spark

Transformation through participation

Discovery
via hands-on
learning

...see page 3

A Letter from the Director

"Participation, I think, is one of the best methods of educating."
– Tom Glazer, singer/songwriter

Peeking into the new year and thinking about what is ahead for Anythink brings a sense of anticipation. Our first phase was creating library space that is collaborative, flexible and supportive of all endeavors — from quiet study and thinking to interactive space that fosters communication and community participation. We are now in the phase of developing these spaces. Like so many things, creating learning environments in a library setting is an experiment.

One such experiment is Explore Outdoors, our first Nature Explore outdoor classroom at Anythink Wright Farms. This new outdoor classroom allows everyone to spend time listening, touching, building and playing outdoors. We've established a fundraising goal to expand these classrooms to other locations, starting with Anythink Brighton.

Our community garden projects at Anythink Perl Mack and Commerce City are another example of collaborative learning. Not only are people growing healthy food, they are sharing expertise and building community. Getting to know your neighbors while also learning how to grow a mean tomato plant is an ideal combination. Anythink Wright Farms is the next site slated for a community garden in the spring of 2013.

The makerspace at Anythink Brighton is taking off with new programs and

Anythinker Samantha Meisinger gets creative.

classes. A recent beginning sewing class earned this customer comment: "I am so thankful for these programs...This was [my daughter's] first time ever using a sewing machine and now she's hooked."

In March, our first digital learning lab for teens will open at Anythink Wright Farms, and we're currently recruiting artists in residence to work with teens and assist them in digital communications and production.

The staff has named these new learning spaces "The Studio." In our own way, Anythink is well on its way to becoming a participatory library. Nina Simon, author of *The Participatory Museum* has created a road map to working with community members to make cultural institutions more dynamic, relevant and essential places. From the beginning, Anythink set out to be dynamic, relevant and essential to our community, and 2013 gives us a chance to experiment and explore these ideas even further.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Anythink systems administrator Eustache Nguie Sino delves into the world of computer hardware with young Anythink Brighton customers.

Museums, Libraries Learn from Each Other as They Navigate Change

Imagine a public place where visitors are encouraged to be curious and engaged the moment they walk in the door.

"Children's museums and science centers ushered in this new brand of interactivity," says Nina Simon, executive director of the Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History (MAH) in Santa Cruz, Calif., a museum which has made participatory culture its mission.

What has always been cultivated in the sandboxes and science labs is spreading outward, and in the process nudging traditional public institutions toward change. Now, museums and libraries alike are beginning to take on the challenge of more fully engaging their visitors across all ages and walks of life through participatory experiences.

"There aren't a whole lot of public places yet that are taking the approach because it's still considered pretty radical," says Simon, who helps design and research participatory museum experiences at MAH. "The NEA has shown that, over the last 10 years, participation in traditional institutions is down and they're looking for ways to engage people. There is a huge cultural shift in that direction: making things more accessible to a diverse audience."

Participatory implies a full experience. More than just using the five senses, it's also about creating, intuiting and inventing. And also, influencing.

Vice President of Strategic Partnerships & Programs for the Denver Museum of Nature & Science (DMNS) Bridget Coughlin explains how museums in particular evolved to this point. She says that museums began as places where people with money gathered artifacts and then invited the public to come see them. Later, in the 1970s, 80s and 90s, museums figured out that they needed to be interactive, more "hands-on than eyes-on." Now, museums are in a participatory stage, wherein communities and individuals are actually influencing what museums exhibit, even curating the exhibits themselves.

Coughlin's favorite exhibit at DMNS is the Body Trek Theatre.

"It's a 12-minute show about a hike up Mount Evans, but it's entirely influenced by the biology of the people in the audience," she notes.

Audience members each get a thermal temperature reading and take their pulses with pulse readers. The data is then plotted in real time on the screen, influencing what happens in the show.

Participatory experiences also create emotional connections, as MAH discovered. When they set up an advice booth as part of a larger advice-focused installation, they found that spending $25 on plywood created an opportunity for strangers to get and give advice to each other, including a child giving some simple but heartfelt advice to an adult.

