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Chicago Children's Museum opens new permanent exhibit: *Tinkering Lab*

Exhibit provides real tools and materials, open-ended experiences with a goal to nurture future generations of innovators, creative thinkers

CHICAGO – [Chicago Children's Museum](#) (CCM) today opens the doors to its newest permanent exhibit, *Tinkering Lab*. And with its debut, the museum seeks to open the minds of its young visitors as well, offering them the freedom and flexibility to ask their own questions, play around with their own ideas, fail, and learn from their mistakes. All using real tools and materials.



Inspired by the national [Maker Movement](#), CCM sought to develop an experience unlike any other in Chicago – a space almost entirely free of structure and lineation, where children set their own goals, or not – it's up to them.

It's Chicago's first DIY maker space for families, and the museum couldn't be more excited about the exhibit's potential to cultivate the city's future tinkerers, hackers, makers, designers and inventors.

"With *Tinkering Lab*, it's all about process," said Jennifer Farrington, president and CEO of Chicago Children's Museum. "We designed the exhibit to nurture children's creative, scientific minds, encouraging them to think in new ways, ask their own questions, and test their own ideas. It's an experience you aren't likely to find anywhere else in the city, and that's what we wanted for our visitors."

Real tools. Real science. Really for kids.

Authenticity was a top priority when developing the exhibit, and visitors are sure to notice the museum's attention to this detail immediately upon entering the space. A **Pegboard Challenge**, which features a series of gears, balls, chutes and other loose parts, engages visitors as soon as they walk into the space. Children and families are encouraged to add, remove or change these items to create their own unique cause-and-effect reaction.

After doing their best Rube Goldberg impression, visitors can then move into the exhibit's workshop spaces where they are free to tinker at will. A visit to the **Tool Bar** provides several options to begin, which could include – depending on the day – hammers, power drills, screwdrivers, saws and much more.



A look up reveals another authentic exhibit element, a bicycle wheel sculpture created by Chicago artist Arlan DeRussy. The museum plans for the sculpture to be interactive, using it to test wind movement, to attach hoops during “stomp rocket” target practice, or to hang visitor-made creations.

The exhibit has an **Early Learning Nook** as well, providing the museum's youngest visitors (and little brothers and sisters) with a safe, protected space of their own. The area features interactive wall panels, touchable tools and found objects, loose shakers and other repurposed items.

Professionally trained staff, which include members of [Tinkering School Chicago](#), are available to assist when using tools that need extra supervision, and will happily brainstorm if tinkerers hit a creative wall.

Even the exhibit's sponsor, [The Boeing Company](#), is a natural fit. The company employs some of the world's most pioneering and creative minds.

Tapping Chicago's innovators

While developing *Tinkering Lab*, the museum sought the expertise of Chicago's innovator community, consulting with entrepreneurs, scientists, tinkering experts and creative professionals to understand how certain childhood experiences shaped them to be the innovative thinkers they are today.

“The simplicity of their responses was so enlightening,” said Farrington. “Access to different materials, extended periods of time, the freedom to explore, the ability to fail, and most importantly, the capacity to guide your own experience. It's something that we as children took for granted, but for children today, that's not the case.”

Farrington cited the current structured nature of many children's lives, learning experiences that are too-often prescribed and commercialized, and little-to-no opportunity for open exploration and self-driven outcomes.

“As an institution, we believe a different approach is needed, and you can see that in exhibits like *Unboxed*, *Circus Zirkus* and now *Tinkering Lab*,” said Farrington.

Really for tweens.

With *Tinkering Lab*, CCM hopes to attract more visitors between the ages of nine to 13, a tween demographic they consider to be ideal for this type of experience.

“It’s an unfortunate irony, but today’s tweens have little experience with tinkering, and therefore, it’s a novel activity,” said Farrington. “Tinkering is the perfect activity for this age group. They decide what to do, controlling their own experience from start to finish. It’s a chance to express themselves creatively while gaining a better understanding of the world around them. We’re very excited about the exhibit’s potential for this age group.”

Tinkering Lab is a permanent exhibit at Chicago Children’s Museum, and will be open during normal business hours beginning Feb. 5, 2013. For information on specific programming and events, please visit the museum’s [website](#).

Support for *Tinkering Lab* is generously provided by [The Boeing Company](#).

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About Chicago Children’s Museum

The mission of Chicago Children's Museum is to improve children’s lives by creating a community where play and learning connect. CCM is the only cultural institution in the city dedicated to young children and the important adults in their lives. Playful experiences, including more than 15 interactive exhibits, tap into how kids learn, and engage them at an early age so they develop a lifelong love of learning. Located at Navy Pier, Chicago's number one attraction at 700 E. Grand Ave., CCM is the final stop for CTA buses #29, #65, #66 and #124. For more information, please visit ChicagoChildrensMuseum.org.