Most of us who choose to work in children's museums have a hopeful outlook towards the future. We believe that by providing children with positive, stimulating learning opportunities we can help them lead fuller, richer lives. We believe that our work matters. Optimists by nature, we see ourselves working everyday, in incremental ways, to help create a better world, one child and one experience at a time. We are people who see the world as it can be, not merely as it is. We strive to recognize and think about the fundamental ways of thinking and operating in order to survive. With a growing list of extinct and threatened species, an alarming increase in environmentally-induced illnesses and increasing evidence of ozone depletion and global warming, the need for change is already upon us. The number one challenge that will face the children we serve as they enter adulthood will be reconciling the impact of their daily lives with the limitations of our global ecosystems. How can children's museums look at these challenges proactively, with full concern for our communities, to our children and to the planet.

During the next century as the human population doubles and the resources available per person drop by one-half to three-fourths, individuals, communities and organizations will be forced to drastically alter their fundamental ways of thinking and operating in order to survive. With a growing list of extinct and threatened species, an alarming increase in environmentally-induced illnesses and increasing evidence of ozone depletion and global warming, the need for change is already upon us. The number one challenge that will face the children we serve as they enter adulthood will be reconciling the impact of their daily lives with the limitations of our global ecosystems. How can children's museums look at these challenges proactively, with full concern for our communities, to our children and to the planet.

First Feats
Why It Became Green

When staff at Madison Children's Museum first set out to research and design First Feats, our early childhood education colleagues provided us with a list of materials we should avoid. In the standard exhibit-building materials: Plexiglas, plywood, plastics and carpeting, to name just a few. We have always known that what is good for the world for us would be good for the world. We have been wrong.

We must change our lives, so that it will be possible to live by the contrary assumption that what is good for the world will be good for us.

Wendell Berry
Recollated Essays
the true costs of our decisions close at hand when at-
live in a mountaintop yurt, but to keep an awareness of
from indoor air pollution
deal with cleaning up the pollution or the increases in
can compound even further if one is willing to consider
the external costs for the manufacture of a piece of ply-
mor. For example, the public pays

We are looking for ways to make green thinking
internal practices as well as in public exhibits and pro-
operations, to finding ingenious ways to reuse exhibit com-
munities to have a voice in the museum's programs and
museums across the country already in-
corporate many green and sustainable practices into their
operations, from recycle art activities to inviting com-
munities to have a voice in the museum's programs and
operations, to finding ingenious ways to reuse exhibit com-
mponents and programming materials. Whether by ethic or
by the sense of thrift that permeates children's museum
practices, these actions serve as teaching tools for our com-
munities and suggest that the children's museum field is
perfectly suited to go the next steps.

Why Does “Going Green” Matter to the
Museum Community? As makers of culture and cultural discourse, we have
role in playing in modeling civic responsibility to our young
audiences and communities. Although our museum
our shared situation. Museum exhibitions, however, whose
subject matter, are always the museum's most public out-
ward expression of the institution's vision, values and
what has

Going Even Deeper
First Feats spawned a more holistic commitment to
using natural materials and an eagerness to incorporate
more sustainable materials into our exhibit practices.
That means not just using materials that are safe for kids in
immediate contact with, but materials that by their nali-
ture are helping build a more sustainable planet. That
means getting wood from a sustainable timber source, or
purchasing wood that has been salvaged rather than cut-
ing just any wood from the lumberyard. While using wood
for flooring rather than carpeting may help us fulfill our
short-term mission of creating a space that is safe from
harmful chemicals, it is still working against the first
mission of creating a sustainable future for our children
if we don't use wood from sustainable sources. Incremen-
tal changes and proceed from there. We have recently com-
bined our 2007 focus on the environment that was
completely free of pesticide residues, off-gassing

What Does It Mean to Be Sustainable? sustainable materials selection.
"Green building" is a collection of land-use, building
design and construction strategies that help reduce envi-
ronmental impact. Green building protects ecosystems,
reduces energy consumption and preserves health. Green
building includes many things that children's museums
already do, such as locating the museum on bus lines, in
a central location or in an existing building. It also includes
energy-efficient lighting and mechanical systems, renew-
able energy, improved indoor air quality, daylighting, pho-
novoltaics, gray water recycling, storm water collection and
sustainable materials selection.
"Sustainability" is a much broader and more subjec-
tive concept. Interpretations of the concept of sustainability
will vary widely depending on individual or institutional
priorities. In essence, the concept of sustainability is fairly
transparent: it involves seeking to cultivate and maintain a
culture that can be perpetuated by people and communities.
The process of work on First Feats, that these tentative first
steps would lead us to question our standard practices across
the board. Why build a healthy space and then clean it
with toxic chemicals? How might other areas of our
operations become more sustainable? Can a sustainability
ethic be applied to community partner and donor rela-
tionships? How do our long-term exhibit strategies work
to support the highest ambitions of our institution? What
kinds of programs will further reinforce these values? Can
we become a truly sustainable institution? We are only
continued on page 7

