

SCI



STAY
CURIOUS

ANNUAL
REPORT

24
25

MESSAGE FROM
THE PRESIDENT

As the Science Center of Iowa marks 55 years of service, one thing is clear: our work has never been more important than it is today. Since opening our doors in 1970, SCI has evolved alongside the world around us—responding to new questions, new technologies, and new ways of learning.

This past year reminded us that when curiosity meets opportunity, science has the power to connect, inspire, and strengthen our communities. And in FY25, SCI truly stepped up.



CURT SIMMONS
President & CEO

Through innovative STEM learning initiatives, SCI reached more than 20,000 youth across Iowa, bringing hands-on science to classrooms and communities. Nearly 30,000 students visit SCI through school group experiences, turning field trips into moments of discovery that spark lifelong curiosity. And with almost 200,000 visitors walking through our doors, SCI continued to serve as a place where families, learners, and explorers of all ages could engage with science in ways that are relevant, playful, and inspiring.

These achievements are the result of a dedicated staff, passionate volunteers, generous supporters, and strong community partnerships—all working together to ensure science remains accessible and engaging for everyone. While we are proud of what we've accomplished, we are equally excited about what lies ahead. Our future is full of possibility, and I invite you to hear more about where we're headed from our Board Chair, whose vision and leadership will guide SCI into its next chapter.

Thank you for being part of this journey—past, present, and future.



SCI LEADERSHIP

Curt Simmons
President & CEO

Abby Hood
CFO, Vice President
of Administration

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Vice President
of Community Engagement

Rob Burnett
Vice President
of Science Learning

Zach Riggins
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Thomas Hardy
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Jolie Pelds
Director of Innovative
STEM Teaching

Amy Hock
Director of Marketing
& Public Relations

Molly Pins
Director of Philanthropy

Allison Schwanebeck
Director of Visitor Experience

Cara Koester
Director of Visitor Services

FROM THE CHAIR
OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

In a year marked by both opportunity and challenge for nonprofits across our community, the Science Center of Iowa has continued to demonstrate resilience, creativity and unwavering purpose. As funding landscapes shift and the needs of families and learners grow, the Board of Directors has remained deeply engaged in ensuring that SCI not only adapts, but thrives.

This past year, we saw firsthand how essential science education is to Iowa's future—how curiosity, hands on learning and access to STEM opportunities can strengthen our workforce, energize our region and inspire the next generation of problem solvers.

The pressures facing nonprofits today are real, but so is the impact institutions like SCI deliver every single day. That impact is what drives our board's commitment to strong governance, responsible stewardship and long term vision.

We are proud of the leadership shown by SCI's staff and volunteers, who have continued to serve our community with passion and innovation despite an increasingly complex environment. Their work reminds us that mission driven organizations are at their best when they stay anchored in purpose and open to partnership.

Looking ahead, the Board remains focused on sustainability, strategic investment and strengthening the relationships that make SCI a vital community resource. Together—with our members, donors, partners and the thousands of Iowans who walk through our doors—we are building a stronger, more curious and more connected Iowa.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, thank you for standing with the Science Center of Iowa.

Your belief in our mission makes all the difference.



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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.



SCI

How we do what we do

8% Administration
5% Communication & marketing
6% Development
16% Retail operations
65% Visitor experience

24
25

OPERATING EXPENSES

SCI



12% Admission fees
25% Donations/government & grants/in-kind
8% Investment income
11% Membership
21% Preschool
14% Retail operations
9% School groups & education

OPERATING REVENUE AND SUPPORT



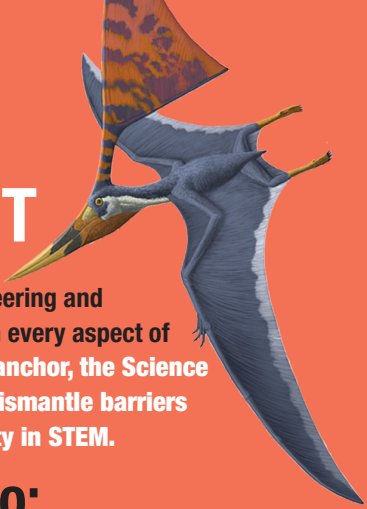
OUR COMMITMENT TO YOU

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 Commitment to Excellence

SCI We have a positive attitude. SCI We

treat others with

respect. SCI We will

exceed participants'

expectations. SCI We

embody a shared

purpose and mission.

SCI We will be

accountable. SCI



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 almost 200,000 individuals from across the state and country.

SCI

OUR CORE VALUES

SCI SAFETY SCI COMPASSION SCI
SCI INTEGRITY SCI INNOVATION SCI



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.



GROUNDBREAKING
EXHIBITION

Pterosaurs: flight in the age of dinosaurs

The Science Center of Iowa (SCI) took visitors back in time with **Pterosaurs: Flight in the Age of Dinosaurs**, a groundbreaking exhibition organized by the American Museum of Natural History. This remarkable display explored the fascinating world of prehistoric reptiles that once ruled the skies—long before the first birds or bats took flight.

