2020 Annual Report
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Our Mission
Discovery World provides fun and educational experiences through interactive exhibits and educational programs for families and students in Milwaukee, the region, and the state of Wisconsin.

We generate excitement for Science, Technology, Engineering, Math (STEM), freshwater education and careers in the minds of children and young people, while playing a vital role in the workforce development pipeline.
Dear Friends of Discovery World,

As we reflect back on 2020, it is safe to say it was not the year any of us anticipated. The COVID-19 pandemic impacted all aspects of our lives, forcing us to lockdown and change our most basic daily routines to protect our own health and the safety of everyone around us. The issues of racial injustice required us all to consider how we can individually and collectively overcome the inequities in our society and provide more opportunity and access for all members of our community.

After a strong start to the year, Discovery World closed its doors to the public on March 13 with the hope that we would reopen after a few short weeks. Our closure lasted much longer and it was not until July that we reopened with limited capacity. We faced further challenges as health indicators forced us to close again in November for another extended period.

But throughout 2020, Discovery World never lost sight of its educational mission. The pandemic made it clear that the need for a scientifically literate public is even more essential, and reminded us that every child deserves access to high quality science learning experiences.

Efforts like DW@Home (highlighted later in the report) allowed us to quickly support parents who found themselves in the role of educator when schools closed, learning was focused at home and instruction moved online. Even when school resumed in the fall, teachers and students found themselves in a very different environment. Onsite field trips were not an option, so our team launched the School and Community Initiative (SCI) program (discussed later in the report), ensuring that students and teachers could continue hands-on science learning in a virtual setting.

We were forced to make many difficult decisions from closing our doors to revising budgets and dramatically reducing our staff. Our focus for much of the year was on stabilizing Discovery World and surviving these challenging times. The scale of our organization has been reduced, but our commitment to the community we serve has never been greater.

We are thankful for all the support we received from our partners. As we rebuild for the future, hope and optimism will guide Discovery World to become a stronger organization. With your help, we will take what we have learned and expand our impact. Together with families, schools, community organizations, volunteers, staff, and donors we can make sure that all of our children can be resilient and prepared to maximize their potential. They deserve a brighter future, and we look forward to supporting them on that path.

Thank you for all you do for Discovery World.

Sincerely,

Bryan Wunar
President and CEO
In response to closing our doors due to Covid-19 but still wanting to fulfill our mission to families in Wisconsin, Discovery World created an online portal of resources called DW@Home. The portal provides STEM-based activities, projects, connections to the aquarium and resources for families to do at home - encouraging hands-on science learning and investigations using common household supplies.

https://www.discoveryworld.org/discovery-world-home/

The DW@Home page includes the following:

**Experiments and Activities**
Each week, three to five activities were posted, sharing a common theme. Activities include experiments, design challenges, investigations, videos and other educational materials.

**From the Aquarium**
Videos, projects, and posts, hosted by Discovery World’s Aquarists that highlight animal feedings, behind-the-scenes glimpses, informational talks and live look camera feeds.

**Additional Resources**
Recommended resources to further at-home learning. All resources are vetted by Discovery World staff prior to being posted, and will be evaluated based on several criteria.

Through support from our Board of Directors and community organizations, Discovery World raised over $100,000 in the spring of 2020 through a publicly launched community fundraising challenge to fuel the institution’s ability to increase science literacy and accessibility through DW@Home, continued care for the animals in the Reiman Aquarium and to once again reopen our doors.

The challenge originated through Discovery World’s Board of Directors and leadership committees. Benjamin Wagner and Will Nasgovitz, Board Directors and Development Committee co-chairs, were instrumental in leading the efforts amongst board members to help Discovery World in these times of uncertainty. Discovery World applauds the major investment from our Board of Directors, as they raised $50,000 in a few short weeks.

Community partners also supported these efforts through sponsorships of DW@Home.

Fitted with the support of Discovery World’s Board and leadership, including word-of-mouth outreach, the team increased exposure to the fundraising challenge through earned media stories, inbound marketing and the utilization of new organizational social media efforts such as live fundraising streams.
Discovery World realized that in-person field trips would not be a reality for the 2020/21 school year. In response, the organization created a new program to bring field trips to life – virtually! We created virtual tours, activity kits, video-based labs and equipment loans to provide a broad range of instructional supports for educators to enhance their students’ educational experience. We did not want high quality STEM education to go the wayside simply because schools are not physically embarking on field trips; we brought Discovery World field trips and labs to the schools.

This program deepened our impact on the children of Milwaukee and ensured that all young people are provided with learning opportunities in these challenging times. The beauty of this program is that many roadblocks that once restricted students from coming to Discovery World are gone, such as limited busing resources and lack of chaperones. By reducing barriers and costs, we helped deliver hands-on STEM content to the schools that couldn’t afford it – at a time when the needed it the most.

The program launched in October and by the end of the year, we had already welcomed over 5,000 students into the program. Teachers have expressed gratitude for Discovery World virtual programs, as they provide an opportunity to experience hands-on and interactive learning, despite the new, virtual world. Of the teachers surveyed after the program, 87% cited that they would want to participate in a virtual program in the future, even after school and field trips resume; 95% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that the program met their expectation for a virtual learning program.

