

Restore Our Funding!
Donna Curran, Development Director
Discovery Museum and Planetarium

GREETING

Good evening, Representative Grogins from Black Rock, Members of our Bridgeport state delegation, elected representatives from Fairfield and Norwalk, colleagues, neighbors and friends,

THANK YOU

On behalf of Discovery Museum and Planetarium, I would like to begin with a statement of deep gratitude and appreciation for the active, sustained interest of our **elected officials**. Without your highly visible advocacy, our message, our mission would have been overwhelmed and lost in the chaotic fray of budget deliberations. We don't take your support lightly or for granted. Your attention elevates our mission.

In addition, I wish to acknowledge our **Board of Trustee members** present, staff members and volunteers. It is a tribute to their commitment that our annual meeting scheduled for this evening was rescheduled so they could attend this important forum.

Thank you, All, so very much.

BRIEF HISTORY

In 1937, in the basement of this library, perhaps in this very room, Mrs. Henry D. Bradley, an esteemed civic leader, along with 40 members of the Junior League, established the Museum of Art, Science and Industry to educate the children of Bridgeport.

Here we are, 72 years later, the creation of these visionary women at mortal risk because of sweeping cuts which will close our doors if allowed to pass. I wish to be clear about that—one year of zero funding, we close our doors.

Science is the heart of Discovery's mission, and EDUCATION is the first principle underlying its creation. Therefore, with your permission I would like to address the educational aspects of what might be lost if this newest budget is passed as is. I think the other speakers have dealt with the economic development issues quite thoroughly.

BACKGROUND

As an elected member of Bridgeport's City Council (2004-2006), I sat on the budget, contracts and education committees. I witnessed first hand the dynamic interplay between education and economic development. I also witnessed first-hand the tremendous need and the tremendous opportunity.

When I joined Discovery last fall after my council term ended, I knew it to be a worthy institution, a science-technology resource for the region's teachers, home of NASA's Challenger Learning Center—one of only 52 in the world—and the Henry B. DuPont III planetarium. Overall, an engaging, yet serious, enterprise that attracted visitors throughout the tri-state area and beyond.

You can imagine my happy surprise to discover its substantive, relevant and timely *educational outreach* aimed at defeating science illiteracy.

And as a value added, this programming met the curriculum standards set by the State Department of Education to help improve benchmark testing scores. Connecticut has serious achievement gap issues that transcend income disparity.

To quote from the **2008 CONNCAN** Report Card on CT Schools “Already the highest in the country (50th out of 50 states), Connecticut’s achievement gap increased...Fifth and eight graders took state science tests for the first time this year, and they performed worse in science than in reading, writing and math.”

At Discovery Museum, we address that gap everyday.

But the sad irony is our budget is being cut to zero as our mission and programming continue to grow.

While our budget is being cut:

In one week—and this is not unusual—our staff was in Bridgeport area public and parochial classrooms 25 times, exciting students with hands-on, mind-on demonstrations, turning them on to Newton, the stars, and space;

While our budget is being cut:

We deliver after-school Lighthouse and summer camp programs along with scholarship support when needed;

While our budget is being cut:

We provide inter-district programming—as early as kindergarten, we bring children together from the suburbs and the inner-city to learn about science as they learn about each other and the unique aspects of each human being;

While our budget is being cut:

300 fifth-graders from Fairfield, Monroe, and Bridgeport, met over 2 days at Sacred Heart University to deliberate, collaborate, and compromise on the kind of base camp to build on the lunar surface to support human life. The children also trained for and flew a simulated space mission. The program, called MoonBase Alpha, is part of the Totally Extreme Adventures in Math and Science. Excited by their successful experience, they had a very difficult time leaving the society they had built and the friends they had made,

And very significantly, **while our budget is being cut:**

Ground will be broken in September for an inter-district science magnet school serving 500, pre-K through 8th graders from Bridgeport and the surrounding suburbs with a unique science curriculum not found in other public schools. Discovery, Sacred Heart University and the City of Bridgeport have partnered to form this new, national, education model. What happens to the synergy if Discovery is not there to deliver its critical component?

The President of the United States has been eloquent and consistent in his belief that science and technology are the keys for our country, our children, to get ahead in an ever-increasingly competitive, global economy and regain the ground lost since 1985 when the report “A Nation at Risk” was published. The President said, “We must elevate science—Inspire our kids to get a sense of what *discovery* is about.” (No, we did not pay him to use that word!)

Thomas Friedman, a student of trends, in his 4/21/09 article in *The New York Times*, “Swimming without a Suit,” cites a \$1.2 trillion loss in Gross Domestic Product because the U.S. ignored the achievement gap mentioned in the 1985 report. He states we are no longer a nation at risk; we are now a nation in decline. Even children in modern, suburban schools lag their international peers.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Discovery Museum attracted 75,000 visitors and touched 45,000 students last year. We've heard the statistics. Without Discovery Museum and Beardsley Zoo, local commercial development will be dealt a significant blow.

We applaud the consolidations Governor Rell has made to streamline and cut costs. We understand more cuts have to be made. However, the Governor has *zeroed out* our respective budgets for each of the budget's *two* years.

We seriously question that rationale. We close our doors at zero. It's that simple. Our educational mission disappears, and our economic development contribution ends.

According to the Governor's February budget report, "Culture, tourism, film and historical programs, important elements in the state's economic development in 2008, had significant impact...\$9 billion dollars supporting 110,000 jobs"!

Then why cut funding to the 21 programs that delivered this golden egg? How can the State continue to promote stay-cations—an effective way to exploit the bad economy--if our major attractions are closed?

For the record, Discovery's public funding stands at 25% of its budget which is the national average. We have been good fiscal stewards of the State's investment: our non-directed grant revenues have grown 43% since 2004; programming revenues grew more than 70% in the same time period. We receive no Federal or local funding.

What is OPPORTUNITY COST? It is the cost of the Foregone Alternative.

It's a key economic principle that accountants don't have to deal with. It acknowledges that competing choices exist for one's limited resources. If we choose to spend there, then we can't spend here. It also goes beyond strict dollars and cents; it measures the non-monetary impact of that choice.

How would we apply the opportunity cost concept to the cutting of our budgets? We would try to quantify those threads in the societal fabric that represent the human cost of choices made, and those not made, and compute the net effect. For example, we know the social impact of spending \$1 on pre-school education—The Federal Reserve Bank of Minnesota found each \$1 invested will generate a 16% ROI in society's favor.

But has anyone done the social math for the opportunity cost of eradicating 21 positive, educational influences in the lives of those children who need it most and have few--if any--*positive* alternatives? Has anyone stopped to calculate the opportunity cost of that one imagination that remains uninspired? Has anyone calculated the cost of classrooms of children who will never experience the spark of discovery that was their due and was to fuel them intellectually for a lifetime? I have a feeling the human opportunity cost and the hard-dollar losses will be much, much greater than the \$4.8 million line-item cuts on page 14 of the May 28 budget.

To quote the great orator and emancipator, Frederick Douglass, "It is easier to build strong children than to fix broken men." And we know, less costly too.

Contact our leaders in Hartford. Don't let them push our children further down the economic scale trying to fill a budgetary hole. Don't eliminate the engines that generated \$9 billion revenue and 110,000 jobs. Tell them we want our funding restored.

The deficit can be closed by alternate means. We cannot and will not gamble with our children's minds, their imaginations, and their futures. And please remember, most importantly, only if *we* speak, will *their* voices be heard.

Thank you.