

Wisconsin Historical Society: Three Madison museums to launch 2017 SPARK! program schedules

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Contact: Keri O'Keefe, [6082619597](tel:6082619597)
keri.okeefe@wisconsinhistory.org

Madison Children's Museum, Wisconsin Historical Museum, and Wisconsin Veterans Museum provide creative engagement for people with dementia and their care partners

Madison, Wis – Madison Children's Museum, the Wisconsin Historical Museum, and the Wisconsin Veterans Museum are part of a network of museums across the state of Wisconsin and Minnesota that offer SPARK!, free cultural arts programming for adults with memory loss. SPARK! participants enjoy hands-on, creative experiences that stimulate conversation and shared memories. All three museums will start their 2017 SPARK! program schedules in March.

There are currently about 116,000 people living with dementia in Wisconsin, and over 6,000 of these people are in Dane County. Over 70% live in the Madison community. According to the Alzheimer's Association statistics, there are over 5 million people in the US with Alzheimer's disease and they are expecting those numbers to double in the next 25 years. Due to this increase, many communities in Wisconsin are working to become dementia friendly. SPARK! is a valuable resource for those who are looking for dementia-friendly, creative engagement outside the home.

The SPARK! Program

Our memories make us who we are, but for some, memories have faded due to Alzheimer's disease and other conditions that cause dementia. For many, recent and short term memories fade, while older memories remain. Because of this,

reminiscing and looking back at history, can be a positive way to reconnect to old feelings and experiences.

Sometimes, all it takes to bring up an old memory is a picture, an object, a smell, or a sound. The smell of chlorine might remind you of the long days of summer. An old milk pail, a typewriter or an old tractor can bring back memories of grandpa and farming in Wisconsin. For others, it might be a record player or sewing machine that grandma used that evokes fond memories of home and feelings of love and security. The sounds of children playing and the smell of the paints might take others back to art class and bring memories of the playground and school. Often, these memories cause feelings to flood back as well. Memories are complex and unique to each individual. Reminiscing can be therapeutic for some who struggle with short term memory loss. It may help them remember times forgotten and feel connected and involved.

This is part of the reason why the Madison museum community offers such unique opportunities for people to connect to the past. For those affected by memory loss, the value is potentially even greater and is part of why the SPARK! programs are such an important option for people in Madison and the surrounding communities.

“I love being able to tell people about the SPARK! programs. It’s such a good way for people with dementia to stay active mentally, physically and socially, which is so important for a person’s outlook and quality of life. It’s also such a great way to connect to others who are coping with similar challenges. It benefits both the individual and their family and it is part of a dementia friendly community” Joy Schmidt, Dementia Care Specialist with the Aging & Disability Resource Center (ADRC) of Dane County.

About Madison Children’s Museum

Madison Children’s Museum connects children with their families, their communities, and the world beyond through discovery learning and creative play. The museum offers three floors of interactive exhibits, including a four-season rooftop garden, an open art studio, a two-story climber, and more. As part of its goal to be “the children’s museum that no one outgrows”, MCM offers specialty programs for older youth and adults, including SPARK!

Madison Children’s Museum will host SPARK! programs on Fridays and Saturdays throughout the year from 10-11:30 am. Visit www.madisonchildrensmuseum.org/spark for the full schedule and to RSVP. For more information, contact Angela Johnson, Madison Children’s Museum SPARK! Coordinator at spark@madisonchildrensmuseum.org or call [608-256-6445, ext. 156](tel:608-256-6445)

About the Wisconsin Historical Museum

Located on the Capitol Square at 30 N. Carroll Street, the Wisconsin Historical

Museum features four floors of permanent and changing exhibits document Wisconsin history from prehistoric times to the present day. Exhibits encompass the history of Wisconsin's Native Americans, European immigrants, agriculture, mining, lumbering, industry, tourism and political history. Changing exhibits provide a venue for the exploration of other themes in state history.

The Wisconsin Historical Museum will host SPARK! programs on the second Monday of each month from 2-3:30 pm.

Visit www.wisconsinhistory.org/spark for full program descriptions and to RSVP. For more information, contact Katie Schumacher, Wisconsin Historical Museum's Program and Special Events Coordinator at kaitlyn.schumacher@wisconsinhistory.org or call [608-261-9359](tel:608-261-9359)

About the Wisconsin Veterans Museum

The Wisconsin Veterans Museum is an educational activity of the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs created to commemorate, acknowledge, and affirm the role of Wisconsin citizens in American military history, past and present. Located at 30 W. Mifflin St., Madison, WI, the museum is home to more than 26,000 historical objects that tell the stories of local veterans through displays from the Civil War to the War On Terror.

The Wisconsin Veterans Museum will host SPARK! programs on the second Tuesday of the month through October from 10-11:30 am. For more information and to RSVP, contact Erin Hoag, Wisconsin Veterans Museum's Curator of Education at visitor.curator@dva.wisconsin.gov or call [608-264-7663](tel:608-264-7663).