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Central Coast Children's Museum Triples in Size for Three Times The Fun From Reptiles to Rockets, Giant Bubbles to Climbing Walls, Santa Maria Valley Discovery Museum Is an Action-Packed Place to Learn

SANTA MARIA, CA—Daylight floods through a chartreuse-colored wall of tiny windows revealing a tyrannosaurus rex, a shipwreck jungle gym and a “Mars Terrain” climbing wall.

And that’s just the beginning of the new and improved Santa Maria Valley Discovery Museum, a 13,000-square-foot facility that has tripled in size since moving across town to the site of the historic art deco Coca Cola Bottling Company, and the only hands-on children’s museum in Santa Barbara County.

“Kids aren’t the only ones who get caught up in the fun,” said Christine Gerber, outreach coordinator of the Santa Maria Valley Discovery Museum. “I see grown men spend hours playing our construction magnet game and our giant bubble machine.”

Indeed, visitors of all ages are treated to colorful murals; games that test your sight and senses; a beach with real sand, boardwalk pier and climbing nets; and even a live talking ambonian king parrot, corn snake and variety of iguanas and geckos.

Cleverly designed to give children a taste of the Santa Maria Valley’s natural wonders, the museum features zones highlighting the wildlife of the Guadalupe Dunes; the origins of local produce, ranching life and the culture behind the famed Santa Maria Style Barbecue; and even a soon-to-be rocket launch pad that celebrates the sights and sounds of nearby Vandenberg Air Force Base.

Other favorites include a genuine whale skull found on a local beach, a “creation station” craft area, and “cowches”—small couches that look a lot like Holsteins! The museum continues to unveil additional curiosities and attractions as new installments arrive each month.

“We have regulars who say it looks like a whole new museum each time they visit,” said Gerber, who reveals that a shark tank and two smaller tanks featuring “Nemo” puffer fish are on the way, as well as a tar pit with fossils, an expanded rainforest zone and the rocket launch pad. “This is all part of the museum’s growing mission to broaden the public’s knowledge about science and nature and to stimulate behaviors associated with learning by emphasizing hands-on education in a multi-sensory and multidimensional environment,” she said.

Regularly open Tuesdays through Saturdays from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Sundays from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m., the museum will have special hours on Monday, July 4 from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. and on Monday, September 5 (Labor Day) from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. The museum is located at 705 South McClelland Street in downtown Santa Maria. For more information, visit www.smvdiscoverymuseum.org or call (805) 928-8414.

Serving the greater Santa Maria Valley in the heart of California’s Central Coast, the Santa Maria Valley Chamber of Commerce and Visitor & Convention Bureau is a nonprofit association that facilitates local tourism and provides information on the region’s many attractions and visitor services. Famed for its fine wines, natural wonders, agricultural heritage and flavorful barbecue, the Santa Maria Valley offers a broad range of cultural, sporting and historical experiences. For information on lodging, dining, tours, attractions and events, please contact the Santa Maria Valley Chamber of Commerce and Visitor & Convention Bureau at (800) 331-3779, or visit www.santamaria.com.