"The booth ended up mediating conversations that wouldn't otherwise have happened," Simon concludes.

As a more participatory culture takes root, sometimes change is first born from a crisis. Simon reveals that "financial and community engagement problems caused MAH to say, 'Hey, we have to go in another direction.'" In fact, when Simon came on board as the executive director in May 2011, MAH was on the brink of closure.

At Anythink, there were similar struggles. But after the Adams County community

Anythinker Cate Sweeney creates a fort with coworkers during a recent staff training day.

voted for an increase in funding for the Rangeview Library District in November 2006, transformation became possible. Anythink Director Pam Sandlian Smith says this was "a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity" that allowed the district to re-think the role and purpose of libraries.

"A library is much more than a place to come check out a book," Sandlian Smith says. "A library is becoming a learning place, a place where you interact with information."

As part of their strategic plan, the Board of Trustees and leadership team decided to create a library experience where customers feel empowered with a sense of learning.

The transformation into Anythink brought with it new interactive experiences for the customers, including Anythink Brighton's teen makerspace, which opened this December, and Anythink Wright Farms' Nature Explore outdoor-classroom, which opened last summer. A digital learning lab is also set to open at Wright Farms in March 2013.

But it goes deeper than that. Anythink buildings were designed to reflect the local communities they serve, and all are noted for their airy, light-filled spaces and unique features such as outdoor gardens, collaborative public art and even a café. It's this kind of open, thoughtful environment that's meant to make Anythink customers feel welcome and comfortable.

"Once you're here, you want to experiment with ideas," Sandlian Smith affirms. "It's about thinking, daydreaming, making things."

Simon can attest to this with MAH, where they started with events, comment boards and couches to achieve the goal of making the museum more welcoming and energizing to visitors: "We were able to say, 'Let's be messy, casual, family-focused. Let's embrace the chaos.'"
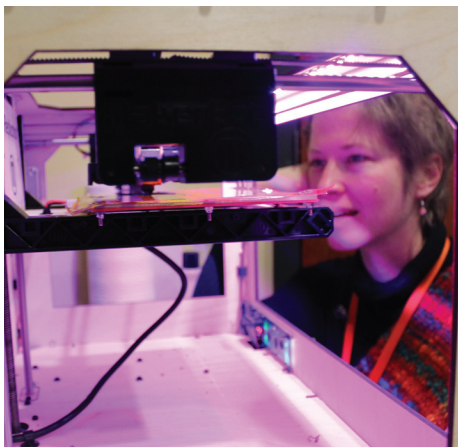
Anythink Brighton's MakerBot prints in 3D.
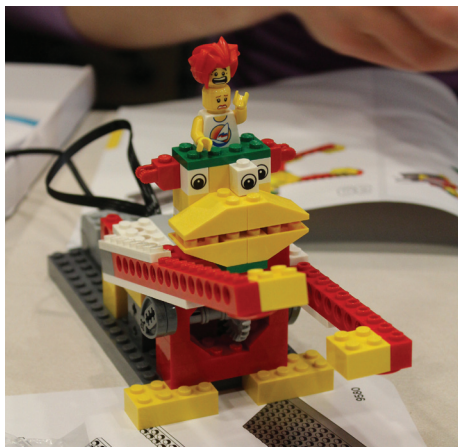
Customers build, create and explore.

As a result of this new vision, MAH's audience changed dramatically and quickly. In some ways, libraries are already set up to lead the charge when it comes to participatory culture. Simon points out that libraries are able to consistently serve at the local level, whereas a portion of museum visitors are tourists who may only visit once. The challenge is often to get local visitors to return.

Coughlin has a different perspective. With a membership base of 65,000 households – the largest of any museum or science center in the world – DMNS is able to have a large repeat visitorship. Instead, Coughlin says their challenge is about constraints.

"Even with great outreach programs, we are still largely an enterprise that's based on being physically present in one place," she explains. "We are space-constrained in an era where everything is immediate and within your pocket and 24/7."

Sandlian Smith also feels the need for immediacy, and says that the Anythink website is helping to create a virtual 24/7 presence which will hopefully create even more interactive experiences in the future.

