

SCCI

2022-23 SCIENCE CENTER OF IOWA ANNUAL REPORT

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT – CURT SIMMONS

Each year, I reflect on our organization’s growth – especially in reaching new audiences and strengthening our connections with visitors of all ages. I know we’re on a path promoting wonder and curiosity when the community inspires those connections.

To expand our mission and strengthen our position as the resource for informal STEM learning, Science Center of Iowa (SCI) is committed to engaging in meaningful partnerships with formal education, businesses and Iowans throughout the state. By collaborating with experts from diverse fields, SCI provides experiences that are unique, engaging and designed to continue inspiring generations of Iowans.

Last year, I challenged our staff to think beyond what we’ve been doing. To think outside the box this year, if you will, and engage in ways which can broaden our connection to the community. As SCI continues to evolve, so do our opportunities to connect with our visitors. And sometimes that means breaking down barriers and meeting people where they’re at.

Just as science and our community continue to change, SCI is committed to responding to the needs of its communities and those we serve. I’m pleased to share that this year we were able to bring our staffing levels back up and provide our visitors with a full slate of live experiences. I continue to be inspired by the day-to-day “A-ha!” moments our staff provide visitors through our interactive exhibits and live programs.

In closing, I am immensely grateful for the ongoing support and enthusiasm of our community. The Science Center of Iowa remains dedicated to fostering curiosity and sparking a passion for learning among all generations. Together, through innovative partnerships and a commitment to adaptability, we will continue to inspire and empower Iowans to explore the wonders of science. Thank you for being part of our journey as we work towards a brighter, more informed future for Iowa’s children and beyond.



2022–2023 SCI leadership

Curt Simmons President & CEO

Ann Shelton CFO, Vice President of Administration

Rob Burnett Vice President of Science Learning

Dan Raedeker Vice President of Community Engagement

Beth Brewer Director of Early Childhood

Allison Schwanebeck Director of Visitor Experience

Jolie Pelds Director of Innovative STEM Teaching

Amy Hock Director of Marketing & Public Relations

Molly Pins Director of Philanthropy

Cara Rypka Director of Visitor Services

Thomas Oldham Director of Facilities



“SCI remains dedicated to fostering curiosity and sparking a passion for learning among all generations.”

“ Together, we will continue to push the boundaries of innovation and inspire lifelong curiosity in science. ”

LETTER FROM THE BOARD CHAIR – SHELDON S. OHRINGER

As we reflect on the accomplishments of the past year and look towards the future, I am thrilled to share our vision for continued growth and forward-thinking initiatives at the Science Center of Iowa.

Our commitment to innovation and exploration extends beyond the confines of our physical space. We recognize the importance of keeping ourselves open to new possibilities and opportunities, constantly seeking ways to expand engagement and reach new audiences.

In the coming year, we are excited to unveil reimagined spaces within our center, designed to foster creativity and inspire curiosity. These spaces will serve as platforms for expanded partnerships, both within our community and beyond. By forging new alliances, we can amplify our impact and create meaningful experiences for all who walk through our doors.

Furthermore, we are dedicated to enhancing our programs and services to offer multiple avenues for learning and discovery. From hands-on classroom experiences to immersive exhibits, we aim to provide diverse opportunities for engagement at every turn.

Additionally, we are exploring avenues for collaboration with public and private schools, recognizing the vital role they play in shaping the minds of future generations. By expanding our programming and partnerships in this realm, we can further enrich educational experiences and empower students to explore the wonders of science.

As we embark on this journey of growth and expansion, I am confident that together, we will continue to push the boundaries of innovation and inspire lifelong curiosity in science.

