Families, defined as at least one child visiting with one or more parent(s) or guardian(s), are one of the fastest growing segments of museum-going audiences nationwide. Perhaps your own early memories of visiting a museum—the large, cavernous spaces, the wondrous and beautiful things to see and touch, or the personal time spent with a loved one—still hold special meaning for you.

Research shows that such early museum experiences remain with visitors. Children who visit museums with a parent or guardian are far more likely to grow into adults who continue to visit and support museums; even more so than if they had visited as part of a school group.

Family visitation and participation in family programming are both growing at the National Building Museum. The Museum is excited to welcome these visitors and to learn more about their needs and desires in order to serve them better and to support their exploration of “the world we build for ourselves”.

In fiscal year 2007, the Museum launched a new multi-year family programs initiative that features new daily activities and special programs, and improvements to existing offerings for families.

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Daily Programs for Families

On any given day, the Museum offers a variety of learning activities for families to enjoy. Some are old favorites; many are new or planned for the near future. Try one on your next visit.

Exploring the Museum’s Exhibitions

Two of the Museum’s current exhibitions offer free family guides. Colorful and full of interactive questions and activities, these guides are designed to encourage adults and young people to discuss and explore the exhibitions’ key concepts and offer ideas for further learning activities. These guides can be found just outside or inside the exhibitions The Green House: New Directions in Sustainable Architecture and Design and Washington: Symbol and City.

How Things Work: Discovery Carts

On weekends, families and visitors of all ages (but especially those ages five and older) are invited to participate in one of the Museum’s two popular Discovery Carts: Bridging the Gap and Arches and Trusses: The Tension Builds. Both Discovery Cart programs are free and registration is not required.

Every Saturday from 10:30 to 11:00 a.m., participants in the Bridging the Gap interactive demonstration learn about five basic bridge types before solving a specific transportation problem by choosing which type of bridge to build.

On Sundays from 11:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m., the Arches and Trusses: The Tension Builds cart helps visitors to explore how different physical forces, materials, and structural systems affect the strength and longevity of a given building. Participants are then invited to test different building materials and work together to build a brick arch.

Amazing Arches

Recently, the Museum debuted its new Amazing Arches activity, offered daily in the Great Hall. Smiles, giggles, applause, and wonderment are frequently observed as families with children of all ages, teenagers, and curious adults construct a soft, seven-foot-tall block arch for themselves. The arch, which requires more than one person to build, exemplifies the Museum’s educational philosophy of involving visitors in their own learning and discovering answers to questions for themselves.

Exploring the Museum’s Historic Home

Free, printed family guides are always available at the Information Desk for families to pick up. The Treasure Hunt, recommended for children ages 6–13, uses fun activities to introduce architectural concepts and features within the Museum and around Washington, D.C. For families with pre-teens, the Adventures in Architecture scavenger hunt challenges families to set off around the Museum to identify key architectural elements, sketch, and analyze the building.

Family Tool Kits

In late spring 2007, the Museum will debut its new Family Tool Kits.

Designed for families with children of various ages, each kit will be loaded with lots of exciting educational tools to help explore the architecture of the Museum’s historic home by seeing, moving, touching, and doing. The kit, which will be free for Museum members and require a $5.00 check-out fee for non-members, will be appropriate for children ages three and older with their adult companions.
Artful Architecture Summer Camp

Building on its experience and success in serving thousands of families and school and scout groups over the past 21 years, the Museum is excited to premier its first Summer Camp in 2007. Designed for individual campers ages 8-11, the week-long sessions will be full of hands-on learning about architecture, design, and engineering.

Inspired Architects—Session A

activities include: architectural print-making, a design scavenger hunt, creating tin ceiling tile rubbings and pressed copper magnets, making “terra cotta” tiles, and exploring architectural features of the Museum’s neighborhood and the National Mall through campers’ own architectural photos and collage-making.

Daring Designers—Session B

activities include: designing a container for an egg-drop from the Museum’s second-floor balcony; creating plan, elevation, and section drawings; exploring five bridge types before constructing a model bridge to solve a transportation challenge; and constructing a one-room, one-story house using real power tools.

Registration for camp is required and is currently being accepted. More details and registration information can be found on the Museum’s web site, www.nbm.org.

Building Zone

April 2006 marked the debut of the Museum’s new exhibition for its youngest visitors—ages 2-6—and their adult companions. The Building Zone serves both as an early introduction to the building arts and as a social learning experience. The exhibition has been enthusiastically embraced by young families, serving more than 23,000 visitors in its first ten months. In response to high demand, the Museum extended the presentation of the Building Zone indefinitely, and will move it to a larger space on the first floor of the Museum this spring.