So where is participatory culture headed?

Coughlin sees more digital outreach for DMNS, such as apps and web education, but understands that the business side of being more participatory means figuring out how to monetize these things.

Sandlian Smith believes libraries and museum will continue to inspire and learn from one another.

"When you visit the Denver Art Museum, you have an opportunity to engage in the narrative, the story of the exhibit, then experiment with art in a personal way," Sandlian Smith says. "On a smaller scale, we are creating these moments at the library, as well. In conjunction with an art exhibit, we have a painting class. Our team has just named our learning spaces The Studio, which is a perfect way of thinking about the library of the future. The Studio is

New Books: Check 'Em Out

We've got great new titles in January for children and adults at Anythink.

CHILDREN

- *I Funny* by James Patterson and Chris Grabenstein
- *Shark Wars #5: Enemy of Oceans* by EJ Altbacker
- *The 39 Clues: Trust No One* by Linda Sue Park
- *Bartholomew Biddle and the Very Big Wind* by Gary Ross
- *LEGO Ninjago Masters of Spinjitzu Character Encyclopedia* by Claire Sipi

ADULT

- *Two Graves* by Douglas Preston and Lincoln Child
- *Safe Haven* by Nicholas Sparks
- *1775: A Good Year for Revolution* by Kevin Phillips
- *Rise to Greatness: Abraham Lincoln and America's Most Perilous Year* by David Von Drehle
- *The 4-Hour Chef: The Simple Path to Cookling Like a Pro, Learning Anything, and Living the Good Life* by Timothy Ferriss
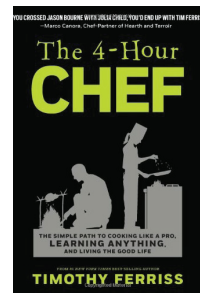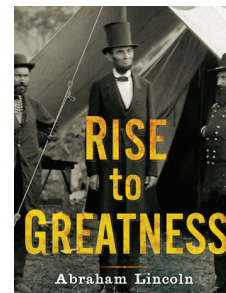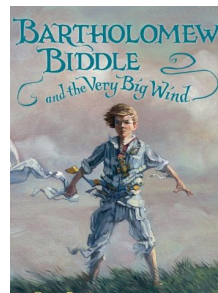
a place to think, work, learn, teach yourself something new."

As museums and libraries work to become hubs in their communities, Simon has one piece of advice: "An organization should decide what their vision is for the community and try to live that mission. Don't keep doing things you've been doing if they don't hit that new criteria."
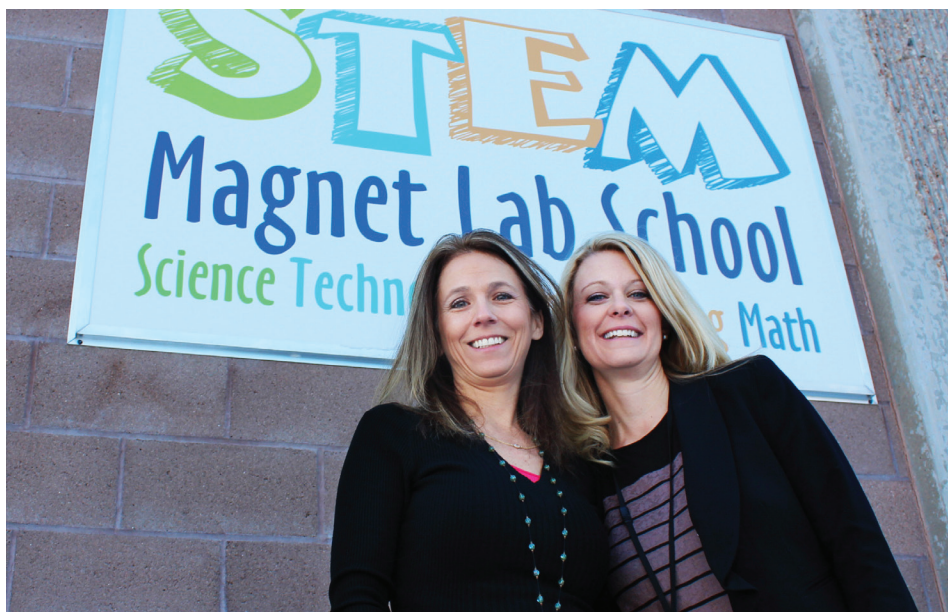
Change for museums and libraries might mean dropping old ways and traditions. But participatory culture means that something new – insight, creativity, connection – is always acquired in exchange.