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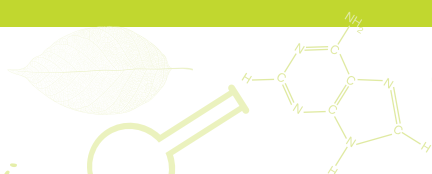
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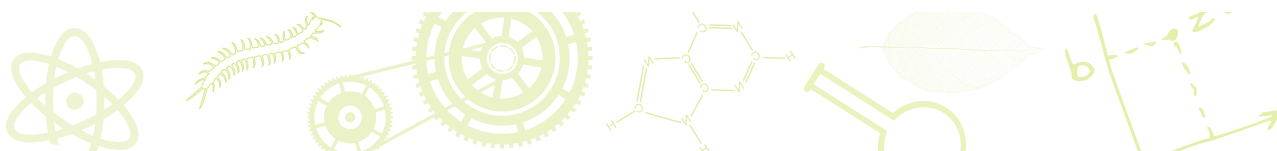
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Claudia Schabel
Schabel Solutions

Muhammad Aadil Spocter, Ph.D.
Des Moines University



We are the Science Center of Iowa. In addition to welcoming visitors from all 99 counties and beyond, our outreach and professional development programs take STEM learning on the road, reaching tens of thousands of Iowans each year.



As a private, nonprofit organization, we rely on the donations of private individuals, companies and foundations to achieve our mission and serve more than 128,000 individuals from across the state and country.



Thank you
for **your** support!

501(c)(3)

The Science Center of Iowa is a 501(c)(3) entity. We are independent, operating solely from money raised and earned on our behalf.

OUR COMMITMENT TO INCLUSION, DIVERSITY, EQUITY & ACCESS

Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) inform every aspect of our lives. As a community anchor that celebrates diversity, the Science Center of Iowa strives to dismantle barriers that limit access and equity in STEM.

WE COMMIT TO:

- Inspire lifelong learning through creating welcoming environments and conditions which support ALL in STEM learning.
- Work toward eliminating inequities with those who have historically been marginalized and underserved in STEM learning.
- Improve our communities through building relationships, thought and action on topics related to equity, inclusion and public access to STEM.

To be successful, the Science Center of Iowa embraces the need for continual reflection upon these principles and commits to adapting to the changing needs of our communities, creating greater global awareness and improving upon our actions and experiences.



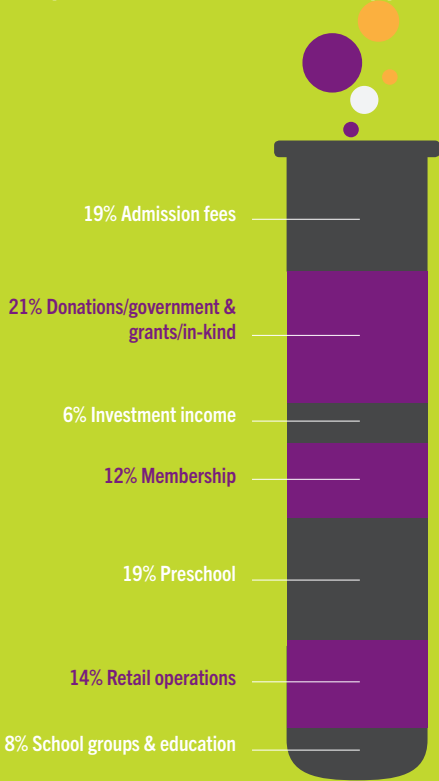
OUR CORE VALUES



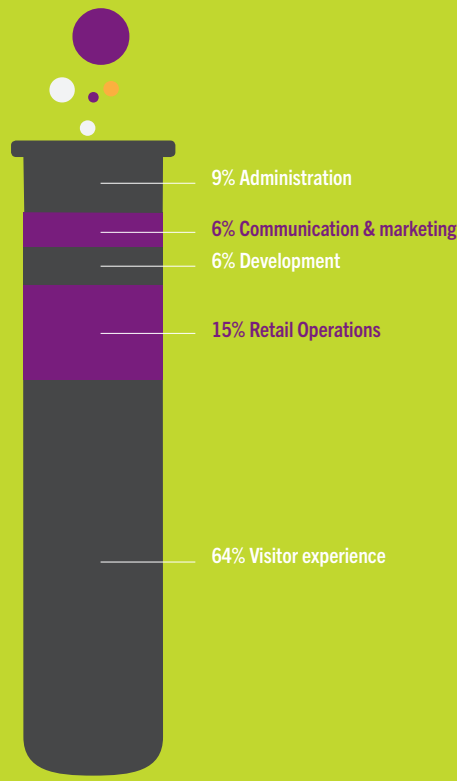
SAFETY ■ COMPASSION ■ INTEGRITY ■ INNOVATION

