Inspiring minds.
Creating community.
Innovating futures.
The Mississippi Children’s Museum (MCM) was honored in the spring of 2015, when a group of committed volunteers from Meridian reached out to seek assistance in planning and creating a physical space for their children to play, learn, and flourish. These volunteers had visited the Mississippi Children’s Museum and were inspired to create a tangible representation of their care and love for the children of Meridian with a children’s museum for their community. The MCM board and staff, seeking to achieve one of our strategic goals to embrace more Mississippi children with high quality educational experiences, saw an opportunity to work together.

Studies, evaluation, and reporting about the challenges that Mississippi’s children face in literacy, health, and early childhood development seem daunting. Our children in Mississippi are consistently ranked last in almost every category of childhood well-being—-for those of us who work in an institution that is focused on children, it can feel overwhelming. Frankly, because of our partnerships and collaborations with other dedicated organizations and leaders across Mississippi, we know the solutions to systemic issues will require more than just our efforts.

Because MCM has served as a community convener, we feel deeply that our collective future is dependent on making sure our children are competitive for the 21st century and that they develop into healthy, engaged, and inspired adults. We are very optimistic this can be accomplished by loving our children enough to work together, to share our knowledge and resources in communities around the State of Mississippi to develop fun, creative, but effective approaches. By focusing our collective energies on putting children at the center of their own learning experiences, encouraging play, promoting reading, exploring science, making healthy choices, and providing safe spaces for children and families, the museum and its mission are essential in changing hearts and attitudes to better love our children into being confident learners in the future.

We hope you will support us by giving life to our Meridian volunteers’ vision—-the creation of a space that gives voice to the love and care of East Mississippi’s children.

Susan Garrard, Mississippi Children’s Museum President/CEO

“With opportunities to sharpen their reading skills, dig into STEM, and improve overall health and physical fitness, children will have a tremendous resource right here in Meridian. I encourage parents, grandparents, and other community members to get behind this effort to benefit East Mississippi’s youngest learners! -Sally Gray, Parent Coach, Parents for Public Schools

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT
In the fall of 2014, Kim Bowers, Kimberly Denison, and Elizabeth Vise Wilson, recognizing the positive educational and economic impact that would result for the East Mississippi community, began researching the possibility of bringing a high quality children’s museum to Meridian. In the spring of 2015, these volunteers reached out to the Mississippi Children’s Museum (MCM) for professional guidance because of MCM’s similar community-driven development, proven track record of success, dedication to high quality, and unwavering commitment to Mississippi’s children.

As discussions progressed, MCM’s leadership determined that the possibility existed for this proposed Meridian children’s museum developing as an extension location of the Mississippi Children’s Museum. MCM’s board formed an exploratory partnership with the Meridian volunteers to conduct a feasibility study which was completed in Fall 2015. This study revealed an overwhelming groundswell of community support for this project. In January 2016, MCM’s board of directors voted unanimously to move forward to establish the Mississippi Children’s Museum-Meridian.

As Mississippi’s only statewide children’s museum, MCM is dedicated to improving the lives and well-being of children throughout Mississippi. From MCM’s very inception, it was recognized that it would be imperative to reach outside of the museum’s physical walls in Jackson to have the greatest impact. The Mississippi Children’s Museum-Meridian offers an unprecedented opportunity to collaborate with Meridian and East Mississippi to build a resource for this community where children from all backgrounds will be able to discover and achieve their potential.

HISTORY OF THE MERIDIAN PROJECT

FOUNDING MERIDIAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Kimberly Denison, Elizabeth Vise Wilson, & Kim Bowers

“David and I are so excited...!”
-Angela Majure

“What an awesome opportunity...!”
-Maurice Hall

“The kid in me excitedly says YES...!”
-Dustin Markham

“I’m thrilled...!”
-Linda Davidson
OUR GOAL

The Mississippi Children’s Museum, in concert with Meridian and its leadership, seeks TO BRING A HIGH QUALITY CHILDREN’S MUSEUM TO MERIDIAN AND EAST MISSISSIPPI.

