

'Disney Hall of the Valley'

By Kerry Cavanaugh
Staff Writer

Children's Museum groundbreaking on Tuesday

After five years without a home, the Children's Museum of Los Angeles will break ground Tuesday on its stunning new facility at Hansen Dam.

When completed in the summer of 2007, the \$52.6 million museum will

be the first major cultural institution in the San Fernando Valley and California's largest museum dedicated to children.

"This will be the Disney Hall of the San Fernando Valley," said Bruce Corwin, co-chair of the museum's

board of directors. "This is something truly exciting and truly over the top, particularly for the Valley."

And like the undulating steel of Frank Gehry's downtown design, the Children's Museum will startle and delight with its unique architecture

and cutting-edge exhibits, planners promise.

Architect Sarah Graham plans to wrap the 57,000-square-foot concrete building in unexpected,

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Go to our Web site for an interactive display on the Children's Museum.

Museum to coax visitors to Valley



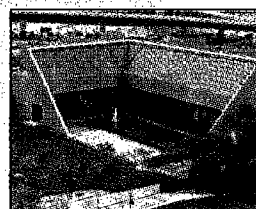
Indianapolis museum



Houston museum



Boston museum



San Jose museum

What's Best for Children

Child Magazine surveyed hundreds of children's museums across America and came up with the following list of the 10 best, based on the quality and diversity of exhibits, programs, staff, comfort and overall value.

1. The Children's Museum of Indianapolis, Ind.

The 433,000-square-foot gallery features 11 major exhibits, including "Bones: An Exhibit Inside You," in which children can build a skeleton, shop for calcium-rich foods and walk through a giant model of a bone enhanced with fiber optics.

2. The Children's Museum of Houston

Its multicultural exhibits include "Yalalag, a Mountain Village in Mexico," where kids can explore life in the replica of an Oaxacan village — shopping in the mercado, making tortillas in the kitchen and learning Spanish and Zapotec words in the schoolhouse.

3. The Children's Museum, Boston

One of the few museums with many activities for toddlers and preschoolers, this one features a rock-climbing wall for 3- to 5-year olds and a treehouse with hidden pathways.

4. Port Discovery, Baltimore

One of the newest children's museums aims to bring kids' dreams to life. In Miss Perception's Mystery House, children piece together clues and evidence to solve a mystery.

5. Discovery Center, Rockford, Ill.

Among the exhibits that aim to educate kids in the "science of fun" is "Amusement Park Science," where kids can build and test a model of a roller coaster.

6. Brooklyn Children's Museum

Founded in 1899, world's oldest children's museum keeps pace with its much younger — and flashier — counterparts. Its award-winning Museum Team program allows children as young as 7 to visit the museum unaccompanied by an adult and participate in art and science residency programs, peer tutoring and other educational activities.

7. Strong Museum, Rochester, N.Y.

Operates an authentic 1956 diner and a 1920s-style soda fountain so families can enjoy a snack or a meal without leaving the premises.

8. Minnesota Children's Museum, St. Paul

Many of the exhibits are designed to inspire learning through role-playing. In "Earth World Gallery," kids can don ant suits and crawl through the mazelike tunnels and chambers of a giant anthill, meet live turtles, play in a stream, and create a thunderstorm with movable clouds.

9. Children's Discovery Museum of San Jose, Calif.

Its environmental study program allows students to perform authentic scientific tests of the local water quality.

10. Madison (Wisc.) Children's Museum

An award-winning "First Feats" tot area is made entirely of nonsynthetic materials such as wood, stone, straw, clay, sand and cotton. Even the toys in its infant section are all-natural.

Source: Child Magazine

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environmentally friendly materials. There'll be natural grass on one wall, synthetic grass on another.

A toddler play area will be covered in acoustic pillows — perfect for bumping into — and the black-box theater will be wrapped with a chalkboard.

"Inside and outside the building what we've been trying to do, on a restricted financial diet, is to make the building an exhibit and get people to ask questions," Graham explained.

"We want children to have more questions when they leave than when they arrive. It's about reaching children and getting them to think."

That theme will be carried throughout the museum.

Lead designer Edwin Schlossberg, husband of Caroline Kennedy, said the museum is more than reading a display or pushing a button — the children will actually make the exhibits function.

They'll pump water to the giant tree to make its leaves turn green. They'll prepare food in the kitchen workshop to bring the mythical Dogbear to life and then they'll operate its eyes and ears.

It will be interactive, making children feel like they run the museum.

"You see what you do really affects what happens in the world and what happens around you," Schlossberg said. "It's much more like real life, all of us responsible for our environments."

