HEARD & SCENE

An International Crafting Trip for Children

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BRIDGEHAMPTON, N.Y.—If there's one thing that a lot of the moms talk about in the Hamptons, it's exercise. If there's a second thing they talk about, it's the Children's Museum of the East End, which is on the Bridgehampton Sag Harbor Turnpike.

We don't have children, so we hadn't had any need to go there before this weekend, but the way these moms tell it, CMEE, as it's abbreviated, is a godsend, a lifesaver, a panacea.

When you're in the Hamptons and the kids are driving you crazy, when it's rainy, when you just need five minutes to yourself, this is apparently the place to take them.

On Saturday, CMEE hosted its fifth annual summer fundraiser. A handful of local field-face moms came with their kids for the late-morning affair, including Ali Wentworth, Jane Krakowski, Mariisa Hartigay, Kelly Klein, Christa Miller and Tiffani Thiessen.

And a lot of social moms and dads were there, too.

Since there tends to be so much diversity in the Hamptons, the theme was a global one. Kids got a passport when they walked in. In turn, they could collect passport stamps by going around to various stations, both indoors and outdoors, to learn about international cultures and customs.

For Australia, there was a touch tank, where they could learn about crabs and lizards. For South Africa, they could decorate tribal masks. For Guatemala, they could make a worry doll; for Mexico, a paper bag piñata; for Thailand, a beauteous candle; for Kenya, a mancala game; for Japan, a wind sock; for Egypt, a shadow clock; for Jordan, a drum; for China, a wind chime.

This meant at the end of the afternoon, not only had your kids eaten some junk food (dumplings, hot dogs and Sno-Cones), not only had they had their faces painted, but you were bringing home a bagful of the aforementioned crafts you didn't really want to your pristine Hamptons mansion. Kids and their activities!

There were also things the children could do that at least didn't involve a tic-totch to take home. These included vegetable sushi making (thanks to Japan!) a soccer kick (courtesy of Brazil), Irish step dancing (yes, from Ireland); martial arts instruction (via South Korea); a simulated archaeological dig in a sandbox made from a large tire (this was Israel); and a sports challenge, meant to evoke the classical athleticism of Greece.

Needless to say, this was all pretty well thought out. So much so that the play sets inside of the museum were surprisingly free of children.

We would have loved this place when we were a kid. It's like a giant playroom, movie set or doll house, with areas where you can dress up in costume, run around a pirate ship, a soda shop or a farm stand and learn how a potato becomes a potato chip.

Eventually, the museum hopes to open an area to exhibit to educate kids on how to harness water as well as about solar-powered cars. A nine-hole minigolf course is also forthcoming.

"My son loves the firetruck," said Ms. Krakowski of her 2-year-old, Bennett. "That's a very popular one," said Stephen Long, the museum's executive director. "Also the farm stand. They love a farm stand."

Why? There are a lot of plastic vegetables and fruits to play with. And it's very environmentally friendly.

"Kids need play the way we need oxygen," said Mr. Long, of the importance of the museum in town. "We need to keep kids imagining."

Another goal of Mr. Long's is to try to concentrate on issues facing the area, such as low literacy, and turn CMEE into a "community living room."

"Mr. Long said, surprisingly, that the most hectic place in the museum would probably have to be the fake ice-cream parlor.

"It can get really tight on a busy day," he explained. "How many ice-cream shop waiters can you have?"

Note no real ice cream is served in this ice-cream parlor.