



cpas care

Steve Bien helps museum plan *become reality*

By Amy E. Gaeth

Some people might say Steve Bien is just a kid at heart. This father of three children had the best interests of local youth in mind when he got involved in creating the Children's Museum of Eau Claire.

Bien's involvement in the museum began in 2000 when volunteer leader Charlie Grossklaus, CEO of Royal Credit Union, invited him to join the Development Committee. Bien accepted.

"I've enjoyed working with community leaders to create a children's museum that provides a fun learning environment for kids and also brings families together," said Bien, managing partner of the Wisconsin offices of LarsonAllen LLP.

The idea for the museum came from Patrick Rebman, who didn't have a good answer for his daughter when she asked why there wasn't a children's museum in Eau Claire. Rebman and friend Suzie Slota (who is now the museum's executive director) responded by soliciting community interest for the project. Four years later, community leaders answered the request in the affirmative. Bien said it takes people from all walks of life to keep a project like this going successfully.

"I'm not a real creative guy, so my strength certainly isn't in creating an exhibit," Bien said. "Rather, I can help with the financial and daily operations. It's great to have people of different backgrounds, education and experience working toward a common goal."

Bien has served on the personnel committee and as president of the museum's board of directors. As a board member, he helped guide the organization in its daily operations, fostered fund-raising and informed the public about the museum. His term as president ended in January 2008. Though Bien now serves on other boards, he stays in close contact with Slota and other museum board members to keep a pulse on what is happening at the museum.

More than 175,000 visitors have passed through the museum doors since its opening in December 2004, and 2,300 families have purchased memberships. The museum offers an interactive environment that inspires imagination, discovery, creativity and the love of learning. Designed for children ages 2 to 10, the museum has five interactive exhibits. It also hosts field trips, parties,

seasonal events, interactive activities and programs.

But the museum isn't just a place for kids. It partners with Marshfield Clinic to present health education seminars and welcomes families to participate in dynamic cultural events.

When asked what he likes most about his involvement, Bien said, "I've enjoyed meeting new people, and having an opportunity to work on a project from the ground up."

He also likes giving back to his community.

"I feel a sense of obligation," he said. "There's a unique culture in Eau Claire whereby the community expects its business leaders to be actively involved."

Bien learned early in his career about the importance of volunteering from his mentor Joe Stienessen, CPA, founding partner of Stienessen, Schlegel & Co. and past president of the WICPA.

"Joe encouraged me to get involved in the community," Bien said. "As a result, the relationships that I've formed have been invaluable. I've met a lot of people through the museum project that I probably wouldn't have ever met, from representatives of the school district to a CEO of a credit union."

Bien carries the passion for public service as managing partner at LarsonAllen, formerly Stienessen Schlegel. The firm encourages and promotes volunteerism and provides leadership training for its CPAs who wish to serve on local boards.

"I want to help our staff understand that we all have an obligation to better the community in which we live, work and raise a family," Bien said. "We want our employees to feel comfortable with their responsibilities of being a board member. Therefore, we invite staff to participate in Leadership Eau Claire, a leadership skills program sponsored each summer by the Chamber of Commerce. The Young Professionals program offered through the Chamber is also a great way for younger professionals in our firm to become involved in the community." ● ● ●

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