

Busy Brains soon will stay in one spot

By Mick Zawislak

After several years on the road, the nonprofit Busy Brains Children's Museum has found a parking spot.

There is paperwork to complete and significant fundraising ahead, but the organization, founded in late 2003 by two teachers at a kitchen table, is ready to take ownership of a long-vacant car dealership in downtown Lake Villa.

An agreement has been signed to donate to the organization the former 14,000-square-foot Chrysler dealership at 130 Cedar Ave. Pending the necessary paperwork, a closing is possible within 60 days.

"It has been a long time and a lot of effort," museum co-founder and Executive Director Alison Price said Friday. "This has always been the goal from Day 1."

But there will be substantial work and expense needed to convert the space. Opening day for Lake County's only permanent children's museum won't be for at least 18 months, Price said.

"And that's if all of our fundraising goes really, really well," she said.

In the interim, [Busy Brains](#) will remain a road show of about 11 small exhibits — stored in a trailer on a member's property — that travels to parties, corporate events, schools, day care facilities and other destinations two or three times a month.

Finding a permanent home has been a continuing mission.

"This is very big news," said Heidi Alexander, president of the museum. "This location is huge because it will allow us to put in a permanent site, and the fact it's being donated is phenomenal."

Having been unable to do anything with the building, the owner heard about the museum and thought it would be a good fit, she said.

The museum's arrival, near the Metra commuter station, also represents a boost for Lake Villa's downtown redevelopment efforts.

"It gives us an anchor downtown. It's a destination," Mayor Frank Loffredo said. "We feel it's a unique opportunity, which certainly has the ability to attract people and families."

The village has been working with the museum for years, he said. In 2007, the village had designated space for the museum in a proposed recreation center, but voters denied a bond issue for the project and it was not pursued.

That was one of three possibilities that didn't materialize, Price said. But the organization decided to look ahead and hired an architectural firm to develop a permanent exhibit plan for a space ranging from 9,000 to 20,000 square feet.

Money raised over the years has been invested so that “when we found a location, we’d be ready to go,” Alexander explained. “We have all the exhibits determined and designed.”

The theme will reflect Lake County and its features. Next, floor plans will be developed for the Lake Villa building and the exhibit master plan will be completed. A gift shop, eating area, and rooms for programs and other features are anticipated.

Fundraising now takes on new importance, organizers say.

“Our capital campaign calls for us to raise \$1.5 million before we open. That includes the renovation (of the building) and the fabrication and installation of the exhibits,” Price said. “We don’t want to open our doors and hope that people come and pray we can pay our bills.”

The fourth annual fundraiser is 7 to 11 p.m. Saturday, May 4, at Lehmann Mansion in Lake Villa.

“I know there are a lot of people in the area who will be much more likely to help us create the space now that it’s real,” Price said.

Copyright © 2013 Paddock Publications, Inc. All rights reserved.