

# PRESS RELEASE

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## **Union Station Unveils Plans to Significantly Expand Early Childhood Learning in Greater Kansas City**

### **Science City Receives \$4 Million Grant from the Hall Family Foundation to Propel Plans into Action**

KANSAS CITY, MO (October 10, 2017) Today, on the expansive ground floor of internationally-awarded Science City at Union Station, over 100 leaders from the early childhood, academic, business, civic and funding community gathered for the unveiling of plans to greatly expand critical early childhood learning in Kansas City. To put these plans into immediate action, a significant \$4 million grant from Hall Family Foundation was announced to help propel the massive \$7 million initiative forward.

Earlier this year, Union Station officials announced plans – generously funded by the Hall Family Foundation - to develop a blueprint and scope for interactive science learning experiences at Science City for children 0-7 years old. The first step toward that ambitious goal was initiated by retaining the world-renowned Boston Children's Museum. Over the course of the ensuing months, Union Station leadership worked extensively with early and informal learning experts from Boston Children's Museum to bring local and regional realities and insights to ultimately shape what is now a highly actionable and informed plan.

“As one of the largest and oldest children's museums in the world, Boston Children's Museum is a powerhouse and deep with experience and expertise,” Bob Regnier, Board Chair, Union Station Board of Directors, shared. “We feel fortunate for their deep and established leadership in early learning.”

Leading the Early Childhood Initiative from the Union Station Board is Ramón Murguía, Vice Chairman, who expanded on the value of having such a qualified partner in planning.

“The wealth of proven results from the Boston Children's Museum is paying off for the entire Kansas City community,” Murguía, said. “The plans unveiled today will drive our next 21 months of action and will manifest in world-class early learning experiences for our most valuable resources . . . the young minds who will, in turn, shape our futures.”

Plans include multiple exhibit zones and interactive experiences to spark curiosity and creativity in Kansas City's youngest learners. These plans are aimed to offer rich environments that engage kids in meaningful exploration and discovery . . . essentials for successful students and future productive citizens and work-place leaders.

“Learning opportunities specifically designed for children play an important role for most modern science centers,” Carole Charnow, president and CEO, Boston Children’s Museum, said. “We’ve brought to bear our own decades of experience in engaging our youngest children along with the latest research from MIT, Harvard and other leading research institutions on how infants and toddlers learn. What Kansas City is about to do - through the proven Science City platform – is exciting, vitally important and leading edge. It’s been an extreme pleasure to have our teams collaborate during this planning phase.”

An Early Childhood Center as part of Kansas City's award-winning Science City is a natural extension of the current Science City core mission: to serve as a scientific, educational and cultural resource to the community, dedicated to inspiring a lifelong love of science, learning and discovery.

“Science City - now 18 years old - recognized and awarded on the world stage, has evolved in dramatic fashion in the last five years with specific focus on rotating programming and high impact exhibits,” George Guastello, president and CEO of Union Station, said. “Significant and strategic investments in new and existing mission-focused infrastructure, hands-on exhibitions and high-quality teacher education and programming have put us in position to take this next big leap forward. In fact, without those community investments – like the one announced today from the Hall Family Foundation – we would still be at the drawing board with the best of intentions, unfulfilled. With the generous \$4 million grant from the Hall Family Foundation, we are once again in position to reshape the local and regional landscape as it relates to strengthening our community, this time starting with our youngest citizens. We simply can’t thank Kansas City enough for challenging us, then giving us the room and resources to regularly exceed expectations. We now are reimagining the future by growing younger.”

Rebecca Hall, program officer at the Hall Family Foundation, provided further perspective . . .

“We know the promise of long-term community success starts with investing in early childhood learning,” Hall, shared. “We applaud this bold step by the leadership of Union Station. As one of our areas of focus is Pre-K through 12 education, we appreciate the impact these types of initiatives can have in stimulating imagination and encouraging early learning.”

The business community – given voice by Joe Reardon, president and CEO, Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce – also delivered a strong endorsement . . .

“The Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce is committed to improving early childhood education throughout our region as one of our Big 5 initiatives,” Reardon, said. “Growing Kansas City's workforce of tomorrow through the big initiatives like Union Station is undertaking is critically important. This represents a tremendous new opportunity for the very youngest in our community. Science City is already a top-ranked science center and an educational asset to Greater Kansas City. Extending their reach to our youngest learners is a natural and much-needed next step.”

