

QUESTIONEERING

By Christina Wichmann

To enter the world of Kimberly Stull is a journey into creativity, collaboration, and perseverance. She and her team work each day to provide a place of wonder where art, math, and science are integrated into everything children experience at the DuPage Children's Museum.

Kimberly has been with DuPage Children's Museum for 20 years, and for the last 6 years, she has been the museum's Chief of Building and Making. In this role, she leads the exhibits team in their mission of providing families with experiences as fresh and inviting as possible.

Their latest creation is The Questioners: Read. Question. Think. Play! based on the best-selling book series by Naperville author Andrea Beaty and illustrator David Roberts. Beaty's imaginative world explores STEM themes and perseverance with Ada Twist, the Scientist; Rosie Revere, the Engineer; Iggy Peck, the Architect; and Sofia Valdez, the Future President. Museum staff try to stay up to date on what's popular with children, like the Questioners book series, which has been very popular at Anderson's Bookshop and the Naperville Library (over 300 copies sold and over 375 check outs since last year).

The DuPage Children's Museum often incorporates children's stories into its exhibits, but this is the museum's biggest endeavor yet. At first, Kimberly was unsure when a team member suggested a Questioners exhibit. "How would we bring the themes of the book to life? How do we make it interactive?" But then Kimberly thought, "Why can't we bring this book to life? We can do it better than any other children's museum!" Kimberly connected with Andrea Beaty through a local book signing. Beaty was

extremely excited about the idea and directed Kimberly to her publisher, Abrams, for the rights to use the book characters.

Kimberly and the museum's exhibits team brainstormed for weeks. She told her staff to go crazy and wild. She wanted to review all the ideas to then consider what would work. There were no limits! Kimberly shared, "Creativity is messy and there is always give and take until the last minute with our exhibits." The museum's early childhood specialist guided them on the learning standards for their final ideas. The exhibits team presented their proposal to Abrams for approval. Beaty's publisher loved it!

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From there, Kimberly and her staff reached out to their partners in exhibit design: Architecture is Fun and Chicago Scenic Studios. Architecture is Fun designed the museum itself along with key exhibits like Make it Move and the Construction House on the first floor. Chicago Scenic Studios are the artists and craftsmen behind many theater set designs and museum exhibitions around Chicago and surrounding areas. Their partners know the DuPage Children's Museum and its needs well.

In the exhibit, children will be able to collaborate and solve problems in Miss Lila Greer's second grade classroom. They can question how the world works in Ada's thinking chair, fly in Rosie's cheese-copter (ooooh!), build a bridge to save the class with Iggy, and practice civic leadership while playing in Sofia's Citizens' Park. The team missed no details in this massive undertaking. Greg Johnson, the museum's exhibit tech, created an enchanting yellow resin duck for the Iggy Peck display. The team found beautiful hand-knit bumblebees from an artist on Etsy for the hive in Young Questioners. The characters themselves, brought to life by Chicago Scenic Studios, are perfect renditions of the book illustrations. When Beaty's new book, Aaron Slater, Illustrator comes out this month, the museum will be ready to incorporate this new character into the Questioners exhibit.

The Questioners exhibit is here until next summer. In September 2022, the exhibit will begin traveling around the country to other children's



museums and science centers. Kimberly said, "By lending this to other museums, we can provide STEM experiences for children around the country and help make an impact on them. Because we designed and built it, we also generating revenue for DuPage Children's Museum when we lend it out." Kimberly shared that the museum staff find new methods for engaging children through networking with other museum professionals through the Association of Children's Museums, of which there are 312 children's museum members in the United States.

You can find the exhibit on the second floor of the museum, where exhibits typically rotate every two years. After The Questioners: Read. Question. Think. Play! begins its travels around the country next fall, a new exhibit called Framed: Step into Art will come to Naperville from the Minnesota Children's Museum.

Kimberly told us that the Questioners and the new Young Explorer exhibits are her favorites at the museum. Kimberly said, "I walk around the museum every day and see parents doing new things with their children that they can't necessarily do at home. Families are inspiring their children here."



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