

SCI

Science is fun

until it gets

messy,

then it is

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some

ANNUAL REPORT

23  
24

## A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT – CURT SIMMONS

# Reflections on a Year of Growth and Discovery

This past year at the Science Center of Iowa has been a year defined by innovation, transformation, and an unwavering commitment to providing exceptional experiences for our visitors. I am thrilled to share the highlights of a journey that has brought science to life in new and exciting ways for our community.

At the heart of everything we do is our mission to inspire a love of science and discovery, and this past year we took significant strides to enhance how we achieve that mission. One of the most exciting milestones was the complete remodel of our beloved **When Things Get Moving** exhibit. This hands-on, interactive exhibit has long been a favorite among families, and the remodel brought it to new heights. With updated technology, refreshed activities, and engaging demonstrations, When Things Get Moving now offers a deeper, more immersive exploration of the principles of physics and motion, sparking curiosity in learners of all ages.



“  
Together,  
we’ll continue  
to grow, discover,  
and inspire for  
years to come.”

In addition to the When Things Get Moving remodel, we upgraded several of our exhibits to ensure they continue to captivate and educate. These updates reflect not only advancements in science and technology but also the feedback we’ve gathered from visitors. It’s this collaborative spirit—where we listen to and learn from our community—that allows us to create experiences that are both meaningful and memorable.

This year, we welcomed thousands of visitors from around the world, each bringing their own sense of wonder and curiosity. Seeing children light up as they launch a rocket or solve a science challenge reminds us why we do what we do. Our goal has always been to create a space where science feels approachable, exciting, and relevant to everyday life.

As we look ahead, we remain committed to innovating, inspiring, and building connections through science. Thank you for being part of this journey.



## SCI LEADERSHIP

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**Allison Schwanebeck** Director of Visitor Experience

**Jolie Pelds** Director of Innovative STEM Teaching

**Amy Hock** Director of Marketing & Public Relations

**Molly Pins** Director of Philanthropy

**Cara Koester** Director of Visitor Services

**Thomas Hardy** Director of Facilities

**LETTER FROM THE BOARD CHAIR – DOUGLAS FICK****Charting a Vision for the Future**

As Chairman of the Board of Directors for the Science Center of Iowa, I am excited to share our vision for the future—a future built on innovation, growth, and deeper connections with our community.

In an ever-evolving world, it is essential that we remain forward-thinking, agile, and open to new possibilities. Science is not static, and neither should we be. As we look ahead, our focus is on expanding our reach and impact, creating opportunities for more people—children and adults alike—to engage with science in meaningful and accessible ways.

At the core of our mission is the belief that science is for everyone. To truly live out this vision, we must continue to think boldly and embrace growth. The coming year presents countless opportunities to expand our reach and deepen our connections with schools, educators, and the community. By building stronger partnerships with educational institutions, is an example of how we aim to bring science into classrooms across the state, empowering teachers and students alike with hands-on, engaging learning experiences.

The Science Center of Iowa is poised to grow, not just in physical spaces or exhibits, but in how we inspire curiosity, understanding and create opportunities for access to SCI. This vision is ambitious, but with your continued support and collaboration, it is a future within our reach.

**“ Together, we can shape a world where discovery knows no boundaries. ”**

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**We are the Science Center of Iowa.** In addition to welcoming visitors from all 99 counties and beyond, our outreach and professional development programs take STEM learning on the road, reaching tens of thousands of Iowans each year.



**Our mission:**  
**to engage and inspire**  
**Iowans along their**  
**journey of lifelong**  
**science learning.**

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## OUR COMMITMENT TO YOU

Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) inform every aspect of our lives. As a community anchor, the Science Center of Iowa strives to dismantle barriers that limit access and equity in STEM.

### We commit to:

- Inspire lifelong learning through creating welcoming environments and conditions which support ALL in STEM learning.
- Work toward eliminating inequities with those who have historically been marginalized and underserved in STEM learning.
- Improve our communities through building relationships, thought and action on topics related to public access to STEM.

