

Life in the Valley



The front kiosk will be removed and the entryway will be redesigned in the coming year to make way for a bubble exhibit at Gilbert House Children's Museum in Salem. The Gilbert House is celebrating 30 years with a birthday party on Dec. 21. Photographed on Dec. 10, 2019. ANNA REED / STATESMAN JOURNAL

Celebrate Gilbert House's 30-year anniversary

Abby Luschei
Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Emile Holden was determined to set a record.

The 3-year-old was running around the “Up, Up and Away” exhibit at the Gilbert House Children’s Museum with his dad, Nathan. They wanted to get every foam piece scattered on the floor into the exhibit’s vertical wind tube.

“Up, Up and Away” allows children to learn about aerodynamics.

Next door, 2-year-old Amaya Vierra was exploring the museum’s “Farm to Table” exhibit. She pretended to drive a tractor and then showed her mom the apple and potato she “picked from the orchard.”

It’s this type of play that’s been at the heart of Gilbert House since it officially opened Dec. 19, 1989 — meaning this month marks the museum’s 30th anniversary.

Everyone’s invited to a birthday party on Saturday, Dec. 21, to celebrate the milestone.

Over three decades, the children’s museum located by Riverfront Park has become quite the destination. Alicia Bay, executive director of Gilbert House, said they see about 100,000 visitors each year, with about 60% coming from the Salem and Keizer area.

“The group that started this museum ... had such an early vision for what this could be for the community,” she said. “(30 years is) really exciting.”

Bay and promotions coordinator Samantha Bowdoin are proud of the museum’s growth the last several years, like an increased amount of visitors annually and reaching different demographics within the community.

The next year or so will bring many changes to the nonprofit. This includes the Outdoor Discovery Area transforming into The Inventor’s Yard, a project announced in December 2018 slated to come to fruition in 2021.

Sierra Langford, exhibits and facilities coordinator for Gilbert House, said most of the outdoor playscape will be replaced. The current structure had about a 20-year life expectancy, and they are currently in year 21.

The updated outdoor playscape will improve accessibility by removing most stairs and overhead obstacles and have more nature-based play opportunities,



Emile Holden, 3, of Salem, plays at Gilbert House Children's Museum in Salem on Dec. 10. The Gilbert House is celebrating 30 years with a birthday party on Dec. 21. ANNA REED/STATESMAN JOURNAL

Langford said.

But the most anticipated change is the return of the Bubble Room, a popular exhibit that flooded in 2012. Bay said they are constantly getting asked about its return.

“It’s such a fun part of Salem history that people connect to ... and have such distinct and fond memories of being in it as a child,” she said. “To bring it back in a way for the next generation to play in a really new and improved way, we are excited about that.”

“Bill’s Bubble Factory” will feature five different ways to play with bubbles and is set to be completed by May 2020. It’ll be featured front and center near the entrance, outside the historic houses, where there are currently ramps and a

kiosk.

The future is bringing many changes to Gilbert House, but Bowdoin said they didn’t want to pass up the opportunity to celebrate what the museum’s accomplished the past 30 years.

Admission to Gilbert House will be free Saturday, Dec. 21, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Everyone is invited to explore the exhibits, play outside, participate in birthday activities and enjoy birthday treats while supplies last.

For more information, visit acgilbert.org.

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If you go

What: Gilbert House Children’s Museum 30th birthday party

When: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 21

Location: 116 Marion St. NE

Information: 503-371-3631

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