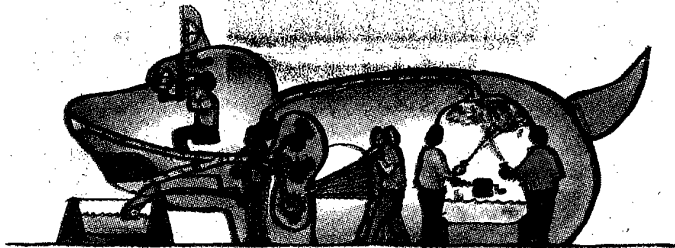
All this at \$8 per person — less than movie. Ultimately, organizers expect to draw 360,000 visitors a year, from as far south as San Diego and north to Kern County.

The original Children's Museum was a 17,000-square-foot facility designed by Gehry, then little-known architect, and opened in 1979. The museum served about 250,000 visitors a year and eventually outgrew its downtown space.

In 2000, the museum closed its doors with plans to build two new facilities — one in Little Tokyo and one at Hansen Dam.

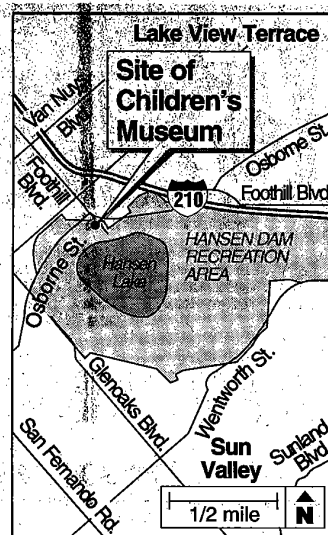
But raising money was difficult, and organizers dropped plans for the Little Tokyo facility to focus on the 3.5-acre Hansen Dam site. The land is owned by the city and leased to the museum for \$1 a year.

Organizers later scaled back the size and amenities of the new museum in order to break ground this year and meet grant-funding deadlines. A total of \$17 million in public funding has been dedicated to the museum, with \$9



Children's Museum of Los Angeles rendering

A rendering, right, shows off the striking design and inviting entrance of the new Valley home for the Children's Museum of Los Angeles, which is set to feature interactive exhibits like Dogbear, above.



Daily News

IF YOU GO

Groundbreaking for the Children's Museum of Los Angeles will be held at 10 a.m. Tuesday at the Hansen Dam Recreation Park, Foothill Boulevard near Osborne Street, Lake View Terrace. For more information, visit www.childrensmuseumla.org.

million raised from private sources.

Organizers are still raising the \$26.5 million needed for exhibit construction, staffing and the museum's endowment.

The museum will sit on the edge of the Hansen Dam Recreation Area, next to the new Lake View Terrace Library and overlooking the recreational lake, hiking trails and willow forest.

City Council President Alex Padilla said he hopes the facility will be the anchor of redevelopment in Lake View Terrace and

surrounding communities. He's been a champion of the project, even using his 30th birthday party as a fundraiser that generated \$500,000 for the museum.

"You ask people about Pacoima and Lake View Terrace, and very few people go out of their way to visit the area," Padilla said. "I can already envision it as a destination point. They go to the museum for half a day and then go the aquatic center in the afternoon."

Roberto Barragan with the Valley Economic Development Center said he believes the museum and the Hansen Dam area will become regional destinations, with potential for new restaurants, bike shops and sporting good shops in the neighborhood to serve the visitors.

Likewise, the museum will be a boon for local families and schools looking for arts activities.

Museum Executive Director Mark Dierking said he hopes the museum can replace some of the cultural education that's been trimmed from public schools as a result of budget cuts. The museum also plans to work with schools to match their curricula with the exhibits so children get more than a field trip.

And, in a community that's traditionally had fewer parks and fewer recreational activities, the museum will expand children's opportunities.

"There's a strong reason we're going to Lake View Terrace and Pacoima," Dierking said. "We feel there's a need here. We hope to be a local asset."

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Children's Museum breaks ground at Hansen Dam site

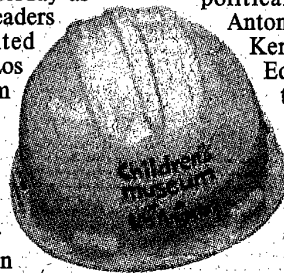
By Kerry Cavanaugh
Staff Writer

Dark rain clouds and cool weather couldn't dampen spirits Tuesday as politicians and community leaders celebrated the long-awaited groundbreaking of the new Los Angeles Children's Museum at Hansen Dam.

