



Jacob Smith, 5, and his grandfather Orlando Zuniga play with fog bubbles in the Bubble-Airium.



an afternoon at **WonderLab**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SHANNON ZAHNLE

TRUE STORY: One little girl growing up in Bloomington watched Disney's *Alice in Wonderland* for the first time when she was two years old. "Mommy," she called out. "Alice is in WonderLab!"

It's an easy mistake for a local child to make. Ask Bloomington youngsters to describe the most magical place they know, and you'll almost certainly hear about a fantasyland where giant bubbles float through the air and friendly snakes and spiders peek out to say hello. Here, they'll tell you, you can build rainbows that glow or stand up high above your head, look straight into the mouth of a T. rex, and guide colorful balls through waterfalls and whirlpools. In this topsy-turvy world, shadows stick to walls and giant vines stretch to the ceiling, huge and sturdy enough for even big kids to climb.

Alice might have had an easier time of it, though, had she landed in WonderLab at the bottom of the rabbit hole. There are no Mad Hatters here, just passionate museum staffers who love to see kids get excited about science. Far from being lost and lonely, visitors are guided through hands-on environments where often several kids are needed to bring them to life. WonderLab though it may be, this amazing place helps youngsters sharpen skills they need for the real world: cooperation, curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking. They uncover principles of gravity, light, sound, natural environments, and animal behavior. Most important, they discover that learning can be tons of fun—and, for parents as well as children, that's a dream come true. —*Elisabeth Andrews*

Wanna.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:

Simon Wenger, 10, learns he is 4 feet 7 1/2 inches tall, according to the ultrasonic sensor inside the mouth of the WonderSaurus.

Guy Drummon, 5, examines his tongue in the Funhouse Mirror, while his father Dale looks on. The mirror exhibit demonstrates how a curved surface bends light to show a distorted image.

Sylvia Richardson, 3, calls to her mother to show off the castle she's built on the Fog Table.

OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:

Jacob and his grandfather check out the Salt Water Aquarium, which represents the shallow sea that once covered this part of Indiana.

Simon and his sister Molly, 14, build a catenary arch with the assistance of WonderLab volunteers Frank Hooks (left) and Troy Holifield.

Jacob explores pixilation through the PixiLight cave in the Discovery Garden.





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:

Jacob uses a magnifying glass to get up close and personal with the WonderLab animals, which include cockroaches, snakes, and bees.

Simon, Molly, and Jessie learn the ins and outs of an Etch A Sketch in the visiting exhibit Toys: The Inside Story.

Molly and her friend Jessie Grubb, 14, compare their shoes in the Funhouse Mirror.



Cooperation pays off when Molly and Simon produce a giant bubble in the Bubble-Airium.