

KIDZMANIA ready to bring fun

Mall is site for second annual family event

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"Think like a kid."

That's the strategy Elizabeth Stanek said she used in planning KIDZMANIA.

Stanek is the executive director of Linking Families and Communities, which is partnering with the Fort Dodge Community Foundation and United Way to present the second annual KIDZMANIA at the Crossroads Mall Saturday. Attractions at the event will run the gamut from big bugs to balloon artists to NASCAR tire-changing.

"KIDZMANIA is an event for kids and families to have a wholesome good time and learn about community resources," Stanek said.

Kids and adults at last year's KIDZMANIA were intrigued by the Iowa State University insect zoo, which is why it's returning this year, Stanek said.

"They can hold a tarantula or touch a walking stick," she said. Last year she saw "eyes that were big," as children and adults reacted to the zoo.

Fact Box

If you go:

What: KIDZMANIA

When: 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday

Where: The Crossroads Mall

Cost: Free

There will be at least 50 booths, each with a different activity for families at the Crossroads Mall.

"It's just a little bit bigger and a little bit better than last year," Stanek said.

For example, organizers learned from last year that having only one balloon artist wasn't enough.

"He was in high demand," Stanek said. "So we have two this year."

In addition to the second balloon artist, there will be NASCAR tire change demonstrations.

Stanek admitted not knowing much about NASCAR or changing tires, but watching how quickly they work impresses her.

"It's timed," She said. "How cool is that?"

There will also be some special guests for the Iowa State University fans.

Mascot Cy the Cardinal and Iowa State cheerleaders will drop by KIDZMANIA from noon to 2 p.m., she said.

The Science Center of Iowa will also have a booth set up with various science experiments, including a unique way for children to make smoothies. The blenders that make fruity concoctions are powered by kids pedaling a bike.

Stanek said she was excited about the Department of Public Works demonstration, which will feature a garbage truck with a mechanical arm.

"I think it's pretty cool myself," Stanek said. "I lived in the country, so I had never seen it before."

She said she suspects children will find it pretty cool as well.

With all the activities available at the booths, Stanek said she hopes KIDZMANIA will be a great experience for families.

"What a great way to bond with your kids and experience things you don't experience here on a daily basis," Stanek said. "It's certainly important for kids and families to do things together."

Stanek said families can also learn about more activities they can do together in the area.

For example, the Fort Dodge Community REC will have information available about its programs.

For Stanek, seeing people's reactions at KIDZMANIA is great, she said.

"Seeing the expression on a kid's faces or the things they are saying, that was a great feeling for me last year," she said. "I was proud we were able to pull it off and see all the fun the kids were having."

She said the event works perfectly with Linking Families and Communities goal of keeping kids both happy and healthy.

Linking Families and Communities is a nonprofit organization that works in Calhoun, Pocahontas and Webster counties.

Stanek said the organization couldn't have the event without support from its sponsors and the community.

"It takes a community to make this work," she said.