How we do what we do

Operations Revenue & Support



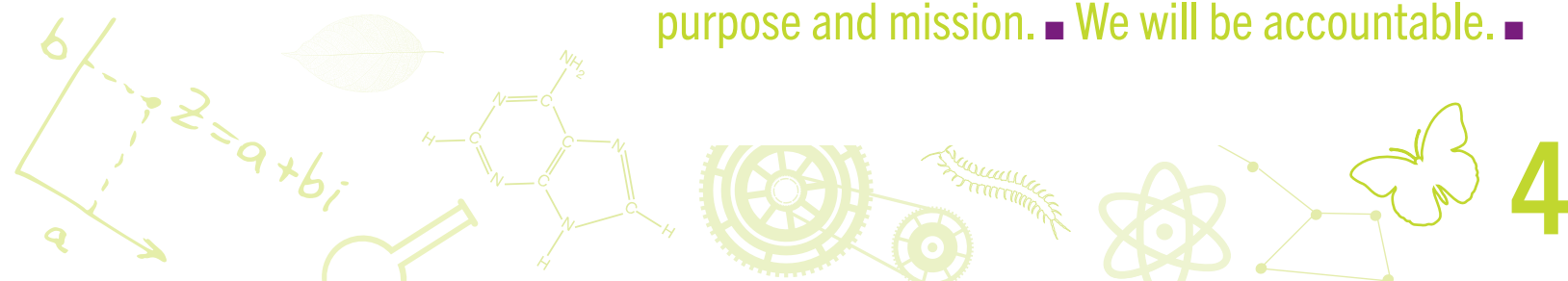
Operating Expenses



Our mission: to engage and inspire lowans along their journey of lifelong science learning.



Our Commitment to Excellence ■ We have a positive attitude. ■ We treat others with respect. ■ We will exceed participants' expectations. ■ We embody a shared purpose and mission. ■ We will be accountable. ■



DES MOINES MINI MAKER FAIRE

The Greatest Show and Tell on Earth!

For nearly 10 years, the Science Center of Iowa has been the proud host of the Des Moines Mini Maker Faire. This daylong event is a family-friendly showcase of creativity, innovation and invention!

It's an all-ages gathering of tech enthusiasts, artists, educators, crafters, tinkerers, hobbyists, engineers, science clubs, authors and students.

All of these “makers” come together to show what they have made and share what they have learned — from high tech (laser cutting and 3D printers) to low tech (LEGO® creations and Cosplay).

Hands-on workshops in SCI's Innovation Lab are also part of the Des Moines Mini Maker Faire experience and give visitors a focused opportunity to try out a “makers” skill. Complementing the workshops are several **skill stations** scattered throughout the facility, offering bite-sized experiences with activities like sewing, knitting, soldering, and puppet making for those seeking a ‘touch and go’ experience.



VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT — STEVE LITTLE

Teaching and science are in his DNA. **Steve Little** grew up in a house of educators. In fact, his dad was a physics teacher and Steve said he always knew he'd be an educator because of his dad.

While in college, he studied astronomy, geology, and meteorology, then continued his education to earn a master's degree in earth science. For 38 years, Steve put his love of earth science and education to work as a junior high science teacher.

A year into retirement, Steve's significant other suggested it might be time for him to do something more than just play golf. Julie introduced him to volunteering at SCI. Seven years later, he hasn't looked back once.

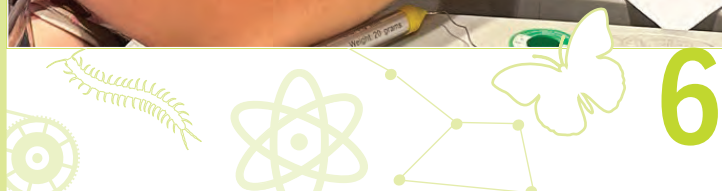
“The Science Center is like my sanctuary. I can tap into my inner science geek and volunteering helps fill my teaching void.”

