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— OSC President and CEO JoAnn Newman

Clockwise, from above: All-new Drip Drop Splash, Orange Grove and Kaleidoscope.
of all the exhibitions and activities at the Orlando Science Center (OSC), none is more iconic or beloved by thousands of Central Florida children than the Orange Grove.

The exhibit always drew a crowd, and kids would pester their parents to go again and again. They spent hours “picking” fruit and sending it to the “packing plant” and practicing teamwork with their peers.

With the Orange Grove reopening in October, the newest generation of “pickers” are in for a treat: a much expanded activity that also features more of the sorting, weighing, processing and factory portions of the citrus fruit life cycle. A farmer’s market rounds out the activity, showing kids how oranges get from tree to table.

Sponsored by Dr. Phillips Charities, the Orange Grove is a centerpiece of the New Kids-Town, the largest renovation OSC has done in more than 20 years.

Museum officials might be as excited as the kids.

New KidsTown is also an exciting beginning for OSC’s renovation plans.

STORY BY G.K. SHARMAN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ROBERTO GONZALEZ
“New KidsTown encourages the hands-on creative play that is so important to the cognitive development of our children,” says OSC President and CEO JoAnn Newman. “This exhibit responds to the strong need we’ve identified for quality, immersive educational opportunities for families with young children ages 7 and under. They are the fastest-growing segment of our audience and are hungry for the chance to learn and grow together in a fun environment.”

Designed from the ground up, New KidsTown draws on ideas from a number of science museums around the country, says OSC Vice President of Marketing Jeff Stanford.

At 11,000 square feet, KidsTown will be nearly three times the size of the current early-childhood space and is aimed at kids from infancy to age 7. The activities for babies are a new direction for OSC.

The $5 million project also signals the completion of the first phase of a $30 million Unlock Science Campaign, a multi-year/multi-phase effort to renovate all the exhibits and expand OSC’s resources.

Pint-sized future scientists will learn through play, exploring and interacting with 75 different exhibits in seven different zones. Activities are accessible and bilingual.

In addition to the Orange Grove, kids can look forward to other playful learning experiences — plus “Easter egg” opportunities, or hidden surprises, says OSC Vice President of Visitor Services Brian Lanman.

Not surprisingly, he wouldn’t give any hints what those are. However, he did let on about some of the other exhibition highlights.

Isaacs Family ClimbTime is an obstacle course full of layered platforms, rope bridges and other barriers that challenges kids to test their motor skills and coordination and overcome their fears.

At Drip Drop Splash, sponsored by the James M. Cox Foundation, kids use water wheels and pipes to experiment with water, including building dams and fountains, creating elaborate water paths and working with other kids to fill up a reservoir that delivers an impressive Florida rain shower.

For the youngest visitors, Toddler Town, presented by Community Based Care of Central Florida, is 2,000 square feet of safe space for kids up to 3 years old to explore a variety of objects and work on basic skills such as lifting, opening, closing, pushing, pulling and climbing.

Explore It!, sponsored by Publix Super Markets Charities, is a wonderland of wind and light. Kids can watch scarves dance in the Windy Tubes area and explore the intricacies of air pressure at the interactive Bernoulli table. A giant Lite-Brite lets kids create their own roller coasters or block structures.

At KidsTown Studio, sponsored by Florida Hospital for Children, kids and adults learn together as they tackle puzzles, brain games and science experiments. Kids also can explore topics that interest them in more depth and at their own pace. In the arts and crafts workshop, they also can send digital greetings to kids who are sick at Florida Hospital for Children.

Harriett’s KidsTown Theatre lets kids unleash their imaginations and express their flair for the dramatic by dressing up in costumes and presenting their own plays on the stage.

Are some of the activities messy? Yep! For instance, kids can count on water getting everywhere at Drip Drop Splash.

“New KidsTown is a safe place to experiment,” explains Lanman, “and we’ll take care of the mess afterward. They won’t hurt themselves, the carpet or each other.”

Eventually, officials hope, the kids grow into the rest of the science center — and one day bring their kids to experience the activities they enjoyed as children.

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