

Discovery Centre ready for new challenges

CHILDREN'S SCIENCE MUSEUM MOVING TO N.S. POWER BUILDING IN 2015

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Like the children who visit every day, the Discovery Centre on Barrington Street is growing and leaving some old things behind.

"Some of the exhibits were getting tired," says Renée Fournier, director of the capital campaign for the children's science centre.

By the end of 2015 the "tired" exhibits and the old downtown building will give way to "bigger, brighter, more fantastic" offerings at a new location, inside the Nova Scotia Power Building on Lower Water Street.

"Science centres are wonderful for bringing the community together," says Fournier. Cities that have one, she says, rank higher on the Mercer Quality of Living Survey, a ranking of cities based on 39 "livability" criteria, including safety, education, and culture.

"It's great for the city, great for the province and it's great for the region."

A paper written by Karen

Worth of the Center for Science Education in Newton, Mass. makes the argument that the most important part of early childhood science education is actually doing science, which fits right in line with the Discovery Centre's policy of making science "fun, interesting, and engaging."

Andre Bellefeuille, father of a nine-year-old girl and a seven and a half-year-old boy, used to take them to the centre when they were younger.

"One of the current limitations," he says, "is that they only appeal within certain age limits."

Currently, the centre focuses on children aged 2 to 10. Permanent exhibits like the Bubble Room (a room dedicated to bubbles and bubble making) and touring exhibits like the current one, Animal Grossology (a successor to the original Grossology exhibit, The (Impolite) Science of the Human Body) are clearly designed for a young audience and while the centre has about 80,000 visitors per year, families like Bellefeuille's are outgrowing it.

Bellefeuille agrees that science centres are important.

"It's a scientific anchor for the region," he says, "and it's important for the organization to position it that way."

That seems to be the plan.

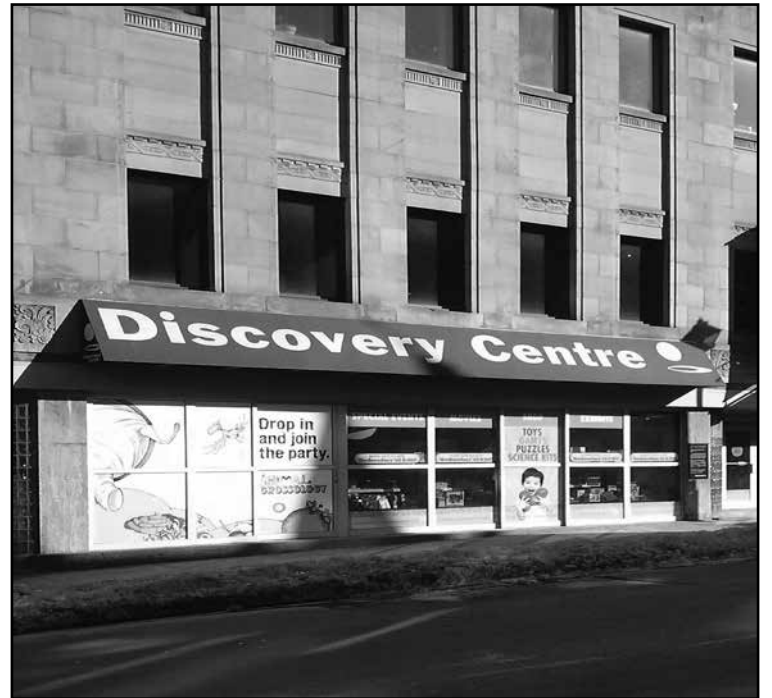
Fournier says the new centre will be "completely reimaged" in order to appeal to not just the younger crowd, but to teenagers and adults as well.

The new centre will include several exhibits designed to appeal to an older audience than the existing one. Among them is a touch tank, where visitors will be able to have hands-on contact with aquatic life.

Bellefeuille says that's something his children would be interested in.