The Maker Faire also recognizes **robotics teams**, comprised of high school aged students from Central Iowa, as “makers.” These teams show off their creations and even provide demonstrations of what their robots can do. More than 850 visitors and over 50 exhibitors and volunteers took part this year.

If you missed it, mark your calendars for April 26, 2025 and join us at the Science Center of Iowa for our 10th year of hosting the Des Moines Mini Maker Faire.



A big smile comes across Steve's face as he recalls helping a fifth grader and her mom trying to make a paper rocket. The mom told Steve her daughter couldn't read well but was well versed in science. He sat down at the rocket table with the girl and read the instructions. They built a rocket body and Steve asked if it would fly. She said, "No," but gave it a try. It didn't go far. When she came back to the table with the rocket body, Steve asked "What would help it go further?" She replied, "fins." They added fins to the rocket body and went back to the launch pad to see if it would go further. It did! Steve asked, "What can we add to make it go even further?" They added a nose cone and launched it one last time. Success! The girl was beaming, and mom was so grateful for the time he spent working with her daughter. Steve loves it when kids have an "A-ha!" moment and celebrates when their creation "works." It's clear to see he hasn't lost his passion for teaching or science.



THE WORLD'S LARGEST DINOSAUR TRAVELING EXHIBIT

Calling all dinosaur lovers!

The World's Largest Dinosaurs, a major exhibition, opened at the Science Center of Iowa (SCI) Saturday, October 15, 2022. This traveling exhibition explores the amazing biology of a group of uniquely super-sized dinosaurs: the long-necked and long-tailed sauropods.

Organized by the American Museum of Natural History in New York, the exhibition draws on paleobiological research that looks in part to living organisms to make inferences about how these giants—some of which grew to be longer than 150 feet, or the length of four standard city buses—were able to thrive as a group, for approximately 140 million years. Through imaginative exhibits — including the exhibition centerpiece, a life-sized, detailed model of a 60-foot-long *Mamenchisaurus*



— *The World's Largest Dinosaurs* takes visitors beyond the bones and into the bodies of these titans, shedding light on how heart rate, respiration, metabolism, and reproduction are linked to size.



DONOR SPOTLIGHT

“For over a decade, our journey with the Science Center of Iowa (SCI) has been remarkable.” It all began around 10 years ago when **Jake and Jessica Srameks** stumbled upon SCI while seeking enriching experiences for their first child. Little did they know that this encounter would ignite a longstanding commitment to supporting SCI’s mission.

The Srameks inaugural donation came during the Gala, a moment where they felt compelled to contribute to SCI’s relentless efforts in advancing science literacy and fostering curiosity within their community. “Reflecting on SCI’s impact, we firmly believe that its role extends far beyond science-oriented individuals; it instills critical life skills imperative for all.”

Among the plethora of programs and exhibits, the allure of natural history and paleontology captured their hearts.

Distinguished by their colossal size, sauropods included animals of diverse shape, and ornamentation, such as the gigantic *Apatosaurus*. Focusing on the biology and behavior of these diverse creatures, *The World's Largest Dinosaurs* builds on a growing body of research that examines dinosaurs as living animals, primarily through comparisons with modern dinosaur relatives.

After six months of roaming SCI, the *World's Largest Dinosaurs* became extinct once again when the traveling exhibit packed up and headed to its next location.



From the awe-inspiring *World's Largest Dinosaurs* to the captivating *Tyrannosaurs: Meet the Family* traveling exhibits, SCI consistently delivers enriching experiences. Even during Iowa's cold winters, Small Discoveries provided families with an educational and fun activities on the weekends.

"Yet, amidst all the wonders SCI offers, one gem remains relatively unknown—Snippy the snapping turtle's feeding time, a show not to be missed!"

What continues to motivate Jake and Jessica in their support for SCI is witnessing the evolution to meet the educational needs of our community. "As steadfast believers in the power of knowledge and exploration, we stand committed to nurturing SCI's growth and impact for generations to come."