In the Building Zone, children can:
• Build a tower or brick wall;
• Curl up with an architecture picture book in the Book Nook;
• Drive bulldozers and other construction play trucks in the Construction Zone;
• Imagine being a craftsperson complete with a hard hat, tool belt, and goggles;
• Explore in a playhouse; and more.

The Building Zone is further enlivened by a mural of cities and neighborhoods designed and painted by artist Sarah L. Smith.

Why play at the National Building Museum?

Just as a foundation provides a base for a structure, child-initiated play lays a foundation for learning. Play helps children make sense of their physical and social worlds and their place within them. The Museum invites its youngest visitors and their families to enjoy this space as they explore the world we build for ourselves.

below: A young builder at work in the Museum’s Building Zone exhibition. Photo by F.T. Eyre.

The Building Zone exhibition’s cityscape mural painted and designed by artist Sarah Smith. Photo by Museum Staff.

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Valuing its role as an informal learning environment and cultural community partner, the Museum has offered numerous large-scale Family Festivals for many years and will continue the tradition with some new events this year.

The Museum’s signature annual Festival of the Building Arts took place most recently in October 2006, drawing more than 5,000 visitors, who enjoyed a variety of demonstrations and hands-on activities related to the building arts. This past year’s festival featured ideas and activities to complement the Museum’s exhibition The Green House: New Directions in Sustainable Architecture and Design, such as demonstrations on straw bale construction, green roof technologies, and waterless toilets.

The Museum again worked in partnership with the National Engineers Week Foundation to present the Discover Engineering Family Day on February 17, 2007. The festival included hands-on engineering challenges, robot demonstrations, and the opportunity to interact with engineers from a variety of fields. This year, the Museum was pleased to welcome exhibitors from the PBS series Cyberchase and Design Squad, as well as the Smithsonian’s National Air & Space Museum’s Udvar Hazy Center and the Museum of Science, Boston.

As a Washington architectural landmark, the National Building Museum was excited to collaborate with a Washington cultural landmark—the annual National Cherry Blossom Festival®. For the second year, the two organizations co-presented the National Cherry Blossom Festival® Family Day and Opening Ceremony on Saturday, March 31, 2007, to officially kick-off the two-week citywide spring celebration. This year’s family day focused on ways in which Japan is going greener and featured screenings of the Japanese anime film Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind, samples of Japanese recycling collection bins, Japa-
Family-Friendly Festivals and Family Days

nese environmental public service announce-
ment videos, and a hands-on activity based on Furoshiki, the Japanese art of using textiles (often recycled from a former use) to wrap gifts or other items, among other activities and demonstrations.

As part of the 2007 citywide celebration of Shakespeare in Washington, and to complement its highly acclaimed new exhibition Reinventing the Globe: A Shakespearean Theater for the 21st century, the Museum will co-present a Shakespeare Family Day with the Folger Shakespeare Library on Saturday, May 12, 2007. Children and families will enjoy mini-performances of the Bard’s works—by kids, for kids—performed throughout the afternoon by Folger Shakespeare Library students on sets designed by the Museum’s spring 2007 Design Apprenticeship Program (DAP) participants. DAP students will also make presentations about the processes behind their designs. Families are invited to be a part of the stage action with impromptu Shakespeare scenes, juggling, and “sword” play, and by creating their own shoebox set designs to take home.

To kick-off the summer and the opening of the exhibition David Macaulay: The Art of Drawing Architecture, the Museum will present The Big Draw, the first event of its kind in the U.S. Offered in association with a British program of the same name organized by the Campaign for Drawing, the Museum’s event will take place on Saturday, June 23, 2007. Based on the four main themes of the exhibition—visual archaeology, playing with perspective, revealing structures, and imagination—this fun-for-all-ages event, featuring architect and illustrator David Macaulay, will encourage visitors to shake off their fear of “drawing” and try some activities that offer a new way of seeing and interpreting the world around us.

Family-level members have more privileges at NBM:

New: Discounts on Artful Architecture Summer Camp
Coming Soon: Hands-on Activity Tool Kits — Free for members
• More exhibition-related Family Guides
• Updated Discovery Carts
• Discounts on weekend Family Programs
• Access to Museum Birthday Parties

To join, renew, or upgrade your membership please call the Membership Department at 202.272.2448 ext. 3500.