Digital photography supports teen content creation in the new Anythink Brighton makerspace.

Kellie Lauth (right) and STEM Lab School Principal Tracy Tellinger promote learning through authentic field experiences.

Champion of STEM Sees a Bright Future Ahead

Kellie Lauth was at work by 7 am.

Her day looks like this: Facilitate a teachers' planning session, dash off to meet with a potential business partner, give a tour to an interested city councilperson, then close out the day with a trip to Northglenn to meet with another teacher who needs help getting an idea off the ground. To say that she is non-stop is an understatement.

As the district science/STEM coordinator for Adams 12 Five Star Schools, Lauth is on a quest to educate communities, local governments and other school districts about the importance and relevance of STEM education. It's her job to not only preserve the integrity of the STEM model, but to also be a resource to the teachers who are tasked with carrying out its mission.

STEM (which stands for science, technology, engineering and math) is Lauth's passion. Designed to develop proficiency in these four core areas through the method of real-world, hands-on problem solving, STEM education in the Adams 12 school district involves even more than that.

As part of a fully integrated STEM model, the kids also learn literacy, art and music. They work with technology every day and, according to Lauth, are "encouraged to think about the most appropriate tool for whatever they're trying to accomplish."

There's even an entrepreneurial focus: if students create something marketable, they have a chance to start a company. She cites a recent example of students who created skins for technology devices and partnered with Amazon.com to produce them. All of this serves the intent of STEM, which is to develop students who are going to make a difference in the workforce.

"The goal is not necessarily to turn out scientists and engineers, although that would be great, but to have kids walk away as critical thinkers and problem solvers and be able to tackle whatever society is going to face," Lauth says. In fact, when the first STEM school was being developed, she explains that before they even hired teachers they "brought industries to the school and said, 'We want to be relevant to you.'"

One of the most important ways STEM accomplishes relevancy and problem solving is through authentic field experiences.

Lauth talks about a group of students who were learning about the pine beetle problem in the mountains. When beetles were found in trees in Broomfield, the students, who were working with park rangers and biologists, had to create a model for solving the problem locally. They then shared their ideas – including a cost analysis – on a panel. She says that some businesses who heard the ideas actually came back and wanted to know more.

But it's not just about hands-on learning.

"The only lens through which you should judge the classroom is engagement," Lauth says. "If we're not engaging, we're not doing our jobs. When students have to wrestle with a problem in context, come up with their own solutions, and then present to engineers, scientists and entrepreneurs, that whole process leads to teacher and student engagement, and when that happens, there is no ceiling to learning."

Lauth knows from first-hand experience. With a background as a biochemical engineer, she originally came to Adams 12 to teach science. Eventually she and other science educators on the district science team dreamt about having their own school and wondered what it could look like. They spent almost four years researching STEM high schools and listening to what people were saying about them.

"We found that there were really no K-5 and K-8 schools doing STEM, and none of them were public schools," Lauth notes. "Or they might have offered some STEM classes, but not a fully integrated model."

That's when Lauth, along with colleagues Tracy Tellinger and Penny Eucker, proposed to start a public, fully integrated K-8 STEM school. In 2009, the district's flagship school, STEM Magnet Lab, opened. Today, 450 students are enrolled.

The district went on to open STEM Launch, another K-8 school, in the fall of this year, and next fall they plan to open a STEM high school in Northglenn with a projected enrollment of 2,000.

In the three years since STEM Lab opened, it has earned some of the highest achievement data in the state, based on TCAP scores. In fact, 100 percent of last year's STEM Lab fourth-graders were found to be proficient in math, an achievement that makes Lauth especially proud.

