

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CONTACT: Gretchen Wilson-Prangley

Deputy Director

Imagine Children's Museum

(425) 542-1838

gretchenwp@imaginecm.org

Connecting through Play at Community Access Night

Everett, WA – When Rachel Leonard arrived at Imagine Children's Museum Friday evening, her 4-year-old son went straight to Camp Imagine, a pretend campground centered around a make-believe fire pit. She watched as her son used a wooden fishing pole to catch a realistic-looking fish in the pretend pond. Excited, he brought it to his father next to the fire, who proceeded to put the fish in a frying pan. He pantomimed cooking it over the fire before pretending to taste the fish. Then he invited his son to try a bite.

"They were pretending and working together," said Leonard, a mom of three from Everett who is training to become a certified kindergarten teacher. "From a teacher standpoint, play is how children learn. It's their language, and I think this place really captures that."

On Friday evening, Leonard was one of hundreds of families from across Washington State who laughed and played amid the interactive playful learning exhibits at Imagine Children's Museum. The state's largest children's museum hosted a free evening for families with children ages 1-12.

Imagine Children's Museum, voted #1 in Snohomish County for family entertainment by readers of The Herald, hosted the Community Access Night to provide access to its facility for all families, regardless of financial capacity or ability to visit during regular museum hours. The Museum serves diverse communities all year round, and Community Access Night is an additional opportunity for families to experience the inclusiveness of the museum. While anyone can make a voluntary contribution on a "pay as you can" basis during the evening, there is no general admission fee.

In October 2022, the Museum doubled in size when it opened two new floors of state-of-the-art, interactive exhibits to inspire a lifelong love of learning through play. The new exhibits showcase the Pacific Northwest, Puget Sound and the Port of Everett.

"Imagine is a physically and emotionally safe space to families from all walks of life to playfully learn together," said Executive Director Nancy Johnson. "Through partnerships, Imagine is a hub of inclusion, equity and quality of life in our community, where children and adults can play together while developing the 21st-century learning skills needed in future careers."

Families explored two floors of imaginative playscapes full of interactive, hands-on exhibits, promoting active learning and healthy development through play. Some of the playful learning exhibits inside include the Puget Sound Ecosystem Gallery with a real whale skeleton and cold water aquarium, a Tinker Shop where children learn to use real tools, and Import, Export, Our Port, where children can pretend to be a tugboat captain.

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Thanks to a unique partnership with Everett Transit, families could take short bus rides throughout the evening to learn about Everett's transit system and the importance of Everett Station as a local and regional transportation hub.

The Museum also offers amenities for visitors, including Divy's Food Truck, which sells snacks and drinks, and Adventure Toys, a retail store where award-winning games and toys are always in stock.

Watching her 6-year-old son skip around the museum with school friends, Fawn Schumaker of Everett said the museum is a unique and safe place for children to learn through play.

"This is really what it means to learn through play, because they're being introduced to new concepts and ideas they won't find at home," said Schumaker. She said she'd watched as her son especially enjoyed operating the lights and sound in the Theatre exhibit while his friends took the stage.

"You learn to see your child's gifts. They are going to be drawn to certain activities, and you can start to identify which ones they are gifted at, and which ones they keep wanting to return to."

For Leonard, the evening was a great way to spend time together after trying to keep her kids busy all summer.

"I like these nights because right now we're a one income family. I know that for my kids the chance to go out with their parents on a Friday night feels like a real treat," she said.

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