



Annual Report: 2009

**How we promote inquiry and discovery
for a brighter future...**



a place for curiosity and creativity
located in Mall del Norte, next to Dillard's

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The Imaginarium of South Texas is a private, non-profit, informal learning environment where children and families discover science and technology, history and culture, health and nutrition, and the arts. It is a resource center for parents, students, educators, and tourists that has enriched our community landscape for generations to come. Since relocating to Mall del Norte in February of 2007, the Imaginarium has increased its capacity to deliver the services that meet its mission to create the spark of curiosity which ignites a lifelong passion for learning through educational exhibits and hands-on programs that nurture the individual's sense of inquiry and inspiration. Through collaborations with state and local institutions and organizations, the Imaginarium strives to provide the model for creative learning experiences that build confidence in children and the adults in their lives.

Bringing in traveling exhibits rich in interactive experiences in the sciences is a key part of this effort. In August of 2008, we welcomed "Visual Vibrations", an exhibit about light, shadow and reflection, from the Exploratorium of San Francisco. In January of 2009 the Imaginarium received a grant from the Lamar Bruni Vergara Trust to implement an exciting traveling exhibit schedule for the 2009-2010 season. The first exhibit in this sponsorship is "Body Carnival: the Science and Fun of Being You" from the Catawba Science Center, which opened this past September. This rotation of science-based exhibits allows our community to experience national programs of science engagement in a dynamic environment.

Perhaps equally exciting has been the growth in the services we offer to the schools. In addition to providing field trip programming, the museum offers an outreach program that invites parents to get involved with their children in science investigations. The Imaginarium's Family Science Festival provides a platform for schools to encourage parents to engage with their child's school through the promotion of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (stem) activities. The museum has also delved into the realm of teacher professional development as a partner in the TAMIU Texas Regional Collaborative, part of a state-wide initiative to improve science education, and we now have offered workshops that provide teachers with inquiry-based materials for their classrooms. And this year the museum proudly opened a new exhibit designed in-house, in collaboration with the Texas Network of Exhibit-based learning and Teaching, called "Thinking Tinkering" about the engineering design process.

A lot of positive movement has been achieved but there are many challenges that lie ahead. Like many other non-profit institutions, we have seen the effects of families limiting their discretionary spending. We receive more requests for outreach services than we currently have the capacity to provide. But we also know from our regular visitors that the museum fills a great need in the community for an environment for families to unite with their children in a world filled with distractions. The Board of Directors and staff are committed to making the Imaginarium of South Texas a safe place for vibrant family interaction and a significant resource for stem activities for our community schools in Webb County and South Texas.



Melissa R Cigarroa, Executive Director
Oscar Lopez, 2009 Board President

Exhibit Manipulation on display --

Left: The wonder of surface tension at the Bubble Tray.

*Top Right
and Below: Constructing dams at Stream Table;
Light, lens & shadow play at Visual Vibrations;
Movie-making at Animation Station;
Snail study with Texas land snails;
Frenetic activity at the Toddler Ball Run.*





Our Vision

The Imaginarium of South Texas envisions a Webb County that has an unmatched quality of life. The people are literate in the sciences and engaged with science's offspring, technology, thereby bringing jobs and economic prosperity to the region. The people are actively working to sustain a healthy environment for themselves and future generations.

Our Mission

The mission of The Imaginarium of South Texas is to create the spark of curiosity which ignites a lifelong passion for learning through educational exhibits and inquiry-based programming that nurture the individual's sense of inquiry and inspiration.



Above: Blessed Sacrement creates impressive chemical reactions.

Our Values

We show that science matters.

We expand people's horizons.

We emphasize the importance of family interactions.

We value each child.



Above: Camilo Prada student experiences surface tension.

Top Left: 5th graders compare Earth's relative size.

Left: 4th graders play with Gyro Rings and the phenomena of precession.

Far Left: Mixing colors, a TEKS-aligned field trip activity.

Left: Borchers GT students spend the whole day at the museum, engaged in a 2 hour inquiry workshop before spending time on the floor.



Programs

This past year the Imaginarium has improved service to the general public by offering programs that are appealing across a broad age range on science topics from astronomy to zoology. In the effort to revitalize the public program offerings, staff developed new programs that are more focused on content of current interest and which target learners from early childhood through high school. Highlights include the Bright Sparks program for ages 3 – 6, the popular discovery Camp series for school ages, the Robotics series for older elementary students, and the Volunteer Program for young adults.



