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Contact

Kerry Falwell, CEO
863-687-3869
kfalwell@explorationsv.com

New Outdoor Gallery Becomes Reality Thanks to Two Local Families

Lakeland, FLA – Two Lakeland families are bringing Lakeland's iconic history to families in a big way at the new Florida Children's Museum facility. Thanks to the Harrell and Masters families, the Museum's largest gallery encourages families to use active creativity in an outdoor space featuring a larger-than-life, climbable alligator.

The Harrell Family Charities Front Yard will be 7,800 square feet enclosed by a decorative steel fence, sitting by the entrance to the new Florida Children's Museum. The gallery celebrates the "Florida under our feet" as kids dig up marine fossils in the Mosaic Dig Pit, and observe and taste seasonal fruits and veggies grown in the garden.

"It is a privilege to come alongside the Florida Children's Museum at Bonnet Springs. Harrell Family Charities is committed to funding innovative programs that improve the quality of life in the Lakeland, Florida community," says Jack and Tina Harrell.

The gallery's centerpiece is Blinky made possible by Greg and Ansley Masters. Blinky is a 100-foot long, 17-foot tall playscape where kids can relax in sensory swings throughout the body, slide down the tail or make music throughout the body. Inspired by Lakeland's legendary alligator with the same name in the 1970's, this whimsical piece is poised to be an icon not only for the Museum but the entire Park.

"I used to love to drive by Lake Mirror with my family and see Blinky. And although the original Blinky is gone, our grandkids and other families in Central Florida will be introduced to that piece of Lakeland's history in an innovative and educational way," Ansley Masters shared. "We are so excited and honored to partner with Bonnet Springs Park and Florida Children's Museum for this project."

When the Museum started gathering public feedback for the new facility in Bonnet Springs Park, an overwhelming community request was for safe, enclosed, outdoor play for children. The Museum proposed making the largest gallery at the new facility an outdoor space and the Harrell and Masters families stepped up to make it a reality.

Ansley Masters and Jack Harrell's fathers were friends and the two grew up together in Lakeland. This investment in Florida Children's Museum reflects the power of friendship and how it can significantly improve a community.

"Both the Harrells and the Masters are pillars in our community. We are honored to have their support and thrilled for the children of Lakeland who get to enjoy these special exhibits," says Kerry Falwell, CEO of Florida Children's Museum.

Florida Children's Museum, formerly Explorations V Children's Museum, is a 501c3 non-profit organization whose mission is "curating the world for all children to explore". Since its founding in 1991, the Museum has served more than 1.6 million children and families and will be positioned to serve even more when it opens its new facility in Bonnet Springs Park in 2022. For those interested in learning more about Florida Children's Museum, visit ExploreFCM.org.

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