To be successful, the Science Center of Iowa embraces the need for continual reflection upon these principles and commits to adapting to the changing needs of our communities, creating greater global awareness and improving upon our actions and experiences.

## OUR CORE VALUES

- SAFETY ■ COMPASSION ■
- INTEGRITY ■ INNOVATION ■

# How we do what we do

SCI



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## Our Commitment to Excellence

- We have a positive attitude. ■ We treat others with respect. ■ We will exceed participants' expectations. ■ We embody a shared purpose and mission. ■ We will be accountable. ■



**Thank you** for **your** support!

As a private, nonprofit organization, we rely on the donations of private individuals, companies and foundations to achieve our mission and serve more than 128,000 individuals from across the state and country.

**501(c)(3)**

The Science Center of Iowa is a 501(c)(3) entity. We are independent, operating solely from money raised and earned on our behalf.

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SCI

## STAR THEATER PLANETARIUM

# Exploring the cosmos live

The Science Center of Iowa (SCI) launched an exciting new live planetarium show, breaking new ground in both content and format. While many planetariums offer traditional “Skies Tonight” shows that focus on star viewing, SCI saw an opportunity to innovate. For years, “Iowa Skies Tonight” was SCI’s go-to live astronomy program, blending discussions of viewable objects like constellations and planets with occasional deep dives into notable celestial phenomena. Recognizing the vast wealth of STEM content within our solar system, the programs team decided to create a standalone live show dedicated to exploring these features in depth.

**Why live? Visitors overwhelmingly prefer live presentations because they provide opportunities for interaction with STEM professionals, allowing for questions and tailoring the content to the audience’s age and understanding. This personalized approach enhances engagement and fosters a deeper connection to the material.**

Audience participation is a hallmark of this new show. To keep the presentation concise and captivating, visitors are invited to guide the journey through the solar system by choosing which planets or features to explore. “This empowers them in their learning experience,” the team explained, making the show uniquely interactive and visitor-driven.



### VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

#### BRUCE REEVE

At the Science Center of Iowa (SCI), we are fortunate to have incredible volunteers like **Bruce Reeve**, whose dedication and passion for science education inspire everyone he meets. With a degree in Chemistry from the University of Iowa and a distinguished career in laboratory sciences, Bruce brings a wealth of experience to his volunteer role.

Bruce’s career journey began at the Kansas Department of Health and Environment and spanned roles in the private sector and the Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation’s (DCI) Crime Lab. Over his 26 years with DCI, Bruce worked in areas related to drug chemistry, quality assurance, crime scene analysis, and ultimately as Laboratory Administrator. His diverse expertise reflects a lifelong commitment to science, public safety, and problem-solving.



Creating this show was no small feat. The process began with defining clear STEM learning goals, followed by storyboarding, scripting, and gathering supplementary media like NASA images. The team then programmed the planetarium software and designed a user-friendly interface, allowing presenters to deliver the show dynamically, even from within the theater itself.

Generous support from the **Iowa Space Grant Consortium** made this innovative endeavor possible, and the result is a truly groundbreaking experience that puts SCI visitors at the center of cosmic exploration.

Since retiring, Bruce has found meaningful ways to give back. He and his licensed therapy dog, Ollie, volunteer with a local hospital and provides therapy dog services to staff and in/out patients. At SCI, Bruce's love of science education and museums shines. "Volunteering at SCI is rewarding," Bruce shares. "It's great to give back, and it's fun interacting with kids and their parents."

Bruce has contributed countless hours to SCI, motivated by the joy of seeing children's excitement. "I enjoy seeing the excitement on the faces of kids who visit SCI," he says. His favorite experiences include the **Pterosaurs: Flight in the Age of Dinosaurs** traveling exhibit, the **Why the Sky?** exhibit which showcases the two Iowa-born astronauts, and the remodeled **When Things Get Moving** exhibit.

