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## Pasadena's Kidspace Physics Forest makes its public debut

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A tug-of-war using giant levers was part of the first day of the \$4.4 million Robert and Mary Galvin Physics Forest at Kidspace on Thursday. The physics forest includes 13 interactive exhibits, each featuring a fundamental principle of physics. (Walt Mancini / Staff Photographer)

Photo gallery: [Kidspace Celebrate Opening of Galvin Physics Forest at Brookside Park](#)

PASADENA - Kidspace Museum's new \$4.4-million Robert & Mary Galvin Physics Forest, with 13 outdoor interactive exhibits on a half-acre of the Arroyo Seco campus, opened to the public Thursday.

The hands-on exhibit is the first of its kind in the country, and perhaps the world, said Kidspace CEO Michael Shanklin.

"We are not aware of anything like this," Shanklin said, adding that a 10-acre outdoor children's science museum in Israel offers "not quite the intensity we have here."

Each exhibit, specially designed for Kidspace by Florida-based "Hands On Interactive," demonstrates a fundamental physics principle.

The idea is to prompt kids trying out the Rocket Bottle Blaster, the Sun Spotter telescope, the Giant Lever Air Cannon, the Kid-Powered Fan or the Magnetic Pendulum to connect actions with theories and ask questions on the "sound science concepts," Shanklin said.

They are designed to appeal to elementary school children 5 to 10 and boost enthusiasm for science and math at an age when interest often starts to fade, he said.

"We will have a (trained staff) educator at every station, all the time ... to enhance the educational value," Shanklin said.

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Kidspace boardmember Mike Brown, the Caltech professor of planetary astronomy just awarded the 2012 Kavli Prize in Astrophysics, has been involved from the beginning, with his 7-year-old daughter Lilah acting as a tester.

"We've been checking on the progress, and it's been fun to watch her engage in exactly the ways we'd hoped," said Brown, aka "Pluto killer" for his research that demoted Pluto from the status of a planet.

"It's such a long process - we started this two years ago - and the vision is here, better than I thought it would be."

Brown said he hopes the exhibit "encourages enquiry and thinking about how the world works" through hands-on play.

"I don't care if they become scientists or engineers or physicists," Brown said, "I want them to be curious about the world."

Brown said he thinks the Kidspace physics forest can become a template for others. "There are few things like it in the world of children's museums, and I think people will enjoy it and want to see it replicated."

Lilah Brown's verdict: "Awesome."

The hands-on exhibits, initially funded by a grant from the California Cultural and Historical Endowment and supplemented by major gifts from several private foundations, involve sophisticated concepts. But they are all comparatively low-tech and easily maintained as part of the annual \$3 million budget, Shanklin said.

He expects the exhibit will increase visitor numbers and boost the \$13 million Campaign for the Future of Kidspace, which just received a \$2.5 million pledge from Chicago-based Galvin Family Foundations.

"Everyone likes a winner," Shanklin joked.

Janet Rice Elman, executive director of the Association of Children's Museums in Washington, D.C., said people in the field are "very excited" about the exhibit.

"I think they'll be hosting many children's museum professionals over the coming months," said Elman, who visited the exhibit on Tuesday.

Most outdoor children's museum exhibits focus on the environment and "interaction with the natural world," as Kidspace does in the Arroyo Seco, Elman said.

"This is the next step forward ... the opportunity to really delve into physics - and having someone like Mike Brown really helps," she said.

"The concepts are sophisticated," Elman said. "The methodology of children's museums is play, and what we see in this is creating playful interaction and experiences that allow children to make science a verb - to get into the middle and understand what's happening, engaging, predicting what happens."

Shanklin said Kidspace had a series of "soft openings" before the official start to work out some of the logistics of having up to 275 children and adults in the physics forest at one time.

"Initially we're going to do 'timed' tickets," he said. "We don't want it to get overly crowded."

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