A YEAR IN REVIEW WITH SCI CAMPS MANAGER

Empowering Young Minds

As we reflect on the past year at the Science Center of Iowa (SCI), Mena Ramm, our dedicated Camps Manager, shares insights into the triumphs, challenges, and moments of inspiration that have defined our summer and winter camps.

At the heart of our programs lies a deep commitment to fostering success in group settings. Mena emphasizes the importance of equipping children with the tools they need to thrive, balancing challenging STEM experiences with pure enjoyment. It's this blend that makes SCI camps truly unique.

Our camps cater to a wide age range, from Pre-K to 8th grade, offering immersive STEM experiences beyond the confines of the classroom. Rooted in inquiry-based learning, each session encourages campers to take the lead in their exploration, nurturing curiosity and innovation.

The topics for our camps are carefully curated to encompass all realms of science, ensuring equal representation across disciplines. From engineering to environmental science, we strive to ignite a passion for STEM in every camper, regardless of their grade level, age and/or ability.

But why do we do it? SCI is more than just a venue; it's a beacon for families seeking enriching experiences for their children. For Mena, the motivation lies in serving the community and sowing the seeds of STEM curiosity.

Undoubtedly, the most surprising aspect of our camps is the children themselves. Their boundless creativity and unexpected insights constantly amaze us, reinforcing the importance of our mission.



IOWA AFTERSCHOOL ALLIANCE — PARTNERSHIPS WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

For more than eight years, the Science Center of Iowa has worked with the Iowa Afterschool Alliance (IAA) to develop high-quality STEM curriculum for their online lesson plan repository. SCI is providing a solution to continuing a students' STEM learning by creating quality STEM experiences for these student learners, an opportunity which expands SCI's reach across the state.

IAA is the industry leader for out-of-school programming in Iowa. This organization provides resources to over 1,800 providers, community-based organizations, schools, state policy makers and afterschool advocates.

What makes this relationship with IAA so special is that SCI is exclusively working on the STEM portion of the curriculum and puts SCI in true partnership with

Of course, running camps for 12 weeks comes with its challenges. Recruiting camp educators in a competitive workforce is no easy feat. Yet, the dedication and passion of our team have ensured the success of our programs time and time again.

Amidst the challenges, there are countless “A-ha!” moments that make it all worthwhile.

Witnessing a child’s face light up as they grasp a new concept reminds us of the profound impact we have. It reaffirms our belief that we are exactly where we need to be—inspiring the next generation of scientists, innovators, and leaders.

As we look ahead, our commitment to providing exceptional STEM experiences remains unwavering. With each camp session, we continue to shape young minds, instilling in them the skills and confidence they’ll carry forward into the future. Together, we’re building a community of curious, engaged learners, and the possibilities are endless.



Blank Park Zoo and the Iowa Children’s Museum.

The partnership SCI has established with IAA also keeps SCI relevant in afterschool groups across the state.

In addition to developing and providing high-quality curriculum, SCI is also a member of IAA’s STEM working group, along with Blank Park Zoo and the Iowa Children’s Museum. This group meets once a month to discuss topics for new STEM lesson plans, grant opportunities and new learnings.

SCI staff have also facilitated a session and participated in a panel discussion at the IAA Fall Conference and have joined IAA staff for the Girls Build Solutions conference in Atlanta, GA. In addition to the conferences and curriculum development, SCI works with IAA through the Americorp program. For the last three years, SCI has engaged Americorp Members to support onsite and offsite programming.



INNOVATION

Turning science into art

Following a conversation with an exhibitor during the Des Moines Mini Maker Faire in 2022, an idea was born that paired an Iowa State University class project with the Innovation Lab at the Science Center of Iowa.



Kim Moss, Associate Professor and Biological/Pre-Medical Illustration (BPMI) Director at Iowa State University, connected with Jolie Pelds, SCI's Director of Innovative STEM Teaching, to discuss what needs SCI had and what the class project could look like.