New Outreach programming has grown to include schools, where the Imaginarium brings science, exploration and discovery to schools for day or evening events. Field trip programming has also grown -- the Imaginarium now offers the opportunity for school groups to participate in an in-depth workshop of inquiry-based learning in addition to the regular field trip time allotment. Special activities of hands-on exploration are designed to address educational objectives for each grade level and are aligned with the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills standards.

This year alone, Imaginarium of South Texas hosted over 4,700 students and teachers; indeed, over 37,000 visitors passed through the doors to experience exhibits, programs and family interactive fun!

Top Left: Dissecting a Cow's Eye during the ExploPro afterschool science club; Top Right: Creating a ball run on the magnetic wall; Above Right: Moms of the Bright Sparks preschool program engage their kids in tactile experiences;

Below: Left: Robotics kids spent 8 weeks building and programming their robots.

Right: the weekly Puppet Palooza puppet show is a fun introduction to books.





Events

Celebrations are key to developing our culture, and the Imaginarium hosts 10 special events during the year for the community. Cutting edge national programs such as *NanoDays*, from the Nanotechnology Informal Science Education (NISE) Network and *National Engineers Week* from the Engineers Week Foundation - engage Laredo youth in the latest in science and technology.

Other programs that nurture the Scientist, the Engineer and the Mathematician include MIT Scratch Day with a focus on computer programming, Pi Day with a focus on geometry, MindFest with a focus on the link between science and art, and our own Grossology Lab during Halloween for the budding Chemist!



Top: Making geometric structures with gumdrops and toothpicks during Math Week;
Top Right: Cirque du Soleil troupe members made a stop to spend time with Imaginarium;
Right: Scouts are engaged in a Take-Apart activity during MindFest.

Below: Practicing the art of sand sculpture with international sculptor Lucinda "Sandy Feet" Wierenga at SANDtastico!

Below Right: Zookeepers from the Gladys Porter Zoo in Brownsville present information to a large crowd about the plight of sea turtles during last year's SANDtastico!





Outreach

We strive to positively impact children's learning, and outreach is an integral part of our mission of which we are especially passionate. You will see us at a wide variety of community events, festivals, health fairs, and career days year round.

We believe our work can make a huge difference in the lives of children. The Imaginarium continues to focus on non-traditional museum audiences and underserved audiences. We partnered with the Office of Border Affairs to embark on a program that offered multiple experiences in inquiry-based learning to two community centers - Rio Bravo and El Cenizo. Twin Cities Public Television, producer of the PBS show Dragon FlyTV and with the support of the National Science Foundation, selected the Imaginarium as a community partner in providing science-based education to girls and boys through their "SciGirls en Español" grant. We were one of 9 museums in the nation to participate in this girl friendly science program this year. Over the course of 12 weeks, the Imaginarium worked with Community center children to provide two-hour workshops of science investigations. We hope to expand this program to include other county community center populations during 2010.



We made our outreach services available to over 17,000 people this past year at nearly 60 outreach events in 2009.

Right: Webb County Consolidated District kids create, experiment and run races with Art Cars at the Quad-City Community Library, a collaboration since 2005.

and Up: Our green entry in the 2009 WBCA Youth and Grand Parades - Abe Lincoln's Recycled Log Cabin to celebrate his 200th birthday, pulled with green technology!; the Imaginarium makes snow with children at Mall del Norte's Santa's Arrival; LIFE Downs annual Exposition gets a "lift" with Imaginarium Hoop Gliders.

Top right: Stomp Rockets are a hit at the Texas Recycles Fair put on by the City of Laredo Solid Waste Services.





Partnering with Formal Education

UISD and LISD Middle School Science and Art teachers received unique training in Science/Art integration four times this year facilitated by the museum. Professional Development in Engineering Design for Elementary teachers was presented by museum staff this summer and this fall.

The Imaginarium is an active member of the TAMIU Texas Regional Collaborative, building relationships with Laredo's Science Educators with the goal of improving science education in the classroom.



Top Left: Who knew there was so much science in a cardboard box! LISD and UISD teachers partner to extend the concept when working with Air Cannons with teacher trainer Modesto Tamez from the Exploratorium of San Francisco.