After fundraising difficulties and lengthy delays, supporters launched work on the \$43 million museum, touted as the first major cultural facility in the San Fernando Valley and an architecturally significant building on par with Disney Hall or the Getty Center.

"I don't know about you, but I'm borderline giddy today," Council President

and museum advocate Alex Padilla told the crowd. Despite the weather, the groundbreaking drew scores of neighbors, literati, local schools and well-known political figures such as Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and Caroline Kennedy — whose husband, Edwin Schlossberg, designed the museum exhibits.



"What Walt Disney Hall is to music and the Getty Center is to art, the new Children's Museum will be to Los Angeles' kids and families," Villaraigosa said.

When it opens in 2007, the 57,000-square-foot museum is expected to entertain visitors with its unique design as well as interactive

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Officials and kids eager to see state-of-the-art museum



Kids and dignitaries armed with shovels break ground on the \$43 million, 57,000-square-foot Children's Museum at Hansen Dam on Tuesday.

John McCoy/Staff Photographer

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exhibits.

Attendees at the groundbreaking Tuesday got a sneak peek with a virtual video tour showing sketches of the interior and exterior.

"It's going to be so cool. The art and exhibits will be really, really awesome," said Christopher Cruz, a 10-year-old student at Angeles Mesa Elementary School.

Classmate Oscar Rodriguez agreed: "It'll be cool when I'm really old; I can bring my children to the museum and then their children can come to the museum and then their children can come."

Organizers expect to draw 360,000 visitors to the Hansen Dam site, which overlooks the park's recreational lake and willow forest and marks a dramatic departure from the museum's previous cramped facility downtown.

"No more parking tickets downtown," joked Jennifer Lettelleir, the

"I've been traveling and seeing children's museums around the country and this is going to be an amazing facility."

— Kymberly Evans, Reading Edge literacy arts program director

museum's performing arts director.

Indeed, she and Reading Edge literacy arts program director Kymberly Evans said they are eager to move into a state-of-the-art facility after five years on the road.

"It's going to be great. I've been traveling and seeing children's museums around the country and this is going to be an amazing facility," Evans said.

The original museum closed its doors in 2000 with plans to build two new facilities — one in Little Tokyo and one at Hansen Dam. After a slow start in fundraising, the museum board dropped plans for the Little Tokyo site to focus on the Hansen Dam site. The land is owned by the city and leased to the museum for \$1 a year.

Organizers are still raising \$16.5 million for the museum's exhibits and staffing, plus an additional \$10 million for an endowment.

San Fernando resident Robert Villafana said he was pleased the museum chose to move to the Northeast Valley, an area too often known for landfills and junkyards.

"People say that the kids are the future, but you have to give them some positive images. This will give the kids something positive, something they can look forward to."

The Valley gets its due

AFTER FIVE YEARS WITHOUT a proper home, the Children's Museum of Los Angeles broke ground Tuesday on a building that supporters already have dubbed "the Disney Hall of the San Fernando Valley." Though L.A.'s cultural venues are dispersed geographically, until now the Valley had been unfairly overlooked as the site of a major museum.

The groundbreaking at Hansen Dam Recreation Area is a sign that L.A.'s political and cultural leaders have learned an important lesson from the Valley secession movement.

When completed in the summer of 2007, the 57,000-square-foot facility will be the largest children's museum in the state. It also will help to revitalize the surrounding neighborhoods. The museum will be adjacent to the newly completed Lake View Terrace Library as well as playgrounds and fields, and will make the Hansen Dam area even more popular.

City Council President Alex Padilla has been instrumental in garnering support for the project from around the city. In his speech Tuesday, Padilla, who

grew up in nearby Pacoima, recalled that when he was a student, school field trips usually required long bus rides to downtown or the Westside. With the new museum nearby, local children will be able to visit a major cultural institution more easily.

The museum's designers have promised that the \$52.6-million building will be playful — its plumbing, electrical and mechanical systems exposed so that children can see how buildings are put together. The interactive exhibit space will pay particular attention to how human beings relate to the environment around them. The museum will not only be a delight for children from all over Southern California, it will be a sign that Los Angeles is trying harder to serve the interests of its far-flung neighborhoods.

Children's Museum Drafts Big Plans for Its Little Patrons

Work begins on a new
\$43-million facility in
Lake View Terrace.
Hands-on displays and
an imaginary ecosystem
will blend learning, play.

By WENDY THERMOS
Times Staff Writer

Adults are building a new \$43-million enterprise in Los Angeles, but it will be left up to the imagination of children to run the place.