Translating plans to action for the \$7 million initiative will begin immediately, with an opening of the three dedicated areas targeted for mid-2019. Station officials emphasized how speed-to-market is one of their strengths when it comes to delivery of programs and experiences . . .

“As we look to the future and this next evolutionary step, the advantages of standing on the shoulders of Science City’s successful business model affords us tremendous advantages,” Jerry Baber, Union Station executive vice president and COO, said. “Science City is already configured with first-class infrastructure. This affords us not only speed to market with new early learning offerings, but keeps our construction budgets much lower than if we were building from the ground up. That ultimately translates to more investment in actual programming. Additionally, Science City already enjoys a dynamic and award-winning professional staff of educators. With specific early learning training, we will extend our reputation for stellar guest experience to new audiences. These new early learning programs and places in

Science City will fill 13,000 dedicated SQF with a complete programmatic footprint of nearly 35,000 SQF, but more importantly, will greatly expand our community commitment to kindergarten readiness. The STEM pipeline will grow and in so doing, will help ensure Kansas City's reputation nationally for aggressively focusing on the human element of what it takes to be a world-class city."

Additional fundraising toward the complete financial investment also started today and was emphasized as both a priority and opportunity by Union station leadership . . .

"Executing on our long-term strategic plan has brought us to this point and with the involvement of business leaders, foundations, educators, early childhood advocates, and family-focused individuals, we will deliver something truly amazing . . . for generations to come," Guastello, said. "We invite all of Kansas City to invest with us and help shape and ensure the success of Greater Kansas City's next and future generations."

Those interested in reviewing the complete plan and lending support to the project are encouraged to call or email Christy Nitsche, Director of Advancement & Community Engagement at (816) 460-2208 or [cnitsche@unionstation.org](mailto:cnitsche@unionstation.org)

#### **About Union Station Kansas City, Inc.**

Union Station Kansas City -- a 501(c)3 non-profit organization -- is a 100-year-old historical landmark and celebrated civic asset renovated and reopened to the public in 1999. The organization -- dedicated to science education, celebration of community and preservation of history -- is home to Kansas City's internationally-awarded Science Center; the popular Model Railroad Experience; the Arvin Gottlieb Planetarium; the Regnier Extreme Screen Theatre, H&R Block City Stage featuring live theater, and a selection of unique shops and restaurants. Union Station is also home to prominent area civic organizations and businesses, and regularly hosts world-class traveling exhibitions. Awarded "Top Banquet Facilities in KC" by KC Business Journal, the facility regularly hosts community events and private celebrations of all sizes. Visit [WWW.UNIONSTATION.ORG](http://WWW.UNIONSTATION.ORG) for details. Also, follow us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube.

#### **About Science City, Kansas City's Science Center**

Internationally awarded for "Visitor Experience" by ASTC and named one of the country's TOP 25 science centers, Science City annually educates and entertains hundreds of thousands of science-thirsty children of all ages. Kansas City's Science Center -- opened in 1999 -- is THE place for inquisitive young minds to create, explore, and experiment with the BIG world of science through hands-on learning and non-stop fun. Featuring over 200 interactive exhibits and host to countless STEM-based events -- including the annual Greater Kansas City Science & Engineering Fair -- Science City leads the region in recognition from educators, parents, caregivers AND children alike.

#### **About Boston Children's Museum**

Boston Children's Museum is the second oldest, and one of the most influential children's museums in the world. It was founded in 1913 by the Science Teachers' Bureau, a group of visionary educators dedicated to providing new resources for both teachers and students, as a center for the exchange of materials and ideas to advance the teaching of science. For over 100 years it has been engaging children in joyful discovery experiences that instill an appreciation of our world, develop foundational skills, and spark a lifelong love of learning.

The Museum's exhibits and programs emphasize hands-on engagement and learning through experience, employing play as a tool to spark the inherent creativity, curiosity, and imagination of children. Designed for children and families, Museum exhibits focus on science, culture, environmental awareness, health & fitness, and the arts. In addition to extensive child-centered exhibits, Museum educators develop numerous programs and activities that address literacy, performing arts, science and math, visual arts, cultures, and health and wellness. The Museum is also one of the few children's museums in the world to maintain a collection. The Museum's collections of Americana, Natural History, Global Culture, Native American, Dolls and Dollhouses, and Japanese artifacts encompass more than 50,000 items.

As one of the largest children's museums in the world, Boston Children's Museum also provides museum consulting services and creates award winning traveling exhibits, staff training curriculum, and exhibit kits for Museum professionals.