

Mary's Story

In 1999 Mary Kasprzyk experienced the pains of loss and life. After losing both her father-in-Law and father within 6 months of each other and after giving birth to her third child, it was with raw emotions and dedication that Mary committed to making a positive change and commitment to the community in which she lived. Mary's love and passion for children and family values directed her down the path of developing a hands-on educational children's museum in southwest Michigan.

Mary completed her independent research late August of 2000. A public announcement was made on Sept. 30 and a meeting was arranged for Oct. 17th, 2000. Several interested individuals listened intently as Mary presented her research and idea. A board of directors was formed as a result of this gathering. The wheels were set in motion for the development of what was then known as the Allegan County Children's Museum

The board met on Jan. 22, 2001. The development of the 501(C) (3) non-profit organization began. The Allegan Community Center was identified as a location for the museum. Then the tragedy of Sept. 11 afflicted the nation; setting the non-profit process on hold. Doubts began to inflict the board; members resigned and were replaced. Community support fueled Mary's confidence and motivated the board to continue on with the development of the project. It was Mary's perseverance, passion and commitment to the project that inspired us to keep moving ahead.

Grant funds were pending due to the delay of the IRS determination process. Mary contacted the assigned agent who was able to expedite the process. Non-profit status was issued on Jan. 22, 2002. Grants were approved, committees were established, floor plans designed and exhibits were built. The attempt to locate the museum at the community center fell through. A traveling museum was created allowing the museum to operate visiting numerous schools through out the county. After two years it was determined that it was in the best interest of the project to present the idea to interested communities.

It felt as if we were starting from scratch. Mary began presenting her idea to various communities. After several presentations and offers the opportunity presented it's self at a town hall meeting in a small community in Fennville, MI. Overwhelmingly received by city officials and residents, the offer of a potential home for the museum was identified. A lifelong resident bought and renovated a building which now serves as the home for The Children's Museum of Fennville (CMF). A generous donation was received to help with start up cost for the museum.

A "stay at home mom's" dream comes to fruition after seven long years. This goal was achieved without any monetary gains by any board member or Mary herself. Mary is now the Executive Director and has three employees. A new 10,000 sq. ft. environmentally friendly green building has been planned. The CMF is paving the way for the redevelopment of rural downtown Fennville, Michigan. Mary, along with the Board and Staff of CMF strongly believe that our rural families and children of all abilities deserve the very best educational opportunities that we can offer.