After five years of planning, fundraising and a difficult search for a site, construction began last week in Lake View Terrace on the new Children's Museum of Los Angeles, a venue that officials hope will draw more than 350,000 visitors a year and become a key cultural asset for the community and the San Fernando Valley.

"It's about empowering and educating children," said Mark Dierking, the museum's executive director. "The concept is that the museum really doesn't function without kids."

Set in the foothill terrain of Lake View Terrace, the museum will revolve around an imaginary ecosystem, intended to show children that everything around them is interdependent — land, vegetation and climate. It's up to humans like them to keep the world running smoothly.

The 60,000-square-foot museum, slated to open in mid-2007, will be packed with hands-on displays in which youngsters can learn while they play. They will feed make-believe creatures phosphorus and nitrogen, learn about air currents by donning wings and imitating birds or planes, create puppets and scripts for performances, and learn to cook healthful meals, among other activities.

A key feature will be a transport system called the Big Fun Cool Thing, which will operate much like a giant dry cleaner's rack. The contraption will ferry children's artwork, inventions and small construction projects throughout the museum for all to see. The machine will also function as a giant energy exchange system, funneling water,

air and sun-generated power to many exhibits.

The ecosystem will have three stand-alone whimsical creatures with which children can interact. Tree will represent the plant kingdom; Dogbear and Puppy-cub will stand for the animal kingdom. The creatures won't thrive without human attention. Children will use colored balls to find the right combination of nutrients to feed the tree so that its lighted leaves turn green or its fruit ripens.

"It puts kids in charge and creatively in control," Dierking said.

In an area called the kitchen, children will learn about cooking customs and healthy eating habits. They will produce food themselves, including simulated fare

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Museum Has Big Plans for Little Patrons

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for Puppycub.

One exhibit will allow children to experiment with water flow by sliding a series of gates to control a cascading stream. In another workshop, youngsters will learn to build small fort-like structures they can play in.

"We really are looking for the next generation of children's museums," City Council President Alex Padilla said last week. "My expectation is that it will be the premier children's museum in the country."

Padilla, who grew up near what is now the Hansen Dam Recreation Area, where the museum will be, and now represents the area, said the facility will help revitalize a part of Los Angeles where residents have long complained of blighted conditions and a lack of cultural opportunities.

"When I was a kid, we had to make long bus or car trips downtown to see the museums," he said. "And then if we wanted to go back the next weekend, we couldn't easily get there. That really hasn't changed.... Cultural offerings need to be dispersed throughout the city, not just concentrated downtown."

It was only after decades of effort on the part of Valley residents and lawmakers that the silt-choked Hansen Lake and surrounding 1,400 acres of wilderness were transformed into a handsome park featuring fishing, trails and picnic facilities.

The city is leasing an acre of its parkland to the museum for \$1 a year.

The new museum, just east of Osborne Street and Foothill Boulevard, will replace the Civic Center Children's Museum, which closed five years ago because it had no room for expansion, parking was a problem and its lease was expiring.

The board of the nonprofit museum initially considered new quarters close to the old 17,000-square-foot location on Main Street but dropped the idea because it was too expensive. Griffith Park came under serious consideration, only to be shot down by neighborhood groups, which didn't want more congestion in an already busy area.

After Padilla was elected in 1999, he pushed to bring the museum to Hansen Dam Park. The site offered ample parking, and the tranquil setting was viewed as a major draw. Also, it would boost the east San Fernando Valley's civic identity, supporters hoped. The City Council approved turning over \$9.5 million in city park bond funds as seed money for the museum.

To date, backers have raised \$27 million from public and private sources for the project.

"We still need \$16 million," Dierking said. "The building is fully funded. We're now raising money for exhibits and operations." After Tuesday's groundbreaking ceremony, a fundraiser in Beverly Hills

brought \$350,000 in pledges.

The Los Angeles Children's Museum will join about 250 youth museums around the nation, with 70 others in the planning or construction stage. Museum advocates say it is vital for children to have a discovery and exploration space to call their own.

"At a children's museum, they can find out that playing is a way to learn," said Janet Rice Elman, executive director of the Assn. of Children's Museums in Washington, D.C.

Los Angeles architect Sarah Graham infused the building design with "green" elements that take advantage of the site's natural surroundings.

The elongated wedge-shaped two-story structure will nestle against a slope, integrating it with the terrain instead of towering above it. To help cool the building, the structure will have roof-mounted misters that visitors can stroll through.

Graham added playful touches as well. Part of the building exterior will be coated with blackboard paint so that children can draw on it. And solar panels for supplying electricity will be arranged against the building like spots on a cow.