Bottom Left: Actually doing science is key to teaching it -- these teachers are getting their hands dirty in a water filtration and environment exercise.

Top Right: Building Marble Runs teaches physics and the fun of the SciGirls activities for the classroom.

Middle Right: These teachers work on a clever Cardboard Automata design to show their skills with simple machines.

Bottom Left: Lucinda Presely, Art and Science Integration Curriculum Designer from Tyler's Discovery Science Place, shows UISD teachers the research behind the methods with Cardboard Automata.



Camps

The Imaginarium of South Texas has provided inquiry-based learning through its Camp program since its first year of operations as the Laredo Children's Museum in the summer of 1992. We offer camps that explore life science, technology, ancient civilizations, invention, and creativity. This year we offered 12 camps during spring, summer and winter school breaks, engaging approximately 250 kids in mind-bending activities ranging from stop-motion animation to fossil-making to black beetle bug racing.



Camps are a wonderful opportunity to engage children in an extended experience with design, investigation, and problem-solving. Children need time to investigate fully to satisfy their own curiosity and develop their own creativity.

New this year was a Preschool camp designed to engage the youngest visitor in hands-on projects. With the help of our strong volunteer program, campers are assisted in age-appropriate activities targeted at their special interests, with a welcome focus on literature.



We can't thank our volunteers enough as they spent literally thousands of hours assisting us with programming and supervision. These young adults were always ready with a warm smile, lots of energy and much patience!

Since opening in 2007, the Imaginarium has hosted over 700 children in camp programs, and we have hosted thousands more throughout the years.



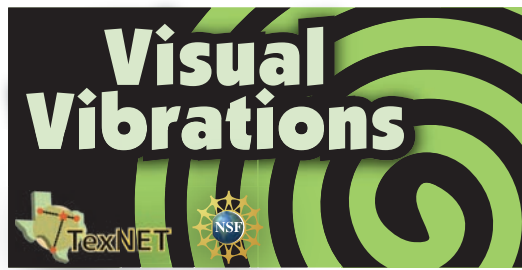
*At Left, top down: Engineering design skills at work;
Volunteers in action;
Girls get dirty pulling apart technology;
Astronaut Boot Camp;
Girls see how much weight a Bess Bug beetle can pull.*



Below: Campers are fascinated with our Corn Snake!



Museum Exhibits



Visual Vibrations: Adventures of the Human Eye

A collection of 12 interactive exhibits that explore the wonders of visual perception.

Visual Vibrations was made possible by the National Science Foundation and by TexNET, the Texas Network of Exhibit-based learning and Teaching, a cooperative of four regional museums (in Fort Worth, Tyler, Lubbock and Laredo), and was developed by the Exploratorium of San Francisco, California, a museum of art, science and human perception.



Thinking Tinkering: Engineering Design to Create & Inspire

Five different stations allow guests to create things that race, float, fly and spin. The engineering design process is explored as visitors create and then improve their designs.

Thinking Tinkering was made possible by the National Science Foundation and by TexNET, the Texas Network of Exhibit-based learning and Teaching.



Body Carnival: Science and Fun of Being You

A collection of 15 interactive exhibits that explore the laws of physics in the human body. Balance, strength, eye-hand coordination and perception are all put to the test.

Body Carnival was made possible by a grant from the Lamar Bruni Vergara Trust and comes to Laredo from the Catawba Science Center, North Carolina.

Finances 2009

Revenues	\$	percentage of total (rounded)
Admissions	42,038	8
Membership	20,953	4
Program Income	93,032	18
Foundation Grants	97,831	19
Government Grants	68,750	13
Contributions	189,321	36
Sales	7,241	1
In-Kind Donations	1,165	~
Investment	967	~
TOTAL	521,298	99
Expenses		
Education and Experience	215,630	42
Operations and Maintenance	193,773	38
General Administration	81,077	16
Marketing and Fundraising	22,478	4
TOTAL	512,958	100



Above: Campers discover the unexpected
Below: Visible effects of the invisible



History

The idea for a Children's Museum in Laredo began in the 1980s as the late Cecilia Martinez Clafin, volunteer at the Nuevo Santander Museum, saw the need for a place where children learn with hands-on experiences versus the traditional exhibits-behind-glass model. She researched the concept and together with a group of educators and concerned citizens established goals that would determine the direction and feasibility of such a museum. The museum incorporated on November 26, 1990 and applied for and received a 501© (3) non-profit educational institution status. The Laredo Children's Museum officially opened its doors on September 11, 1991.