Kim and her students met with Jolie in the Innovation Lab. They discussed Jolie's vision for the room — to ultimately create an intentional connection between the outdoors and the lab. The class went back to Ames to ideate and when they were ready to make their pitches to Jolie, the students used ISU's maker space to create videos for their pitches. The proposals were reviewed, feedback was given

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR A TEACHER IS A JOURNEY — NOT ONE AND DONE

STEM skills are an integral part of our day-to-day life from the little learners to lifelong learners. For over 10 years, the SCI has provided professional development (PD) to over 5,000 educators across Iowa.

SCI's Guided Learning Staff continue to develop opportunities to connect informal learning to the classroom. According to Jolie Pelds, SCI's Director of Innovative STEM Teaching, "Learning can't be transactional. It must be transformational. It's about repetition and how educators are using the information to build confidence, not only in themselves but also their students."

It's one thing for SCI to talk about the significance and impact of our own teacher PD, it's another when you actually hear it from a veteran teacher who's been through traditional classroom/curriculum PD trainings. Meet **Ms. Wendy Garton**, a seasoned educator at Bondurant Farrar Community School District, with over 20 years of experience. She shares her firsthand account of how SCI's approach to professional development has transformed her teaching methods and revitalized her passion for education.

“ I have always been extremely intimidated by STEM activities. For me, STEM content was not easily accessible in my own educational journey so when I became a teacher it was an area I always shied away from. I honestly didn't think I had the tools or experience to design meaningful lessons and inspire young scientists.

From the moment I stepped into Jolie's training, I felt a surge of energy. Her passion for science is palpable, and she exudes a natural curiosity that is infectious. She has

and one project was selected. The ISU students were tasked with showing the process of science and the relationship to creating and making things.

According to Jolie, “there was a lot of ideating on the part of the students. This project was unlike anything this class had ever worked on. In fact, it really pushed their translation of information into art.”

Once the design was finalized, the students engaged with Lashier Graphics, the company who would be producing and installing the window coverings. They provided the students with samples of different materials they could use in addition to consultation on materials that would complement the design in this application and why. To make sure the project was perfect, the students brought a full-size mockup of their window designs to SCI.

Installation happened at the end of Spring semester with the students onsite. As part of their class final, the students individually debriefed on their contributions to the project/design and what they learned from this process.

“This was a very emotional experience for them,” explains Jolie. “As the panels of window graphics were being installed, the students were identifying the designs they individually worked on and were reminiscing about what it took to get to this point.”



a unique way of challenging your existing knowledge and encouraging you to think in new, innovative ways. Although I was initially intimidated and apprehensive, I was also incredibly excited and eager to learn. I found myself immersed in the training, feeling like a child again—curious, explorative, and ready to tinker and build.

This year, I’ve designed lessons using Indi Spheres, Finches, and Indi Robot cars. I’ve openly shared with my students that we’re embarking on a journey of trial and error, and I’ve coined a term for this mix of fear and excitement: ‘scited’ (scared and excited). It’s this discomfort that fuels my growth and drives me to become a better teacher.

Together, my students and I are on a learning adventure and it’s been nothing short of powerful. I’ve witnessed their engagement soar and their frustration when our lessons come to an end—a clear indication that we’re on the right track. As we navigate this journey of discovery together, I’m reminded of the beauty in embracing the unknown and the joy that comes from watching students thrive. ”

Ms. Garton’s story is a testament to the transformative power of SCI’s teacher PD. It’s not just about imparting knowledge; it’s about fostering a mindset of curiosity, resilience, and innovation. By creating a safe space for educators to explore and grow, SCI ensures that the ripple effect of their training reaches every student in the classroom. As we continue to support and empower our educators, we are reminded that professional development is indeed a journey—one that shapes not only teachers but the future of our communities.



STAR/SOLAR PARTIES AND DES MOINES ARTS FESTIVAL 2023

Community Outreach

Expanding Universe, Expanding Impact

The Science Center of Iowa is dedicated to building relationships in our community to better serve and dismantle barriers that limit access and equity in STEM for underserved and marginalized individuals and groups.

Through support of the Iowa Space Grant Consortium, SCI attended Celebrasian, Capital City Pride, and the Iowa Juneteenth Neighbor's Day Celebration. SCI staff and stargazing guide volunteers gave participants the opportunity to experience the wonder of looking through telescopes to observe the sun, sunspots, and solar prominences.