"We did that so it would be noticed and to encourage children to ask questions about how energy is generated," said Graham, whose design projects have included Midfield Terminal at Zurich International Airport in

Switzerland and an aerial tram being built in Portland, Ore.

Inside, where many little hands and feet will be a force to contend with, enameled steel, tough plastics and other durable materials have been included in the design.

"The phrase we use," Dierking said, chuckling, "is that it has to be combat ready."

Edwin Schlossberg, whose New York-based firm is designing the exhibits, said he aims to take the term "interactive museum" to a new level in Los Angeles by avoiding the traditional pushbuttons and video screens with signs saying "Learn more."

The term "interactive" is trendy but often misunderstood, said Schlossberg, who has devised exhibits for dozens of cultural institutions, including the Immigration History Center on Ellis Island.

"The minute you introduce video, you aren't interacting with it," he said. "You're getting a message someone wants to convey."

He hopes that children who have spent a day at the museum will have had fun but will also be newly excited about the world around them.

"We've worked really hard not just to show the interdependence of our lives, but that it takes collaboration to be human beings," he said. "I would love it if they learned that it's both what you know and what your friends know that makes a difference."

Valley Children's Museum about to get off the ground

By Kerry Cavanaugh
Staff Writer

After years of delays and fundraising difficulties, construction is set to begin next month on the Children's Museum of Los Angeles at Hansen Dam, the Valley's first large-scale museum.

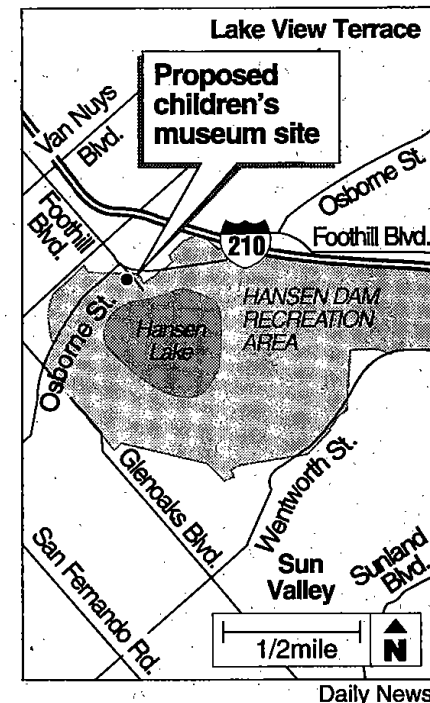
With the \$21 million construction budget in the bank, museum operators plan to hold a groundbreaking Oct. 18 for the interactive children's center with an environmental-education bent. They hope to finish the building by January 2007.

"For everybody involved in the project, it's been a long road and we're excited to be breaking

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online
EXTRA
dailynews.com

► Go online to check out an interactive map for Children's Museum of Los Angeles at Hansen Dam.



Ceremony to kick off work on Children's Museum

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ground," said Mark Dierking, the museum's executive director.

This is the first major cultural institution in the San Fernando Valley and we're excited and pleased to offer it to the local community and surrounding area as well."

Organizers had to trim the facility's size and amenities to break ground this year and meet grant-funding deadlines.

The children's museum downtown closed in 2000 and initial plans to build two museums—one in Little Tokyo and one at Hansen Dam—fell through for lack of

"We're excited and pleased to offer it to the local community and surrounding area as well."

— Mark Dierking, museum's executive director

funding.

Hansen Dam was chosen as the site for a single museum and public funding was consolidated to help get the project off the ground. A total of \$17 million in public funding has been dedicated to the museum, and \$9 million has been raised so far from private sources, Dierking said.

The organization must raise additional funds for exhibits.

But raising money took longer than organizers had hoped, pushing the construction date back three years. The City Council had adopted a July 31 deadline this year for the group to break ground or lose several million in Proposition K park funding, but the deadline

was extended because organizers were so close to construction.

The 58,000-square-foot museum will be on the edge of the Hansen Dam Recreational Area, overlooking a swath of willow forest and riparian habitat. Most of the facility will be on 1.4 acres owned by the city and leased for \$1 a year by the Recreation and Parks Department.

A park and a portion of the museum is on 1.1 acres owned by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which operates the flood control basin.

Shadow Hills resident Mary Benson questions whether the federal agency should allow

construction on the edge of its flood zone.

"In 1978, the area that is proposed, I saw that area under a foot of water. All of a sudden it's OK to build on."

Dierking said the land for the museum is above the 100-year-flood plain, which is the area that would be at risk in a major storm.

The Army Corps of Engineers environmental assessment on the project is available for public review and comment through Sept. 14 at the Lake View Terrace Library.

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