

Category of Submission: Interior Design

Mobius Kids

Mobius Kids is an Inland Northwest discovery museum providing hands-on learning, creativity and fun for kids up to 10 years old. Previous size and access limitations precipitated the need for a new facility in downtown Spokane, Washington with the potential for increased visibility, lower operational costs and exhibit space on one level. As a non-profit entity Mobius was able to negotiate a lease for a site that was non-leasable to most retailers and therefore affordable. The 16,000 square-foot basement location in Riverpark Square provided the context for the design team to work within.

The planning strategies were essentially derived by unique features of the site. Two major entries in prescribed locations (including an elevator pit and a major stairway already in place), major mechanical and plumbing connections, leaks from the sidewalk above, and very low ceilings defined circulation and air and plumbing distribution paths. In addition, generous offers of linoleum, textiles, and stainless steel and a budget of \$550,000 had to be incorporated into the design solution to craft a vision of fun and energy to support exhibits, play areas, programs and events.

Modeling the method of learning promoted by Mobius, the design team and members of the Mobius community participated in a hands-on charrette to begin the design work. Ideas were explored very rapidly saving the client design fees and maximized the exploration process. Outcomes of the charrette included design strategies for the use of color, form and modularity as a way of achieving visual impact, and the development of important goals to focus the design planning. Objectives of openness (due to low ceiling heights), adequate site lines for staff (due to two access points) and flexibility for daily, monthly and annual exhibit transformations emerged as important planning objectives.

The design solution, inspired by the design elements of color and form, particularly attractive to children, color and form, unify the interior. Large circles reinforced by the linoleum or ceiling planes above, and a rainbow of contemporary colors (a deep indigo is used for the ceiling color to hide the insulating foam) applied to MDF panels are used throughout the space to reinforce wayfinding by defining spatial boundaries and important destinations like the retail store, guest services and the beloved backhoe on the museum exhibit floor. Stainless steel panels were used to provide flexibility in a playful way. Magnetic letters on suspended steel panels provide exhibit signage, wall mounted steel panels are used to display children's artwork and provide space for posting future events. Stainless surfaces in the art room provide staff easy to clean and hard to destroy creative space.

The most exciting outcome of the project is that Mobius Kids is succeeding beyond expectations. Over the past year visitations have tripled along and annual memberships have almost doubled, the interior inspired the color strategy for the redesign of the logo and the website (www.mobiusspokane.org) and the gifted donations by the community became inspired elements in the design approach for a treasured children's place.