**We are deeply grateful for Bruce's dedication and enthusiasm. His passion for science and education makes him an invaluable part of the SCI community. Volunteers like Bruce remind us of the impact individuals can have in inspiring curiosity and discovery in future generations.**



**A ONE-OF-KIND EXHIBIT THAT GAVE EVERY DOG (AND CAT!) ITS DAY!**

# Cats & Dogs: The Exhibition

The Science Center of Iowa (SCI) welcomed **Cats & Dogs: The Exhibition**—its latest traveling exhibit—on September 21, 2023. This one-of-a-kind exhibition invited visitors to enhance their animal instincts and deepen their understanding of our furry best friends.

Created by La Cité des sciences et de l'industrie in partnership with Le Musée de la civilisation and produced by Imagine Exhibitions, **Cats & Dogs: The Exhibition** was the first large-scale exhibition dedicated to these beloved animals.

**It explored scientific, sociological, and cultural perspectives on canines and felines. Recent advancements in the science of animal behavior have upended many preconceived notions about cats and dogs, revealing fascinating insights into how these animals demonstrate their skills, awareness, and intelligence in everyday life. The exhibition ensured that every dog (and cat!) had its day.**

Visitors embarked on a fun, sensory, and interactive journey through three distinct environments: In Their Skin, In Their Head, and In Our Society. Each space featured carefully designed settings, colors, materials, and furnishings to immerse attendees in the unique universes of cats and dogs.



## SPOTLIGHT ON SUPPORTERS

### DAVID AND SUSAN GRANTS' DEDICATION TO SCI

David and Susan's connection to the Science Center of Iowa (SCI) runs deep, beginning long before they became volunteers and donors. As longtime members, they have always valued SCI's mission to make science accessible and engaging. David started volunteering just before the pandemic, with Susan joining a few months later. When COVID-19 hit, they saw the financial strain on the institutions they cherished and felt compelled to act. United by their belief in the transformative power of science, they stepped up their support, ensuring SCI could continue to inspire and educate future generations.

With careers rooted in science, David and Susan see the Science Center's mission as vital. They envision a world where science isn't siloed but seamlessly integrated into everyday thinking. "The goal," they say, "is for STEM to become the basic way of thinking—not science and everything else, but science as mainstream."




“

Our goal with bringing in this traveling exhibit was to engage our visitors with friendly, accessible, and relatable content. Plus, there's nothing better than putting yourself in an animal's place to understand them better and decode their behavior.

”

Curt Simmons, SCI's President and CEO



Their favorite exhibits reflect their connection to SCI's work. Susan cherishes **Small Discoveries**, which evokes memories of her childhood, while David admires **When Things Get Moving**, appreciating how it teaches complex concepts through engaging exploration. They are particularly inspired by how SCI makes science approachable and fun, breaking down barriers and sparking curiosity in kids.

**David and Susan** continue to support SCI because they believe in its mission and value the sense of belonging the staff fosters. "It's really fun to give," Susan shares. "The act of giving is enjoyable." Their hope for SCI's future is to see science become an integral part of everyone's lives and for families to continue creating positive experiences together.

**Their passion and dedication remind us that SCI's impact goes beyond exhibits and programs—it's about fostering a love of learning and a sense of community, ensuring science remains a vibrant part of our world.**

## BUILDING FUTURES

# SCI Partners with Des Moines Public Schools to Inspire 5th Graders

In the fall of 2023, the Science Center of Iowa (SCI) partnered with Des Moines Public Schools (DMPS) to inspire creativity, coding, and technology innovation among 186 5th-grade Advanced Learning Program (ALP) students from 38 elementary schools. This partnership began when several DMPS ALP students attended the **Ready, Set, Build** event at the Science Center, sparking teachers' interest in expanding SCI's educational offerings to their students.

The first collaboration took place at DMPS' ALP summer STEAM camp for 3rd-5th graders, where SCI facilitated a Technology-themed activity. Building on this success, the partnership grew to include a series of workshops for 5th-grade ALP students. Over seven individual sessions in October and November, SCI staff introduced students to Micro:bits and Microsoft MAKE Code, a block-based coding program. "This was an introduction to a physical microcontroller," said Jolie Pelds, SCI's Director of Innovative STEM Teaching. "Students explored its capabilities and learned how to code with it to ultimately create games, tools, or even inventions."

