Karen and Gerard Hartigan
Lenore and Peter Henry +
Lisa Hodsdon and Michael Bernstein
Emily Hogan and Scott Pherson
Ming Chia Huang
Kai Johnson
Robin and Tripp Jones

These lists reflect gifts made between January 1 and December 31, 2013, and are complete and accurate to the best of our ability. To notify us of an error, please contact Marie Beam, Chief Development Officer, at mbeam@discoverymuseums.org.

Falling for Science 2013

On October 26 we brought together nearly 150 friends and supporters for a celebration of women in science to benefit The Discovery Museums. The gala was hosted by Dr. Erika Ebbel Angle, founder and chairman of Science from Scientists, CEO of Counterpoint Health Solutions, and an influential advocate for STEM education. Dr. Ebbel Angle talked about science milestones in her early education, and her current work to inspire young people to be curious and active scientists in their daily lives.

As always, our Falling for Science guests were tremendously generous to the Museums, and the event netted more than $31,000 in support of our SMART Gals programming. This special evening would not have been possible—nor as successful—without the creativity and tireless efforts of event co-chairs Carla Bacharach and Cheryl Beaudoin. We are deeply grateful for their support of this important event, and for the generosity of our guests.
Donor Profile: Ben Rosenman, age 3

Dear Discovery Museums,

I love to play in the museum with all of the toys. I decided to give my holiday charity to support this great resource in our community.

Thank you!

Ben Rosenman, age 3

Acton residents since 2010, the Rosenman family—parents Lindsay and Erik and sons Seth, 7, and Ben, 3—have been members of The Discovery Museums since their older son was 1. Lindsay calls the Museums “a very special place for my family” and feels fortunate to be able to watch Seth as he grows into the Science Discovery Museum while Ben enjoys his favorite Children’s Discovery Museum exhibits: the Train Room and Chain Reaction Room. Ben enjoys visiting the Museums so much that he and his friends will celebrate his fourth birthday with a party here this spring.

Lindsay and Erik introduced the boys to the concept of philanthropy at a young age. Each year the family celebrates one night of Hanukkah by talking about making gifts, rather than receiving them: each person picks a place that is personally meaningful and together they discuss how they might be able to support it. For Ben, making it possible for other kids to play at The Discovery Museums was at the top of his list. So, with a little help from his mom, he proudly mailed a check for $18 to the Museums.

Chief Development Officer Marie Beam said, “While many families struggle with communicating to children the idea of giving back, the Rosenmans have successfully made charitable giving a family tradition. Ben’s gift has already inspired all of us who work here, and we know it will inspire others who love this museum to invest in it.”
Our Supporters

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Hologic
MathWorks
Yawkey Foundations

$10,000 - $24,999
The English Family Fund of the Foundation for MetroWest
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Sudbury Foundation ++

$5,000 - $9,999
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Youth in Philanthropy Program
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 Interstate Electrical Services Corporation
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Lake Boone Ice Company
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Mass Audubon
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Associates Insurance Agency, Inc.
Sorrento’s Brick Oven Pizzera

$100 - $499
Acton-Boxborough Cultural Council
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Matching Gifts

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Adam and Camille Fennel
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Patricia and Joseph Motzi
Wendy Caswell
David and Maureen Christmas

In Memory of Maria Conley
Erin Bennett
Terrie Cervera
Emily Hogan and Scott Pherson
Denise and Denis LeBlanc
Claudia and Andrew Veitch
Jean and Marsby Warters
Steven Schaeffer

In Honor of Davida Fox-Melanson
Elyce D’Andrea

In Memory of Eric Hilfer
Carole Marcacci

In Honor of Denise LeBlanc
Pauline Dumais

In Honor of Barbara and David Linnard
Owen Smith

In Honor of The Schafer Family
Kristen Erslend

Key:
+ 5-plus year consecutive donor
++ 10-plus year consecutive donor

2013 Bid for Kids Online Auction

A hearty thank you to all those who helped make our 2013 Bid for Kids Online Auction a success! With your help, the Auction met its goal and raised $20,000 to support the Museums’ Especially For Me accessibility programming for children with an autism spectrum disorder, or who are deaf or hard of hearing. Special thanks to Auction Chair Carla Bacharach, who was instrumental in securing wonderful items for our catalog and invested a great deal of time and effort in our success.
The Discovery Museums

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Looking Forward

The Discovery Museums Announce New Board Chair

Board member Bill Ryan stepped into the position of Chair of the Museums’ Board of Directors effective January 1, 2014. Ryan has served on the Board since January 2010.

“We are thrilled to have Bill assume the role of Board Chair,” said CEO Neil Gordon. “As we enter an exciting growth phase in the history of the Museums, Bill’s experience, knowledge, and well-recognized educational leadership is just what we need to guide us. Through his leadership roles and volunteer work, Bill has greatly impacted the strength of our community and will continue to do so in this role.”

Ryan retired as superintendent of Acton-Boxborough Regional School District in 2010, and before that served as assistant superintendent, overseeing finance and operations for the region. An active member of the community, he has volunteered for the Acton-Boxborough United Way, Acton Memorial Library, Acton Community Supper, Acton-Boxborough Arts Council, and Acton Youth Commission. Ryan currently serves as corporator at Emerson Hospital, corporator at Middlesex Savings Bank, board member of Cooperative Elder Services of Lexington, and board member of the Doli Atamian Campership Fund. He received a BA in political science from Notre Dame and an M.Ed. from Boston University. Ryan and his wife Christine are residents of Maynard.

Ryan replaces outgoing Chair Lees Stuntz, who served on the board for nine years and as Chair since 2006. Stuntz will remain on the board and serve as Chair of the Building Committee.

Planning for Our Future

We thank the following donors for making an early investment in the Campaign for The Discovery Museums:

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Museum Collaborations
Bring Better Process, Better Results

What does it take to design and build a terrific, engaging museum exhibit? Current best practices center on designing for family learning, prototyping with visitors, and building for open-ended investigation. But perhaps the most impactful thing is bringing a broad range of perspective and expertise to bear. Through a grant from the federal Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), The Discovery Museums received three-year funding to collaborate with colleagues from EcoTarium, ECHO Lake Aquarium and Science Center, and the Children’s Museum & Theatre of Maine to work together on exhibit development. The Exhibit Lab project gave museum staff the benefit of a wide range of perspectives, resources, and expertise to leverage when developing our new AirPlay exhibit.

“The fun, but challenging part about building exhibits at The Discovery Museums is that we build low-cost exhibits that look and feel familiar, but must survive intense use,” said Exhibit & Facilities Director Steve Roake. “Finding the right combinations of materials and construction methods on your own can take lots of trial and error. By having a new set of colleagues at similarly situated museums, I now have access to decades worth of exhibit building experiences—as do they—which helps me get to neat, creative solutions much more efficiently. I have a whole new team on my side.”

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