Through life-size models, rare fossil casts, immersive videos, and interactive experiences, the exhibition revealed how pterosaurs evolved to become the first vertebrates capable of powered flight.

Visitors “soared” like pterosaurs themselves using motion-sensing technology that allowed them to navigate virtual prehistoric landscapes, gaining a new appreciation for the mechanics and marvels of ancient flight.

The exhibition showcased casts and replicas from some of the most significant pterosaur fossil discoveries worldwide, including a rare Romanian specimen that may represent a new species. Visitors also encountered a dramatic Cretaceous seascape, where *Thalassodromeus* pterosaurs dove for fish alongside other ancient marine life, and explored aerodynamics through iPad-based interactives and a virtual wind tunnel.

“Pterosaurs: Flight in the Age of Dinosaurs offered a rare and comprehensive look into the lives of these extraordinary creatures,” said Curt Simmons, SCI’s President and CEO. “We were thrilled to bring this exhibit to Iowa, giving visitors of all ages the chance to explore the science behind recent fossil discoveries and experience firsthand what it might have been like to take to the skies as a pterosaur.”

SCI



HONORING A
LEGACY OF SERVICE

The Susan Kelly memorial bench

In September 2024, the Science Center of Iowa (SCI) installed a memorial bench in its Observation Garden to honor the life and lasting impact of Susan Kelly—a dedicated volunteer, passionate advocate for science, and cherished member of the SCI community. A place of reflection and remembrance for a woman whose generosity of spirit continues to shape SCI's work.

Susan began volunteering at SCI in 2018 after being recruited by Exhibits Manager Andy Mickunas. Alongside her daughter, Abigail Kelly, Susan became deeply involved in caring for SCI's bees, helping steward the program from its earliest days.

Beyond her hands-on contributions, Susan encouraged SCI to grow its beekeeping program, taught staff how to harvest honey, and championed the submission of SCI honey at the Iowa State Fair. Her enthusiasm for learning, willingness to teach others, and commitment to sharing science with her children exemplified the very spirit of volunteerism SCI strives to foster.

“She was just a force of positive work and a joy to work with,” said Mickunas. “She cared deeply for bees and was a huge supporter of the observational hive that we installed in 2018.”

Science thrives not only through exhibits and programs, but through the people who care for them with passion, purpose, and heart.



SCI

When Things Get Moving

Science Center of Iowa partnered with Kera Collective to conduct a front-end evaluation of **When Things get Moving**. The study confirmed that visitors valued the exhibit's emphasis on play, experimentation, and collaboration, but **eager for new ways to engage, learn and explore deeper scientific concepts behind the "invisible forces" that shape our everyday world.**

SCI responded with a floor-to-ceiling redevelopment. Every experience within the exhibit was either reimagined or replaced, ensuring that guests encountered something new at every turn. The redesigned gallery introduced immersive, hands-on activities that invited visitors to explore cause and effect, energy transfer, and motion in action.

WHAT'S NEW

BALL WALL

A large, kinetic feature of air pipes, levers, pulleys, and diverters that allowed guests to manipulate the motion of balls, exploring gravity and momentum through playful experimentation.

ROCKET LAUNCH

A re-engineered favorite with a 16-foot extended ramp, adjustable launch force, and illuminated targets, helping visitors understand aerodynamics and trajectory.

TURN TABLE

An interactive disc that **demonstrates rotational motion, tangential velocity, and frictional force in a fun, hands-on way.**

TENNIS BALL LAUNCHER

A dynamic station exploring pneumatics, pressure, and the transfer of energy through dual ball experiments.

SLINKY TREADMILL

Test momentum and gravity while learning the laws of motion and energy—discovering firsthand why perpetual motion isn't possible!



The **PENDULUM SNAKE**, **MAGNETIC GEAR WALL**, **MOMENTUM MACHINE**, and **CLOUD RING LAUNCHER**, further expands the educational reach and fun factor.

“Our goal has always been to provide the best possible experience for our visitors,” said Curt Simmons, SCI’s President and CEO. “By reimagining **When Things Get Moving**, we introduced new elements that inspire curiosity, creativity, and those incredible a-ha moments that define SCI.”

Proving that science is truly in motion.



aha



Sparking curiosity, one a-ha moment at a time

For Volunteer June Johnson, science has always been more than a subject — it's a lifelong passion she can't help but share. After retiring from Drake University in 2017, she continued a volunteer journey that first began in the mid-90s, when she and her family moved to Iowa. She wanted her children to grow up with an appreciation for science...and after seeing their excitement at the Science Center of Iowa (SCI), she was hooked too.