This museum will be a place designed especially FOR children to BE children, where they can play, discover, learn, and grow; a place where families will have the opportunity to connect in meaningful ways; and a place that will bring the community together to create more and better resources to educate and care for their children.

OUR VISION

Through a hands-on children’s museum, we will:

• **ENRICH** the lives of children
• **SPARK** creativity
• **EXPAND** the realm of imagination
• **INSTILL** an everlasting joy of learning
• **BROADEN** families’ understanding of education
• **CREATE** a safe haven where our community can thrive and grow
**INSPIRING MINDS**
celebrating childhood

**CHALLENGE:** In today’s increasingly hectic world, childhood, more and more, is being compressed and children are having fewer opportunities to get to explore their surroundings in their own ways and at their own pace.

**RESPONSE:** Children’s museums recognize that children learn very differently from adults and also recognize that how learning takes place changes over time as children grow. Because of this, children’s museums prioritize creating exhibits, experiences, and programs that are developmentally appropriate and meet children where they are.

**THE MCM WAY:** MCM puts children at the center of everything we do. We start with this question, “What do children find fascinating?” When children are captivated by what they experience, they not only will engage more deeply but their natural curiosity will flourish. This is how meaningful learning takes place. Sparking this curiosity opens the way for children to develop into healthy, lifelong learners.

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**CREATING COMMUNITY**
building resources together

**CHALLENGE:** Resources that educate, care for, and support children are being stretched thin by economic demands which require organizations to do more with less.

**RESPONSE:** Children’s museums collaborate with educational, social service, and other community-based organizations to build creative resources that improve quality of life and strengthen the communities they serve.

**THE MCM WAY:** From the very beginning, MCM has brought experts to the museum to share their knowledge and skills, reached out to educators to provide enrichment activities that enhance classroom learning, and partnered with fellow cultural and community organizations to create joint programming and outreach opportunities. MCM is committed to developing partnerships that empower children and their caregivers. By working together, we believe we truly can make a lasting difference, especially for East Mississippi’s children.

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**INNOVATING FUTURES**
exploring potential

**CHALLENGE:** With technology advancing at an ever rapid pace and the world constantly and, sometimes, dramatically changing in response, predicting the kinds of skills and tools that children will need for 21st century success has become increasingly difficult.

**RESPONSE:** Working from current educational and child development research, children’s museums understand that play fosters creativity and innovation. Through play, children’s museums encourage children to embrace their innate curiosity, develop their talents, and explore untapped potential in unlimited ways.

**THE MCM WAY:** At MCM, we believe that children have an extraordinary capacity for innovation. Because of this, we incorporate inquiry-based learning into all aspects of the museum. Allowing children the space to independently explore, experiment, and investigate their questions without the fear of being “wrong,” gives them the opportunity to develop into the flexible thinkers, creative problem-solvers, and inventive doers we need in our 21st century world.
ABOUT THE PROJECT

Grounded in well-established pedagogy, children’s museums combine specific learning objectives with play in informal learning environments. For the Mississippi Children’s Museum-Meridian, we envision a space that will reflect Meridian and East Mississippi and will incorporate all five of MCM’s learning initiatives.

The three galleries will focus most directly on health and nutrition; literacy; and science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). Aspects of the cultural arts and East Mississippi heritage will be throughout.

20,000 square feet
9,500 square feet exhibit space
51,500 estimated visitors per year
$13.5M campaign budget

What will I discover today?
As informal learning environments, children’s museums make learning hands-on, interactive, and most importantly fun! This is fundamental for capturing the interests and minds of our youngest audiences. At MCM, we take fun seriously but we also take the learning value of our educational mission seriously, too.

**LITERACY**

Literacy is essential to a child’s educational development: gaps in language create gaps in learning that become progressively more problematic as children continue through school. MCM is committed to improving the early literacy development of Mississippi’s children through place-based experiences that incorporate literacy and language concepts; innovative programming that focuses on the mechanics of reading and the enjoyment of it; resources provided to Mississippi families, schools, and teachers; and research that contributes to the body of knowledge about how children learn.

