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This month, doors will reopen to the renovated Halle Heart Children's Museum. The first of its kind, the Tempe museum will teach young hearts how to live a healthy existence for years to come.



Heart Ball 2010's fundraising efforts are going to a cause that many board members hold close to their hearts: childhood obesity. "A lot of us are moms," says Jennifer Blank-Matney, chair of public relations for the Heart Ball committee. "We see what's out there. We see what kids are given [to eat] at school, especially with budget cuts."

Sarah Suggs Cheek decided to focus in on the Halle Heart Children's Museum when she took her chairmanship in November 2009. Each chairwoman chooses her own platform and, because heart disease is the leading cause of death in America (in 2008, it accounted for 10,052 deaths in the state of Arizona), partial funds from the Nov. 20 gala will go toward the museum and its effort to save lives. In fact, the committee has already exceeded their goal and has raised more than \$2 million. The museum's mission is to create a one-of-a-kind interactive, contemporary, collaborative experience for children to increase awareness of heart disease prevention—and affect lifestyle changes to create a new generation of well, fit kids.

"One-third of today's young generation is either overweight or obese," Suggs Cheek says. "It is hard to believe that this may be the first generation since the Civil War who will not live as long as their parents if this epidemic is not put in check. The implications of obesity and cardiovascular disease are enormous, not to mention the quality of life. We have chosen to take an active role in making a life-changing and lifesaving resource available to our community's children."

Groundbreaking on the renewed 16,000-sq.-ft. museum occurred in July; however, the redesign and exhibits have been in the works since 2008. The previous museum has been completely gutted, leaving only the four walls that stand to the exterior.

Upon entering the museum, which is designed completely around the heart, visitors are dubbed "Heart Explorers" and are taken on a journey through exhibits that teach each child how to manage a healthier way of life. Exhibits include a mini grocery store, which will aid children in making nutritious shopping choices; cooking classes showing them how to prepare those healthful options; and a 9-1-1 action theater that teaches young people how to spot an emergency and react to it.

The museum will also house a human heart, as well as a set of lungs that belonged to a smoker. "We tell children they shouldn't smoke, and now we're going to show them why," Blank-Matney says. Such colorful, interactive and innovative exhibits have put the new and improved Halle Heart Children's Museum on the map. "It is the first and only one of its kind in the nation and the world," Suggs Cheek says.

The Heart Ball committee has even started a fund that will help pay to transport students from Valley schools to the museum. Plus, raised dollars can ensure that students can visit the museum at no admission cost.

The hard work from the committee will shine through when the museum doors officially open this month to benefit the entire Valley community for generations to come. "The Heart Ball has a reputation for being a very prestigious event," Blank-Matney says. "A lot of focus gets put on the gowns and the jewelry. But for people with a personal story, they like to see that their money is going to something tangible in their backyard."

To Learn More: Heart Ball 2010

www.phoenixheartball.org.