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Springfield woman pursues museum vision

By: James Cullum

Two years ago, a former Fairfax County art teacher was inspired to begin the I Play Children's Museum for children up to age 12 and to locate the facility in Springfield.

Jane Zatkowsky is now holding events to raise awareness about her concept, despite a competing effort to build the Children's Museum of Northern Virginia in Loudoun County.

The project would require at least 40,000 square feet of donated land to start off, although Zatkowsky envisions a museum as large as 300,000 square feet someday. She also needs exhibits, a structure, advertising, staff and about \$15 million to make her vision happen by her fall 2008 goal.

As of now, she has no donations in the bank for the 501c3 nonprofit, while the Children's Museum of Northern Virginia has monies in excess of \$2.5 million and recently lobbied hard for the donation of land from the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors. The board approved 10 acres, and negotiations are expected to begin soon.

Zatkowsky, the mother of a 4-year-old boy, wants the museum in Springfield.

"I live here. The community desperately needs it. There's not anything constructive the kids can do in the area. They can go to D.C., but I want to make an interactive educative experience for them here at home in Springfield," she said.

Even with another children's museum apparently well under way, Zatkowsky said she would only partner with them if she acquired a space first because she would not like being a staffer.

"I want to run it," Zatkowsky said. "It's going to be arts related, with visuals, music, drama and culture all geared toward education and playing."

One exhibit, Zatkowsky described, would be a 15 by 15 foot room, 10 feet of which would be filled with rubber balls.

"This would be, of course, to teach the kids about the concept of space, making space of visual art, teaching them the value in spaces in literature and breaks and silences in music," she said.

Brenda Hyde, chairman of the Children's Museum of Northern Virginia board, said that she had read a segment in a newspaper about the I Play museum but was not successful in contacting Zatkowsky.

But, Hyde said, if the Springfield museum were built, "It would not affect us too badly. They could pull kids from Woodbridge, Lorton and Alexandria and that effect would be felt, but we already have secured the Loudoun space."

Zatkowsky has gained the support of the Greater Springfield Chamber of Commerce and its business members and will be holding event fund-raisers at Springfield Mall.

There will be events this weekend at the JC Penney pavilion on Jan. 27-28 from 1 to 4 p.m. with improvisation and theater games as well as an artisan show on Feb. 24-25 from 1 to 4 p.m. and an interactive musical event on March 24-25 from 1 to 4 p.m.

Visit www.iplaycm.org for more information.