



The Waiting Game for the Westchester Children's Museum

By Robin Jovanovich



Renderings of planned Toddler Beach and Water Activity areas at the Westchester Children's Museum

For over a decade, a plan to build a children's museum in the former Playland bathhouses has been on the drawing board. To date, a tireless volunteer board has raised over \$9 million, according to Westchester Children's Museum Executive Director Tracy Kay. They've done a heroic job finding funding opportunities and they have donors ready to give.

Until last month, they didn't have a signed lease with the County. They had hoped to have one before former

County Executive Andrew Spano left office after losing in his re-election bid in 2009. When Rob Astorino took office, he clearly stated he wasn't going to agree to a long-term lease for the Children's Museum until a new plan for Playland was arrived at.

In early October, Astorino announced, after a lengthy RFP process and review, that Sustainable Playland Inc. (SPI) was selected to take over operation of the park starting as early as next summer. "Oddly," said Kay in a recent interview, "there was no mention of our museum by the Sustainable group that day at Playland."

The Board of Legislators held a lease signing ceremony October 18, but a spokesman from the County Executive's office pointed out the very same afternoon that the lease had not yet been signed by the County Executive. He asked that it be reviewed by SPI. The process continues.

"The lease can be granted," explained Kay, "but until we have access, we can't proceed with the building."

The County only completed the structural repair of the Bathhouses last month, and then Hurricane Sandy came along, and "threw a little curve," in Kay's words.

Kay continued, "The total construction documents are in place. We could put the project out to bid, but we have to be able to assure our supporters that the way is clear. The longer we have to wait, the longer the revenue is withheld. How much more of our resources have to be diverted to this process?"



While they've waited, the WCM group has become a museum without walls. Kaye, who's been at the helm for four years, said, "We have a core of 16 educators, with 360 years of experience in early childhood. We've been offering programming to low- to moderate-income children, partnering with the Rye YMCA, the White Plains Y, the Lanza Learning Center, the Boys & Girls clubs of New Rochelle and Greenwich, and other organizations that have youth centers."

Countless individuals and groups have shown up at WCM's White Plains office thinking it was the museum, said Kaye. "There are so many people waiting for the Westchester Children's Museum to open."