Working largely with children ages 5–10, she thrives on their wonder—the wide-eyed looks, the giggles, and the “Did you see that?!” reactions when an experiment comes alive. “The kids are just so much fun,” she said. “The light in their eyes when they see a science experiment—those aha moments—that’s the best part.”

Her favorites? Cloud-making in a bottle and electricity with colored lights — hands-on demos that invite kids to guess, predict, and explore. “I love being able to ask questions first and build anticipation,” she shared. “It scratches my itch of teaching, and it gets them excited to learn.”

“WHAT KEEPS HER COMING BACK? The energy. The joy. The shared discoveries. “It is energizing anytime you engage with people,” she said. “It’s exciting.”

Thanks to volunteers like June, SCI continues to bring learning to life—one curious mind at a time.



aha

Coauthoring the Universe

In 2024, the Science Center of Iowa (SCI) launched **Cosmic Playlist**, a reimagined experience in the **Star Theater Planetarium** that transforms how visitors explore the universe. **The new exhibit empowers guests to design their own planetarium shows while blending technology, creativity, and curiosity into one seamless adventure.**

Cosmic Playlist reflects SCI's ongoing commitment to **informal learning through play—inviting guests not just to watch, but to participate.** Using an interactive computer kiosk, visitors browse hundreds of video and audio clips covering topics from sunspots and black holes to distant galaxies and telescopes. By selecting the themes that intrigued them most, they create personalized “playlists” that are automatically linked into a custom **Star Theater** show. **With each selection, guests become coauthors of their cosmic journey, shaping a one-of-a-kind exploration of space that could be revised and replayed again and again.**

Behind the scenes, the exhibit's redevelopment brings enhanced accessibility, an updated interface, and the most current space imagery available—ensuring that SCI remains a destination where exploration evolves as fast as discovery itself.

“By combining scientific accuracy with interactive storytelling, Cosmic Playlist transforms passive learning into active creation, reinforcing SCI's belief that the best way to understand our universe is to play among the stars.”





The return of the Iowa Adventure Pass

In 2024, the **Iowa Adventure Pass** made an exciting return, reconnecting Iowa families with some of the state’s most engaging educational destinations—including the Science Center of Iowa (SCI). After a brief pause, **this statewide program relaunched through the collaboration of Iowa’s libraries and participating attractions, sharing our commitment to learning, exploration, and community access.**

The **Iowa Adventure Pass** allows library cardholders to “check out” free passes to participating destinations, including museums, zoos, gardens, and cultural sites. **Each pass provides free admission for two adults and two children, making it easier for families to experience science, nature, and history together.**

HERE’S HOW IT WORKS: library patrons can reserve a pass online using their library card, download or print a confirmation, and present it with a photo ID for admission. Each participating library determines which destinations to offer, creating flexibility and variety for communities across the state.

The relaunch reflects a renewed focus on sustainability, accessibility, and collaboration, ensuring that the joy of discovery remains within reach for all.

Through initiatives like this, SCI continues to champion informal learning opportunities that connect curiosity, community, and the wonder of science —one adventure at a time.



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 24–25:

- Altoona | Ankeny | Bondurant
- Carlisle | Clive | Des Moines
- Grimes | Indianola | Johnston
- Norwalk | Pleasant Hill
- Polk City | Polk County
- Urbandale | Waukee
- West Des Moines
- Windsor Heights



The following **sponsorships and grants** were made through generous support of specific projects and programs at the Science Center of Iowa between October 1, 2024 and September 30, 2025.

\$50,000+
\$20,000+
\$10,000+
\$5,000+

SCI

ARGOSY FOUNDATION

CORTEVA agriscience

IOWA Economic Development

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Gabus Automotive Group

JOHN DEERE

VOYA FINANCIAL

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Maytag Family Foundation
Meier Bernstein Foundation

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is on your side

Polk County Board of Supervisors

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Change Happens FOUNDATION

IOWA SPACE GRANT CONSORTIUM

Meredith Corporation Foundation

PRAIRIE MEADOWS

Birdies For Charity Principal Charity Classic

WITH SINCERE APPRECIATION, the Science Center of Iowa acknowledges the extraordinary support from all donors. Your **contributions** 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
Maytag Family Foundation

\$99,999 - \$30,000
Meier Bernstein Foundation
Edwin T. Meredith Foundation
Windsor Charitable Foundation

\$29,999 - \$10,000
Bill and Nancy Ambrose Family Fund
Doug Fick
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John Ruan Foundation Trust
Ernest & Florence Sargent Family Foundation

\$9,999 - \$5,000
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\$4,999 - \$1,000
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Chuck and Jaina Johnson

STAY CURIOUS

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\$500 - \$999
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Up to \$499
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In Memory Of Brice Janvrin
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DARE TO JOIN US ?

A stylized yellow lightbulb with a purple base and radiating lines, positioned over the question mark in the main text.

SCIENCE CENTER OF IOWA
401 W. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. PARKWAY
DES MOINES, IA 50309
SCIOWA.ORG