



Challenger Center offers new hours

By MIKE NEUMANN

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On Saturday, Woodstock, McHenry County and even some Palatine residents strolled through the Challenger Learning Center for Science & Technology, 222 Church St. It was the first Saturday the center was open to the public.

"We got a lot of calls over the summer (about when the public could come)," said Anne Marie Brown, community relations manager for the center. "We have yet to determine what our summer hours are."

One thing has been determined, however. From 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. every Saturday, the public is invited to view all that the center has to offer for just \$3. Challenger Center members get in for free.

"What can you get for \$3 these days? Maybe a Happy Meal from McDonalds?" said Paul Sipiera, President of the Planetary Studies Foundation, which has loaned the Challenger Center pieces of its meteorite and earth science collection. "Here you can spend \$3 and roam around for six hours."

About 50 people did just that Saturday, which is about what the center was anticipating, Brown said. She said she hopes more people drop in as word spreads that the center is open.

"We did get a good turnout that first day," she said. "We're hoping that word of mouth is going to bring more people in."

Sipiera said he hopes the center can attract 100 to 200 people each Saturday to view the meteorite and earth science exhibit. The pieces are part of the world's 10th largest meteorite collection.

"We're hoping as time goes on we'll be able to switch up the pieces in the exhibit," Brown said, adding that if the exhibit changes, there is more of a chance people who continue coming back.

The center also shows a 30- to 35- minute movie every hour on the hour, starting at 10 a.m. Brown said the center will change the movie every two or three months. The gift shop is also open during the Saturday hours.

One of the main attractions at the center is the "Ed-Venture Center," which has a variety of interactive exhibits. They include a bowling ball exhibit that shows the effects of gravity on each planet, a board game-type exhibit called Destination Pluto, a forces of flight exhibit and a solar system exhibit.

Brown said there has been a big demand for public hours from Boy Scout Troops especially. The center had two troops visit Saturday, with one Cub Scout Troop earning a travel pin for the trip.

"The kids had a great time there and really enjoyed the hands-on exhibits," said Paul Blome, a Palatine Cub Scout leader. "They enjoyed the meteorite exhibit and took an interest in that."

Blome said he thinks he enjoyed the trip as much as the kids. The troop also went to lunch on the Square and visited the Dick Tracy Museum while in town.

"We just had a really good time here," Blome said. "After we were done for the day, we actually stopped back at the (Challenger Center) to see more of the displays."

The Challenger Center plans to open to the public in the summer, but hours are yet to be determined. The center will continue to do summer educational programs as well, with dates to be determined soon. Brown also noted that the center continues to provide "Family Science Nights" from 6 to 8:30 p.m. the first Friday each month.