**SCI Program**
The summer camp season began with three weeks of virtual summer camps - attended by 45 campers. After the City of Milwaukee health and safety recommendations allowed for in-person gatherings, Discovery World launched in-person summer camps with new protocols to keep campers and staff safe. By integrating smaller camp groups, modifying curriculum to allow for individual and distanced activities, and changing pick-up, lunch and drop-off procedures, Discovery World successfully facilitated in-person learning. During the 2020 season, we had 312 campers join us for longtime favorite camps like Jr. Robotics, Filmmaker 101, Jr. Clothing Designer, and more.

Feedback from parents and guardians was overwhelmingly positive and gracious for the camp opportunity during these difficult times. Parents reported being “impressed” by the experience, and grateful that their children had a safe place to learn and socialize.
Reiman Aquarium

During the first quarter of 2020 the Reiman Aquarium team had been maintaining normal operations, updating the record keeping system, reviewing all systems and trainings as a team, and planning new salt and freshwater animal acquisitions. Unfortunately, due to the impact of the pandemic these new animal acquisitions needed to be put on hold, and the team was split into 2 (A and B teams) in an effort to maintain updated safety protocols while continuing high quality care for the diverse live collection.

Every effort was made to reduce operational impact while maintaining a healthy environment. Exhibit footprints were reduced while closed, and lighting was strategically limited to save on energy consumption and algae growth.

In addition to the aquarium maintenance and care efforts, the team also supported Discovery World’s community support initiatives through social media campaigns and partnering with the Discovery World Education team on content for DW @ Home.

Our aquarists continued to stay sharp and expand their depth of knowledge by virtually attending the Piscine Energetics Conference, known for high quality fish feeds and other supplies. Our team was able to share innovative ideas with other organizations that are reliant on a large staff and volunteers. Several Reiman Aquarium aquarists co-led programs as well.

In July, as Discovery World prepared to reopen, and aquarists switched gears to assist with aquarium-related summer camp programming. When we opened to the public, guests had the opportunity to still see the majority of our aquarium with only a couple exhibits remaining closed to follow new health and safety protocols. Guests could even still visit and pet our touch tank sting rays and lake sturgeon.

During the last quarter of the year, we continued to enhance the public experience within the aquarium, and we can’t wait for our guests to see when they are allowed to return.
Despite the suspension of most of Discovery World’s volunteer opportunities in 2020 amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, 160 volunteers and interns donated nearly 4,000 hours as exhibit docents, divers, tall ship maintenance volunteers, administrative assistants, event hands and more.

Volunteers also donated their time remotely sewing face coverings for staff and fellow volunteers, compiling research and designing activity sheets for virtual education programming.

In a year of uncertainty, the commitment of our talented and generous volunteer community remained a constant.

Thank you! We couldn’t do it without you!
Membership in Review

Members are some of our greatest allies, supporters and audiences. We had tremendous member participation at the beginning of the year. When we closed our doors, we had many members renew their memberships and patrons elected to purchase memberships for the first time – even when we were closed.

In July of 2020, we did a soft open for members and the response to our opening was tremendous. We were providing a safe space for them to learn, have fun and grow as a family. Upon our November closure and through the end of the year, members continued to be supportive via renewing memberships, winning items in our end of year auction and contributing to our end of year appeal.

Discovery World also continues to offer our Corporate Partner Employee Membership Discount Program. This program was introduced in January 2017 to create meaningful relationships with employees of our corporate partners. Membership discount rates of 10%, 15%, 25% and 50% are calculated based on prior year corporate giving and are reevaluated annually. The discount is provided to employees on any level of new or renewing memberships with evidence of active employment. We offered new membership discounts at the beginning of 2020 for all donations made in 2019, and processed new discounts at the end of the year for donations made in 2020.
Discovery World was excited to host its first virtual annual Gala on October 10, 2020. The event featured our emcee, Denise Thomas, our auctioneer, Dan Pronley, and CEO Bryan Wunar. We broadcasted into people’s homes and highlighted the great work that we’ve done in the community and impressed upon the need for support – during the pandemic and always.

The evening also featured a fantastic cooking segment with recently nominated and two-time James Beard Award winner, Chef Paul Bartolotta, of The Bartolotta Restaurants, guest speakers, celebrities, creative fun, a silent auction and a live appeal. The silent auction went live to the public a month before the event.

Further, all who purchased tables or attend at a virtual table received a luxurious gift basket with delicious cuisine compliments of Bartolotta’s Catering and a keepsake from Discovery World. The event raised $230,000.
End of Year Appeal

Like most nonprofits, Discovery World typically solicits for support at the end of the year. This year, being no different, but with additional support from our Development Committee, we did a board-directed push as well as solicitation from our membership base, community donors and supporters.

We also hosted a virtual, end of year silent auction in which donors could purchase auction items just in time for the holidays while also supporting Discovery World’s mission. We created videos about our mission and showcased them on our website and on our social media channels. This initiative focused on how we were still providing STEM education, even when our doors were closed for much of the year.
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