

## Science in your backyard

by Krista Oschmann

Residents and visitors travel down one of Fort Collins' busiest traffic arteries and never realize what the Discovery Science Center houses for the community. This museum may appear like a local school building on Prospect Road, but inside people of all ages share in experiential learning, educational events, programming and 120 scientific exhibits. The center focuses on promoting critical thinking and problem solving skills for children growing up in an ever-changing technological and scientific society.

Seven exhibit rooms comprise the Discovery Science Center throughout the year and traveling exhibits keep repeat visits fresh. Currently, the small traveling exhibit titled "Egypt: Puzzles and Mysteries" can be attended now through July 31, 2007. This exhibit calls on you to use all five of your senses. You can start by looking at original artifacts like supplies used during mummification and admiring golden statues of worshiped idols housed in glass cases. Keeping true to the center's dedication to critical thinking, you can participate in components of what ancient Egyptians practiced in work and play. For example, one of the most recognized parts of Egyptian history circles around the mysterious and grand Great Pyramids. Visitors can see how the massive structures may have been constructed by experimenting with a variety of pulley systems and heavy stones.

In addition to learning about the Egyptians' workmanship, children and adults find themselves stumped by playing the games and mind-teasers Egyptians did hundreds of years ago. One displayed puzzle has never been solved but everyone stops to see if they may be the master-mind to finally do it. Could it be you?

Lastly, scheduled planetarium shows take spectators on a journey through the stars to learn about Egyptian weather and skies. This show is not recommended for children under three.

Year-round, the center offers a small handful of one-session classes for children aged four to twelve. Currently connected to the Egyptian theme, a mummification class allows

attendants not only the chance to learn about mummification but to actually complete the ancient practice by mummifying a chicken!

Brian Krebs of Cheyenne, Wyoming, brought his 12 year-old son Brandon to the center after he completed coursework on Egypt in his sixth grade class.

"I thought the traveling exhibit was pretty good. It's small but they have some interesting things to see, like the artifacts. I'd love to learn how to mummify something. Too bad the class is for kids!" Brian Krebs comments.

In addition to the mummification course, the center offers other sessions focusing on dinosaurs, robots and insects. Depending on the targeted age group, participants often come home with a project they completed and a new appreciation and knowledge of a scientific field. One of the most popular courses, "Junkbots," is available for kids over seven. The course focuses on electricity, motors, wiring and more and children leave with a simple robot they created. The class costs \$22.

A full set of classes, times, costs and descriptions can be found on the facility's website at [www.dcsn.org](http://www.dcsn.org). A nice perk of these sessions is that they are occasionally held on days when the public school system is not in session or for a few hours on the weekends.

While the traveling exhibits may be a favorite, each of the permanent exhibits offers the same type of learning experience: hands-on and experiential. Each of the seven exhibits provides a range of activities and opportunities to appeal to all age groups.

In the Colorado Room, you can get close to a mountain lion mount or see a living Python named "Slinky." You can learn how to track native animals in our communities.

In the Electricity Room you can try your hand at generating electricity manually. While trying and hearing the buzz of old-fashioned light bulbs, you can read about one of the world's most famous scientists, Thomas Edison.

Your eyes may have to adjust to the dimness in the Light and Optics Room but once they do you can experiment with non-radioactive glow-in-the-dark materials and a light phenomenon that captures and temporarily imprints your shadow on a wall. People enjoy trying different poses or even jumping up in the air to freeze their shadow in action on the wall.

Krebs' son, Brandon states, "I liked seeing my shadow on the wall and learning how light affects color. It was cool to see how the colors would change [in the Light and Optics Room] when I would move against the movie screen."

The Live Animal Room houses small

specimens that can also be found in an exotic pet store, yet is still a favorite place to stop for families. During the time the center hosts the Egyptian exhibit, creatures from that area, like Madagascar Hissing Cockroaches, are on display.

The Dinosaur Room presents real dinosaur bones and dinosaur models. Young children use crayons and paper against metal castings of dinosaurs to come home with a simple art project.

Even walking between exhibits provides an opportunity to learn. You can pass by the interior of a dismantled piano and strum the chords or have a tennis ball race to see how surface area and incline affects speed. Or, you can grab a hold of the stuffed animal named "Crash Collins" and see the importance of wearing a seatbelt as you release him down a hill in his little car.

The newest permanent exhibit, Thoracic Park, focuses on learning about the human body. People can test their blood pressure, find out how many pints of blood swim through their body during the day and see how costly smoking cigarettes can be on your body, as well as your pocket book. You can jump on an exercise bike with Mr. Bonz, a full-size skeleton that mirrors your movements. As your heart rate rises, his illuminated heart will beat faster, too. You can see how hard your heart has to work during an exercise program! You can pump a simulated artery system and feel the difference between an artery filled with plaque and a healthy, clean one.

The Discovery Science Center relies primarily on donations for funding. Some of the exhibits house inexpensive displays but are enjoyable and educational none the less. The admission cost is \$7 for ages 13-59. However, hop online and hit on [valpak.com](http://valpak.com) and you may find a free children's admission coupon. Kids under 13 cost \$5. Most people would prefer about 2-4 hours to make it through the center with children. In addition to the basic admission to the center, families may want to look in to the additional class costs, planetarium fees and party opportunities through the facility. The admission cost covers only 20% of what each visitor costs the center. The center relies primarily on business and individual donations.

The next time you find yourself buzzing down busy Prospect Road, remember to watch for the Discovery Science Center. As our community continues to take on a more technological and fast-paced lifestyle, the Discovery Science Center provides a humanistic side of learning through experience.