**The initiative's goal was to highlight the connection between creativity, coding, and technology while equipping students to develop their own innovations. Prior to the student workshops, SCI provided professional development for the ALP teachers to ground them in the work the students would be doing, but to also ensure they could provide ongoing support in the classroom.**

Reflecting on the workshops, SCI and DMPS organizers identified key successes and opportunities for growth. "SCI held a workshop debrief with some of the original organizers at DMPS," explained Jolie Pelds. "We reflected on the process and determined we wanted to repeat our format with those participating in the ALP summer STEAM camp. We also wanted to host the 5th-grade ALP students at SCI for workshops on Tuesdays in October and November the following year." This reflection ensured continuous improvement and reaffirmed the value of hands-on, technology-focused learning experiences for students and educators alike.





“This partnership has been incredibly impactful because it offers our advanced students opportunities for continuous learning,” shared one of the DMPS program leaders.

“Through this collaboration, students engage in enriching experiences not only during the summer at our ALP camp but also throughout the school year as 5th graders, allowing their learning journey to extend over time. Working alongside an innovative technology expert like Jolie and collaborating with their peers fosters essential teamwork and leadership skills, which are critical for their development both inside and outside the classroom.”

This successful model was presented at the 2024 State of Iowa TAG Conference, with the goal of inspiring other TAG educators statewide.

“

**The most significant aspect has been the consistent exposure to new ideas, cutting-edge technologies, and hands-on experiences that keep our students motivated and excited about their education.**

”



## WHAT ON EARTH?

# Buzzing with Success

SCI's observation hive, established in early 2019, has become a cornerstone of the **What On Earth?** exhibit, offering visitors an up-close view of honey bees in action. The addition of balcony hives, managed by the Kelly Family, ensures a thriving environment for the bees while enhancing educational opportunities. This collaboration has been vital to maintaining healthy hives and producing honey, with the first harvest sold in SCI's **A-ha! Store** in 2020.

The Kelly Family, SCI's dedicated volunteer beekeepers, monitor the hives for health, manage population growth, and extract honey at the end of each season. Their expertise has helped SCI collect an impressive 360 pounds of honey over the past four years, with annual yields ranging from 25 to 150 pounds.

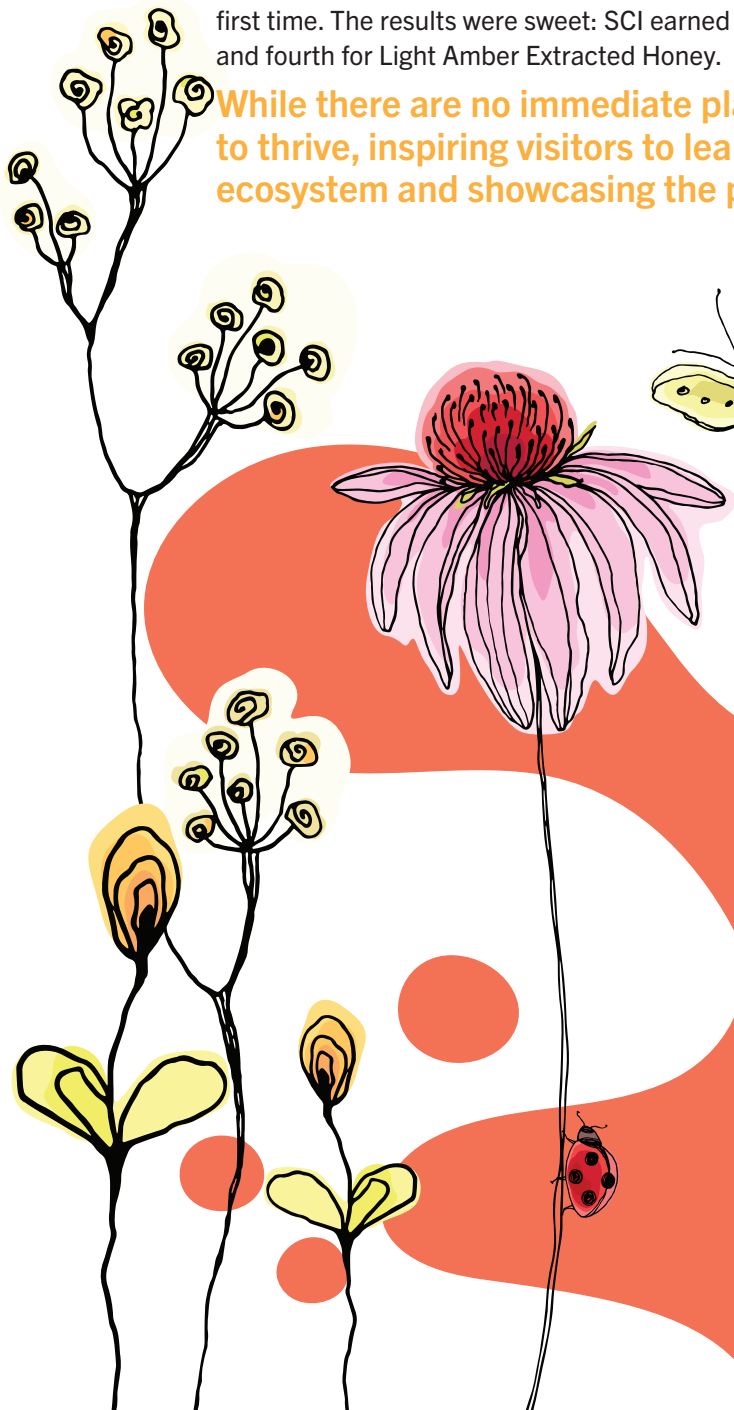
In 2024, SCI took its honey production to the next level, entering the Iowa State Fair Apiary competition for the first time. The results were sweet: SCI earned first place for Frame of Honey, third for Frame of Extracted Comb, and fourth for Light Amber Extracted Honey.