At each festival, SCI highlighted two to three NASA professionals that were representative of each community audience so those participating could see themselves represented in Space Science.

Through these festivals and star parties 6,787 interactions were facilitated.



Public support

SCI ENGAGES A WIDE COMMUNITY AUDIENCE to develop meaningful partnerships and new initiatives that inspire curious minds of all ages. Partnerships and sponsorships from the following organizations help SCI engage and inspire lifelong learning in all of us.



The Science of Square Bubbles

For more than 10 years, SCI has participated in the Des Moines Arts Festival with the goal of showing the convergence of science and art while providing an experience for community members and families to explore with their hands and their minds. This year's experience put the "math" in STEM.

Visitors attending the festival were invited to explore the properties of shapes and create a square bubble. Strawbees®, plastic straws and connectors were selected to build their own bubble wand. To encourage creativity, the SCI staff asked questions such as, "How could you make a square bubble?" or "What pieces would you need to add to make a cube bubble?" "What other shapes of bubbles could you make?" "Can you make the bubbles bigger or maybe smaller?"

By varying the materials, investigating different angles, and adding more sides and dimensions of the wand, bubbles were created in all different shapes and sizes.

"We were intentional about tying science to art," explains Jolie Pelds, SCI's Director of Innovative STEM Teaching. "Our activity of Exploring the Science of Shapes really did bring learning to life."

At the Science Center of Iowa, whether onsite or through community outreach, the goal is to be a quality community resource for informal science learning where children, families, school groups and individuals of all ages come to explore science, technology, engineering and math.



GREATER DES MOINES
REGIONAL ARTS COUNCIL

BRAVO Greater Des Moines Fund The following local governments committed a portion of their hotel/motel tax in FY 22–23:

- Altoona
- Ankeny
- Bondurant
- Carlisle
- Clive
- Des Moines
- Grimes
- Indianola
- Johnston
- Norwalk
- Pleasant Hill
- Polk City
- Polk County
- Urbandale
- Waukee
- West Des Moines
- Windsor Heights



Sponsorships and grants

The following contributions were made through generous support of specific projects and programs at the Science Center of Iowa between October 1, 2022 and September 30, 2023.

\$50,000+



\$20,000 – 49,999



\$10,000 – 24,999



\$1,000 – 9,999



Contributions

WITH SINCERE APPRECIATION, the Science Center of Iowa acknowledges the extraordinary support from all donors. Your gifts enable us to engage and inspire through programming, exhibits, events and so much more. Thank you for making this possible and investing in the SCI mission.

\$50,000 and above

Bravo Greater Des Moines
Mell Meredith Frazier
Edwin T. Meredith Foundation

\$25,000 – \$49,999

Corteva Agriscience (a division of DowDupont)
Fred Maytag Family Foundation
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\$10,000 – \$24,999

Bayer U.S. LLC
Bridgestone Americas Tire Operations, LLC
Iowa Arts Council, which exists within the Iowa Economic Development Authority
Judith A. Lindquist Scholarship Fund
Meredith Corporate Foundation
Principal Charity Classic
Renewable Energy Group
John Ruan Foundation Trust

\$5,000 – \$9,999

Gabus Automotive Group
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Michael and Diane Versackas
Ni and Wade Wagner
Emily and Nick Webb
Timothy and Lori Wiles



Annual event

GO BEYOND WITH SCI – LET’S GET MOVING! The SCI Gala, hosted annually at the Science Center of Iowa, is a unique fundraising event where guests enjoy hands-on interactive exhibits, special format theaters, and engaging programs. This event breaks away from traditional sit-down dinners, offering mobile bidding for the silent auction so attendees can explore, build rockets, watch demonstrations, and socialize freely. Proceeds support SCI’s mission of lifelong science learning and enhanced educational programs. Special thanks to our sponsors, event partners, auction donors, and the 2023 Masters of Ceremonies, Megan Salois and Jeff Angelo, for making the event a success.

Event Partners	Sponsors	
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