An exhibit sign placed above this simple collection of different kinds of brown in First Feats states:
"Feeling: The many textures of our world enrich your
child’s mind. Use everyday objects to explore different
textures and combinations."

A GREEN GLOSSARY
ACTIVE SOLAR: A system using mechanical devices
such as pumps or fans to transfer collected heat to a stor-
age medium and/or end use.

PAS SIVE SOLAR: Systems that collect, move and store
heat using natural heat-transfer mechanisms such as con-
duction and air convection currents.

INTEGRATED DESIGN: A holistic process that con-
siders the many parts of a building project and examines
the interaction between design, construction and operations
to optimize the energy and environmental performance of
the project.

PHOTOVOLTAICS (PVS): Solar cells made from
silicon that convert sunlight into electricity.

PHthalates (pros.-thalt-ate): Chemical plasticizers
that impart flexibility to polyvinyl chloride. These chemi-
cals are common in medical equipment and infant teething
toys and are released during medical procedures or when
objects, such as the toys, are chewed. Many countries have
banned the use of phthalates, particularly in products made for
babies.

RENEWABLE RESOURCES: Resources that are cre-
at and destroyed at a rate equal to or faster than the rate
that they are depleted. Properly managed renewable energy
resources (e.g., solar, hydro, wind, biomass and geothermal)
should be used as long as the sun shines, the wind blows,
plants grow and

SUSTAINABILITY: Meeting the needs of the present
without compromising the ability of future generations
to meet their own needs.

VOLATILE ORGANIC COMPOUNDS (VOCs): Hy-
drocarbons and other chemicals that evaporate into the
air in quality issues. Many hundreds of these compounds, both
natural and man-made, are present in the atmosphere.
now beginning to wrestle with these questions and take more serious strides toward becoming more socially, financially and environmentally sustainable.

We have learned, in no uncertain terms, that true sustainability is a lifelong proposition and an alluring but elusive goal. Greening our museum and moving toward a sustainable future is a process, not an end point. We realize we have far to go but are eagerly seeking out new ways to extend and sustain our commitment to the values that we believe in. Working toward sustainability is simply a way of changing one’s thinking, and making choices from a viewpoint that considers the long-term implications of every decision. Our goal as we move forward is simply to commit to a thoughtful process of creating a sustainable museum, one that is economically, environmentally and socially sustainable. It is based on a sense of hopefulness—that our work can help better the world. Becoming green isn’t something that you do once in designing a building or exhibit, and then you are done. It is a commitment to take steps toward incorporating environmental and social responsibility into our everyday operations. It is an acknowledgment that every decision we make has long-term implications.

Now, nearly three years and two more green exhibits since the opening of First Feats, we stand at the beginning stages of planning a new museum. Our initial foray into sustainable design and the subsequent effort to become more sustainable as an institution now promises to be the backbone of our strategic planning and our new museum’s character. Regardless of how successful our previous projects have been in terms of a green agenda, the process itself has already raised awareness of these issues within our community, and has raised expectations for even more. Far from being daunted by such considerations, we are energized by the process and increasingly certain that asking such questions will help us become a more valuable asset to our community and its children.

SUSTAINABLE DESIGN/GREEN BUILDING RESOURCES
Environmental Building News:
www.BuildingGreen.com
Rocky Mountain Institute:
www.rmi.org
Green Design Network
www.Greendesign.net
Global Environmental Options
www.geonetwork.org
Environmental Design & Construction
www.edcmag.com
Center for Renewable Energy & Sustainable Technology
www.Crest.org

Brenda Baker is Director of Exhibits at Madison Children’s Museum where she has infused her deep respect for children and the natural world over the past ten and a half years. She spends free time with her family hiking, biking and cross country skiing amidst the fragile ecosystems she works to protect.

John Robinson is the exhibit developer at the Madison Children’s Museum where he has been on staff for the past seven years. He is the father of two daughters, an experience that has deepened his conviction that nurturing a stewardship mentality towards the earth is an important contribution to make to his children’s future.