**HEALTH & NUTRITION**

Mississippi currently is listed as the third most overweight state in the nation and consistently is ranked last, or next to last, in most national health indicators. Statistics of 38% of children and nearly 70% of adults in Mississippi diagnosed as overweight or obese highlight the ongoing need for and relevancy of programs that target the health and well-being of Mississippi’s children. MCM’s goal is to play a role in reversing the trend of childhood obesity, one generation at a time, by introducing children to small changes that they can implement now which will make big differences as they grow.

**STEM**

The future of Mississippi depends on its ability to boost student performance in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). With significant job growth in STEM fields and increasing global competition, today’s students need a much earlier and stronger foundation in these subjects. Through innovative STEM-based exhibits, programs, and special events, MCM seeks to foster critical thinking and communication skills, creativity, and real-world problem solving through collaboration. We believe these skills are essential to the creation of lifelong learners and the promotion of positive futures for Mississippi’s children.

**CULTURAL ARTS**

MCM strives to incorporate the arts within all activities we offer. The arts provide a meaningful context for understanding our world, examining challenges in new ways, and discovering how things work. Mississippians have made significant contributions in all areas of the arts in the United States—from music, to literature, to the fine, visual, and performing arts. By giving children the opportunity to investigate a variety of authentic art tools, techniques, and processes, MCM endeavors to encourage the creative pursuits of the next generation of innovative thinkers, explorers, and doers.

**MISSISSIPPI HERITAGE**

MCM strives to instill a sense of state pride in all Mississippi residents. A priority in all of our activities is exposing children to Mississippi’s uniqueness: its rich culture of writers, musicians, and artists; its racial heritage and geographic diversity; its struggles and its triumphs. Mississippi is blessed with an abundant array of cultural traditions and heritage, and it is the goal of MCM to celebrate our unique state throughout everything we do.
“Our community will greatly benefit from the presence of the Mississippi Children’s Museum-Meridian. It will offer children a fun and creative learning environment and enhance the educational resources of the community while embracing and celebrating the wonder of being a child.” - Linda Grant, Honorary Chair

“Having three young daughters with varying learning styles, I appreciate the opportunity of multidimensional learning provided by the proposed children’s museum.” - Dr. Terry Dale Cruse, Administrative Director & Head of Campus, Mississippi State University - Meridian

“Meridian and our surrounding community has been looking for opportunities to engage our children in imaginative play for years now. What better vehicle than a hands-on children’s museum and what better partner than the Mississippi Children’s Museum.” - Melanie Mitchell, Honorary Chair
I am very excited to hear Meridian is getting a children’s museum. If we want to see our community grow and produce well rounded people, it is necessary for us to establish and support such projects. With a children’s museum in Meridian, every child and family in our community will have the opportunity to experience and learn in ways that before this would have been limited to only people who travel outside of this area.

- Dr. Lee Lee Marlow, Clinical Director & Director of Children & Youth Services, Weems Community Mental Health Center

I serve and see a lot of children in East Mississippi; a children’s museum will be a wonderful resource to expose them to different ways of learning. I personally believe a good education comes from exposure to new opportunities to tinker and create. What a sense of pride it will instill in our children to have the children’s museum right here at home! No longer will they have to travel to some other destination; their hometown WILL be the destination!

- Ricky Hood, Executive Director, Boys and Girls Club of East Mississippi
HONORARY CHAIRS
Linda Grant
Melanie Mitchell

ADVISORY COMMITTEE
John Anderson
Dr. Amy Carter
Dr. Terry Dale Cruse
David Hall
Eddie Kelly
Andrea Lund
Dustin Markham
Hallie Pearson Swindoll

MCM-M STAFF
Elizabeth Vise Wilson

BUILDING & SITE
Brooke Chamblee
Bill Cooke
David Hall
Ricky Hood
Jim McGinnis
Hallie Phillips
Don Rogers
Terrell Temple

CAMPAIGN CABINET
Susan Coffin
Dr. Ottis Gowdy, Jr.
Bob Huff
Frances Long
Robert Smith
Stephanie Wright