**While there are no immediate plans to expand the hives, the exhibit continues to thrive, inspiring visitors to learn about the vital role of honey bees in our ecosystem and showcasing the power of community partnerships.**

## Connecting Communities to Conservation

In 2023, the Science Center of Iowa (SCI) launched its demonstration garden, a project aimed at fostering a connection to the outdoors and promoting conservation awareness.

This initiative responds to the growing concern that younger generations are losing touch with Iowa's natural resources, spending more time indoors and missing opportunities to explore and understand the state's ecosystems.





The garden serves as a hub for transformative programs, such as the “Camps for Conservation” initiative. In July 2023, middle school participants in the “Museum Studies” camp worked alongside SCI’s exhibit team to design an outdoor exhibition tied to **What On Earth?**, SCI’s upper-level exhibit focused on Iowa habitats. The completed exhibit will enhance SCI’s educational offerings for visitors of all ages.

Starting the garden required collaboration, resourcefulness, and community partnerships. A REAP (State of Iowa Resource Enhancement and Protection) Grant and support from Des Moines Parks & Recreation (DMP&R) helped kick start the project, including the provision of native plants.

The garden produces food for SCI’s reptiles and amphibians and educates children about the origins of their food. Future enhancements include permanent signage, bird identification graphics, and expanded volunteer engagement. SCI envisions this space growing into a rooftop garden, bringing conservation education to new heights.



## SCALE-UP

# Empowering Educators Through Innovative STEM Connections

The Science Center of Iowa (SCI) is proud to have been selected by the Iowa Governor's STEM Advisory Council (IGSAC) to participate in the **2023 Scale-Up Program**. This initiative, sponsored by the IGSAC, aims to enhance STEM education across Iowa by equipping educators with professional development opportunities and hands-on materials to inspire the next generation of innovators.

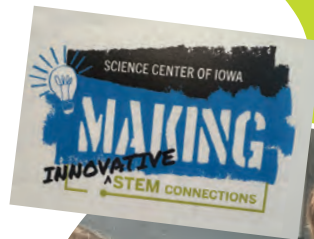
Through SCI's program, "Making Innovative STEM Connections," educators are empowered to integrate engaging, hands-on activities into their existing curriculums. Grounded in the **Maker Movement** philosophy, this program encourages students to combine creative thinking with tactile learning for meaningful and impactful outcomes.