"Most things that adults find interesting in science, kids find interesting as well."

The new centre will also try to draw in a previously overlooked audience: teenagers. One of the ways they will try and do that is with an "innovation lab," which Fournier describes as "a collabo-



New digs coming for the Discovery Centre. (Photo by Dan Malone)

orative space for young people to build and tear apart and create."

The plan for the lab is based on maker culture, a technology-oriented variation of do-it-yourself. The lab will have tools that its visitors might not have access to on a daily basis, such as 3D printers and programming software. Fournier envisions the innovation lab as the "middle ground" between in-class learning and technology start-up companies.

The move and new building are expected to cost \$18.5 million. Last week, the Nova Scotia government announced it would provide \$6 million, in addition to \$3 million from the federal govern-

ment and \$1 million from Nova Scotia Power.

Fournier says securing the government funding was "huge, because it means we go ahead with the project." The move had been discussed for at least seven years, says Fournier.

In a press release, Premier Stephen McNeil said the new centre will be "a marquee educational and cultural destination in Nova Scotia and Atlantic Canada."

For Andre Bellefeuille, the hope is a bit more low-key.

"If the Discovery Centre can provide new and interesting things for a wider range of ages, we'll be there."

Campaign for public Wi-Fi speeds up

HALIFAX TO FOLLOW FREDERICTON IN PROVIDING FREE PUBLIC INTERNET ACCESS

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Halgionians may soon be able to surf the Internet on their laptops in parks around the city.

Among the initiatives in a five-year, \$50-million capital improvement campaign is the idea for free, publicly accessible wireless in urban areas of the Halifax Regional Municipality.

The campaign, started in 2011, is overseen by the Community Planning and Economic Development Committee. Its primary goal is "streetscaping" along Spring Garden Road, Barrington Street and Argyle Street.

But the report states that free Wi-Fi, though ranking below street redesign in importance, would allow "for improvements to be seen across a wider geographic area than any of the other projects considered."

Cities across Canada have been setting up public wireless for the past decade. In Fredericton, the

process started a decade ago.

A free wireless service called Fred e-Zone blankets about 80 per cent of the New Brunswick city's urban areas.

Mike Richard, senior project manager for Fred e-Zone, says setting up the system in Fredericton was relatively easy. A fibre optic network provider, goFred, was already in place.

This removed the need to find an outside provider, such as Eastlink or Bell, to agree to provide the service.

Today, most of Fredericton's original equipment has been upgraded, Richard says, because city-wide wireless isn't something that's set up and left alone.

Such a system requires regular upkeep, but Richard adds that Fred e-Zone's regular costs are now maintained through private funding and without taxpayer money.

Other Canadian cities have attempted to provide free wireless service in the past, only to even-

tually disband the projects.

Toronto had a trial run that fell through about a decade ago, and has only recently begun discussing the service's return.

Saskatchewan! Connected, established in 2007 in a number of the province's cities, was shut down in September due to "outdated technology and extremely low usage in most areas," according to a news release.

Halifax does have some free wireless spaces. A section of the waterfront is serviced by Cisco Outdoors, and Stanfield International Airport uses Eastlink to provide a free connection. The public libraries also offer Wi-Fi, provided by Bell or Eastlink, depending on the branch.

Should Halifax go ahead with widespread, free wireless, the quality of the network, the locations chosen and the weather will affect use of the service.

Jeannette Verleun, a Dalhousie University student who studies at a coffee shop near the campus,

thinks it's a great idea.

"Part of the reason why school gets frustrating in spring and summer is because you're stuck inside all the time," she says.

Verleun says as long as the locations weren't too noisy, she would utilize outdoor public Wi-

Fi for schoolwork.

The councilors on the Community Planning and Economic Development committee were not available to comment on the present status of the wireless initiative. City council reviewed a report outlining the project last week.



Soon you could be online in Victoria Park. (Photo by Shannon Kirk)