STEM students engage in the classroom

"[Teachers] tell me all the time this is the hardest they've worked in their life, but they don't want to be anywhere else," she says.

When Lauth talks about the future of STEM, there is a brightness in her

She is also proud of the teachers and STEM leadership.

voice: "I'm most excited about walking into a first-grade classroom and hearing the kids tell me, 'I'm a scientist, I'm an engineer, I'm an artist' and not just a student." It speaks to her vision of wanting students who can affect their own economic trajectory, and not just their academic one.

As for Lauth herself?

She notes, "People ask, 'How are you going to stay relevant? What if you start to burn out? Will there still be this energy?'"

STEM stays relevant – even thrives – in Lauth's eyes because she knows there will always be problems to solve. And she and the rest of the STEM team work hard to bring a constant freshness to what they do.

"It's hard to kill that energy, and I want to be a part of it," she says with certainty.

Connecting Customers Through Digital Play

Build your own world using "Minecraft"

By Phil Gilchrist
Anythink Systems Administrator

Learning doesn't always take place in a classroom, just like playing isn't just for kids. Play is essential to learning,

creativity and productivity. When you add a dose of technology, there are some great video games that are making a big splash. The Anythink IT team is working on bringing them to library customers.

MINECRAFT
If you Google "Minecraft," you're going to get a lot of different results. "Minecraft" is a game with very simple graphics wrapped around a very complex core. You can almost literally do anything. You can explore a new world, fight monsters, build a colossal skyscraper or design your favorite car out of blocks. Throw in multiplayer functionality and with the vast add-on library known as "mods," you can do even more – and with friends!

If you walk the rows of public PCs at any of our branches, you will see many kids of all ages (some adults, too!) playing this expansive game. Stemming from a help desk ticket about kids wanting to play together – and inspired by the team at Ann Arbor

Events Not to Miss

Duct Tape Crafts
Monday, Jan. 7, 5:30 pm

Ever feel the need to get crafty with duct tape? This is your chance! Try your hand at duct tape wallets and roses during this hour-long program. Appropriate for students grades 6-12.

Anythink Perl Mack
7611 Hilltop Circle
Denver, CO 80222
303-428-3576

Make-Your-Own-Movie Series
Wednesday, Jan. 16, 3-4 pm

Join us for the first installment in this three-session course on introductory moviemaking. You'll have the chance to write, film and edit your own masterpiece using an iPad. Appropriate for students grades 6-12.

Anythink Huron Street
9417 Huron St.
Thornton, CO 80260
303-452-7534

A Good Yarn Fiber Crafts Group
**Thursday, Jan. 17, 6-8 pm**

Are you a knitter, crocheter or weaver? Join other fiber artists and crafters in your community and share your expertise at this information craft group. Bring in a project you've been working on and we'll provide the yarn and light refreshments.

Anythink Wright Farms
5877 E. 120th Ave.
Thornton, CO 80602
303-405-3200

For a complete listing of Anythink events, visit *anythinklibraries.org*.

Public Libraries – we expanded on the idea to create a "Minecraft" server. This provides a persistent and dedicated world for our customers to play together at the library or at home. It also opens up possibilities to dream up great new programs; this server allows up to 40 people to play at once.
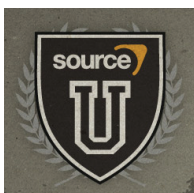
SOURCE U
A major player in the PC gaming world is Valve Corporation. Valve has created classic games such as "Half-Life," "Portal," "Left 4 Dead," as well as the revolutionary content-delivery system known as Steam. Steam is for games like ebooks are for books; you can purchase and play a game through Steam from your computer without buying anything physical or leaving your desk.

Valve has decided to open Steam up to educational institutions in a program they are calling SourceU (after their Source game engine). This means that Valve's entire catalog of games is open to our customers, free of charge. They didn't stop there, either. Valve also provides the tools and instructions they use to make their games. This provides Anythink with the ability for up to a hundred customers to game simultaneously.

Characters from Portal 2

The "Minecraft" server and SourceU suite will be available to the public soon. Check in with your local Anythink for details.

 When you're done reading *SPARK*, share with a friend, give back to a staff member, or recycle.