Mrs. Clafin and early supporters

The Laredo Community College hosted the Laredo Children's Museum since its inception in the space occupied previously by the Nuevo Santander complex. The Museum established an impressive record of accomplishment throughout the years, in the breadth of quality, hands-on exhibits that have passed through its space and in its collaborations with community organizations to bring educational, inquiry-based programming to children. Thousands of children in school tours and enrolled in seasonal camp programs, and thousands of families have passed through the museum's doors to take advantage of educational traveling exhibits and creative workshops.

In 2004, the Laredo Children's Museum was extended an invitation to become a partner in the newly formed TexNET, the Texas Network of Exhibit-based learning and Teaching, funded by the National Science Foundation and designed to create a network that builds institutional capacity and leadership development in all partner museums through exhibit and staff resource exchanges. The museum is partnered with the San Francisco Exploratorium, the Fort Worth Museum of Science and History, Tyler's Discovery Science Place and Lubbock's Science Spectrum to provide unique learning experiences to the rural and Hispanic audience through interactive science exhibits and training in inquiry learning methods. The goal of this network is stronger learning opportunities within communities served by the smaller museums. This marked a turning point in the museum's direction of development, and staff began to lay a path to create an environment with the promotion of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics as its core. Through 4 rotations of TexNET high quality science-based exhibits, "Sound Around" (2005-06), "Wild Weather" (2006-07), "Move It!" (2007-08) and "Visual Vibrations" (2008-09), the museum has provided rich learning experiences in critical thinking, problem-solving and creativity, and this has informed the direction it chooses in the development of programs for the public. The Imaginarium continues work with TexNET as it continues to improve the creative and unique learning experiences that are the hallmark of a children's museum and science center.

In conjunction with this professionalization of its mission and the facility, the museum made a significant move to the Mall del Norte at the beginning of 2007, also changing its name, to take its community meeting space to a more accessible location. The move proved to be a valuable decision; the numbers of guests visiting the facility have dramatically increased, and the museum now hosts over 40,000 visitors, both tourists and locals, through a variety of programs during a calendar year. The facility remains open 5 days a week during the school year (while open to school groups all week long), and it is open seven days a week in the summer, when families and tourists are looking for family activities. The museum is proud to provide a safe place for children and their families to engage in conversation and communication, experience inquiry-based learning that explores the natural environment and encourages creativity and individual expression. The museum regularly provides these experiences to outreach audiences as well, including children and families in Laredo and in the surrounding communities of Webb County.

The goal is two-fold: first, the museum's informal learning environment should be recognized for its important contribution to the overall education of the children and families of its community; second, the museum should enrich what the community offers to the tourist and to the newly-relocated families of incoming employees. The institutional capacity-building that is embedded in the participation in TexNET has led to the development of new programming and opportunities for children and their families to create, to share, and to expand their personal horizons. It is in these experiences that the museum hopes to impact the larger community as a whole. This facility contributes to improving the quality of life and tourism in our community by providing this unique family venue.

Thank-you to our donors this year

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La Flecha Materials
Laredo Kids' Connection Show
Mr. Oscar Lopez
Ms. Cleo Rangel
Target Foundation



Above: Astronaut boot-camp



Above: Staff bring out the tarantula for an upclose nature experience

The Imaginarium takes every precaution to ensure the list is as complete as possible. We apologize if we have not accurately fulfilled this duty. Please notify us of any oversight on our part, and we will correct the mistake as quickly as we can.

Clockwise from below left: Creating Kaleidoscope designs at the AEP laptop station; Chemistry fun at camp; Pin Wheel creation at the LCC Earth Day Celebration; Union Pacific Safety program; Engineering Gears at the Wonder Wall exhibit



Laredo Children's Museum, Inc.
Db. Imaginarium of South Texas

Board of Directors Roster
2009

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Above Left: Girls construct marble runs during the SciGirls en Español grant program at Rio Bravo

Above Right: Boys make their own ice cream as part of the SciGirls en Español activities in Rio Bravo

Front Cover: Young inventors create Doodlebots at the JW Arndt Elementary Family Science Festival

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