**SCI's participation in Scale-Up was secured through a competitive proposal process, with SCI being one of just 14 organizations selected to provide programming for the initiative. This year, an impressive 170 educators from across the state were awarded SCI's training, exceeding the original cap of 120 participants at the request of IGSAC.**

These educators took part in one of eight immersive, two-day training sessions hosted at the Science Center of Iowa. During these sessions, they engaged in hands-on learning with one of three specialized STEM-focused kits: Robots & Coding, Science & Sensors, or Mini Makers (tailored for early childhood education). Each kit featured thoughtfully designed lesson plan frameworks aimed at inspiring creativity, enhancing teaching confidence, and empowering educators to bring STEM concepts to life in their classrooms.

"Scale-Up allows us to connect with educators across Iowa and highlights how SCI supports ALL Iowans," said Jolie Pelds, SCI's Director of Innovative STEM Teaching. "Many participants had never been to SCI before, and through this program, we are indirectly supporting educators and youth in all corners of the state."

As a recognized leader in the Maker Movement, SCI continues to shape the future of STEM education, bridging gaps and fostering innovation statewide.







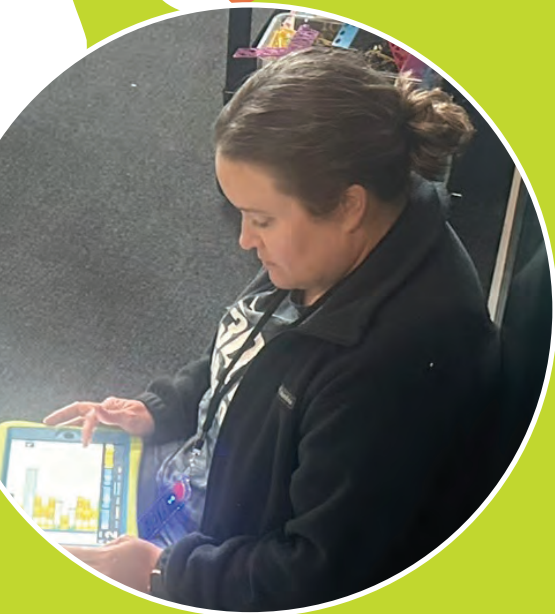
## Public support

**SCI ENGAGES A WIDE COMMUNITY AUDIENCE** to develop meaningful partnerships and new initiatives that inspire curious minds of all ages. Partnerships and sponsorships from the following organizations help SCI engage and inspire lifelong learning in all of us.



The following local governments committed a portion of their hotel/motel tax in FY 23–24:

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- Ankeny
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# Sponsorships and grants

The following contributions were made through generous support of specific projects and programs at the Science Center of Iowa between October 1, 2023 and December 30, 2024.

\$ 50,000+

Institute of Museum and Library Services

Maytag Family Foundation

Meier Bernstein Foundation



Contributions

\$ 20,000 – 49,999



Judith A. Lindquist Scholarship Fund



\$ 10,000 – 19,999



\$ 5,000 – 9,999



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**WITH SINCERE APPRECIATION, the Science Center of Iowa acknowledges the extraordinary support from all donors. Your gifts enable us to engage and inspire through programming, exhibits, events and so much more.**

**Thank you for investing in the SCI mission.**

**\$100,000+**

Bravo Greater Des Moines  
Institute of Museum and Library Services  
Maytag Family Foundation

**\$99,999 - \$75,000**

Edwin T. Meredith Foundation

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David Williams

# Annual event

SCI's **BIG BLAST**, held each year at the Science Center of Iowa, is a one-of-a-kind fundraising event that offers guests an immersive experience with interactive exhibits, special-format theaters, and engaging programs. Proceeds directly support SCI's mission to promote lifelong science learning and enrich educational initiatives. A heartfelt thank you to our sponsors, event partners, auction donors, and the 2024 Master of Ceremonies, Megan Salois, for helping make this event a success!

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# 2024 Gala



# SCI

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