

TRAVEL

COSI makes a fun destination for children of all ages

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When COSI Toledo opened in 1997, I was a bit skeptical that the former Portaide, a Trapper's Alley-style indoor mall, could become a reputable science museum.

But a year later, when my son was born, and visits to his Toledo-based grandparents and cousins became more frequent, COSI became our adopted backyard.

Located in the heart of Toledo — such as it is — COSI sidles up to the muddy Maumee River, and in the summer, viewers can gaze upon recreational boaters and a smattering of commercial ships from the outdoor seats of the Atomic Cafe.

And even though the cafe offers a decent selection of both fried and fresh foods, you're definitely not there for the food. Eat before you go, grab some ice cream as a treat.

If you go:

COSI Toledo (there's also one in Columbus) is located at the corner of Summit and Adams streets. Take I-75 to I-280 and exit off Summit.

■ **Beyond Numbers** will be at COSI through May 28. Upcoming events include a musical performance by Jerry Patrik Clark at 1 and 3 p.m. Saturday, March 10; **Paint by Number**, a 50-year celebration, on Saturday, April 7 and **A Chance Encounter: Meeting or Beating the Odds** April 9-22. Reservations are being taken for Mother's Day brunch 10 a.m.-noon, Sunday, May 13.

■ COSI also offers daily demonstrations, including a lightning show, weather prediction and the physics of bowling.

■ Admission is \$7.50 adults, \$6.50 children 3-18, senior kids (65 and over) \$6.50; kids 2 and under, free.

■ Hours Monday-Saturday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sunday noon-5 p.m.

■ Information: Call (419) 244-2874 or visit www.cosi.org.

Hands-on

The thing kids like best about COSI is that it's hands-on. Totally hands-on. And everything is usually in working order. That doesn't seem like too much to ask, but those who remember the waning days of the Detroit Science Center before it entered into its current \$30 million renovation which will

debut this summer, remember that most of the exhibits were broken or just plain uninteresting.

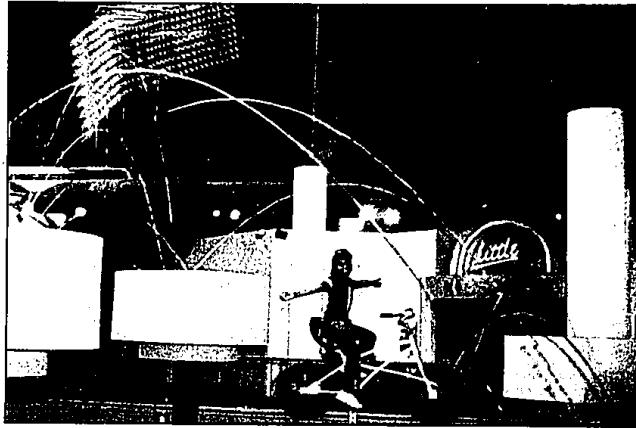
Not here.

Science isn't forced on children, but fun is. In the sports area, which is the first glass-walled area that greets guests, kids encounter gravity while rock climbing, work on throwing the perfect pitch, and lob a virtual volleyball in what can often be a very spirited competition. Along the way, they learn about physiology, technology and the science of making athletes.

Kidspace is the most popular area for the preschool crowd. And any parent who's had to chase a 2-year-old around, wincing as they narrowly miss coffee table edges and stereo speakers, will wonder why more contractors don't just make houses equipped like this.

Just think, a tree house in the living room with a slide that allows kids to go right into a kitchen area built for them. A construction area where little ones can build forts with foam blocks, and a water play area that'll float their boat. There's even a sound exploration space where tots can bang away on chimes, drums and lids, and a tiny toy hospital complete with an ambulance to drive, X-rays to view and babies to feed.

A baby area off to the side offers visual, tactile and auditory



Way up high: Though parents hold their breath, kids love pedaling on the high-wire bike.

stimulation for the tiniest of babies and a little respite for moms and dads, too.

High wire cycle

Older kids can't wait to get tall enough to ride on the high wire cycle, which looks far more dangerous than it actually is. So I'm told. I've yet to brave the bike that's perched a story above a water fountain in the center atrium, but the constant lines attest to the fact that many do.

A partnership between families, industry, schools, labor and community groups make many of the exhibits possible. Life Force, a lower-level exhibit sponsored by several Ohio healthcare organizations, teaches kids about high-tech medical science as kids assume the roles of secret agents for research facilities. Both life and death are treated intelligently, making it an exhibit of fact that does not patronize its younger audience.

Across the atrium is Mind

Zone, where kids explore the fun of perception. A distorted gravity room makes balls roll up, and gives you instant instability on your feet. Great for laughs, but not for the easily disoriented. The big draw here is always the floor to ceiling video screen that multiplies images and turns your ordinary hand gestures into a psychedelic array of colors. Think Target ads meet lava lamp and you get the picture.

In the summer, visitors can explore the outdoor science park's Sound Garden, use themselves as part of a sundial, and usually there's plenty of bubbles cut there to capture the little one's attention.

Because of its large Kaleidoscope Gallery, COSI is able to host regular touring exhibits. Last year's winner was the Science of Roller Coasters, which I thought Cranbrook actually did better job with when it was there earlier in the year.

But this spring, until May 28, COSI offers "Beyond Numbers,"

which was created by mathematicians from the George Washington University and the Maryland Science Center staff. Three areas of COSI have the interactive exhibit, which explains mathematics through patterns and relationships, problem solving and abstractions.

The experiments are meant to engage children to develop a healthy interest in mathematics, and to the most part, they do. I find that if true learning is to happen, it's up to the parents to read the explanations and discuss the experiments with the kids. Otherwise, they're simply a series of interactive games — which isn't a bad thing either.

Whether it's for science or for fun, COSI is certainly worth an afternoon of exploration. And if you really pay attention, you'll learn something, too. Or more likely, you'll remember just how much you used to know, and wonder where all that knowledge went.

Water play: Conducting experiments is just one of the many fun things to do in COSI's Water Works.

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