



News Release

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NMCC students and faculty build first exhibit for Caribou Children's Discovery Museum

Aroostook County - County residents can have a glimpse of what the future Caribou Children's Discovery Museum will have in store thanks to the work of students and faculty at Northern Maine Community College who have constructed the first permanent exhibit for the facility.

Dubbed the "reflex reaction time tester" by CCDM Board President Nancy Chandler, the interactive display, which challenges users to test their reaction time, was a collaborative effort between the museum board and three of the trade and technical occupation programs at NMCC.

The final product, which museum officials are now using at trade shows and other public venues to build awareness and excitement for the Children's Museum effort, features a numeric time clock, start and stop buttons and three lights: yellow, red and green.

Children (and adults) press the start button, which illuminates the yellow light signaling to the participant to place their hands on a painted set of handprints that rest on either side of the stop button. At the moment the green light illuminates, triggering the time clock to start, the participant presses the stop button; and once the button is pressed, the red light illuminates and time clock stops, revealing the elapsed time.

Participants can measure their reaction time against a set of humorous standards that are displayed above the time clock. The five classifications range from the quickest reaction time of "future NHL goalie" to the more delayed reaction time of "future gardener."

"This project came about as the result of a conversation with NMCC metal fabrication instructor Dennis Albert at the first Fall and Winter Sports and Recreation Show at the Forum in Presque Isle last September," explained Chandler. "Our booth was located next to the Youth Hockey booth that Dennis was staffing. He came over and looked at some photos I had taken at a science center in Manchester, New Hampshire and noticed an exhibit that tested reaction time. Dennis told me that he thought that he and some of his students and colleagues could build something similar."

Albert, using only the two photos taken by Chandler of the New Hampshire display, took on the challenge.

“I knew that with the collaborative effort of some of my fellow faculty members and students in their respective programs that we could build something similar,” said Albert. “We wanted to help the Children’s Discovery Museum. At the same time a project of this nature would be beneficial to the campus, as it would provide both faculty and especially students with a unique real-life, hands-on project.”

Recognizing early on that the project would include significant electronic components, Albert enlisted the help of his NMCC colleague Robert White, related electronics instructor, who also serves as treasurer of the CCDM Board. White, in turn, produced a detailed electronic design and construction sketch and enlisted the assistance of Charles Kelley, electrical construction and maintenance instructor in the process.

“Chuck and I selected the switches, lights, power supplies and other needed components,” said White.

The next phase of the project was turned back to Albert, who using a sketch, designed and built the metal case or outer frame for the display with the assistance one of his students, Bernard McManus.

Once the case was built, the project was turned over to Robert Collins, instructor in the automotive body repair program, who also volunteered his time. Collins, again referencing the two photos provided by Chandler, designed the painting scheme and carried it out, which included adding the lettering – all done with impeccable precision by hand.

With the unique production and construction effort nearly complete, the remaining final assembly work was turned over to two of Kelley’s senior electrical construction and maintenance students. Shawn Lay of Bingham and Kyle Nunley of Raymond were responsible for putting the finishing touches on the project and making it operational.

“It gave us something very different to do. It allowed us to build something that will be used for years to come, rather than just a lab project that gets taken apart after we are finished,” said Lay.

“Working on the reaction time tester was pretty cool,” said Nunley. “I hope the children like it.”

According to White, the benefit of the project extends beyond that of the children who will use the exhibit, both in the months ahead at various venues and in the Caribou Children’s Discovery Museum when it opens its doors.

“Beyond the pride and pleasure of providing the museum with a useful exhibit, students and faculty alike shared a wonderful opportunity to exercise our professional skills on a meaningful, real-world project, from initial concept, to design, to delivery,” said White.

“I’m so pleased we formed a partnership with NMCC on this project,” said Chandler. “It is truly symbolic that the very first exhibit that will grace our museum, which for many children will serve as the center where they begin their education outside the home, was completed by College students and faculty. Really, it is representative of the future full-spectrum of education in The County.”

Both White and Chandler see this as only the beginning of collaborative work between NMCC and the CCDM. While no specific exhibit construction plans are in the works, White anticipates that other exhibit projects incorporating NMCC students and faculty will surface as the museum becomes reality.

In the meantime, Chandler is already working with Heidi Broad-Smith, NMCC early childhood education program instructor, on a project that will have Broad-Smith’s students creating packets of lesson plans and other information targeted for area school teachers to use in advance of future visits to the CCDM.

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Northern Maine Community College students (left to right) Shawn Lay and Kyle Nunley, along with instructor Robert White, test the “reflex reaction time tester,” which is the first permanent exhibit for the future Caribou Children’s Discovery Museum.