



John T. Berry

Learning at the Learning Center

If you have not visited the Michigan Supreme Court Learning Center at the Michigan Hall of Justice in Lansing, I would invite you to do so the next time you visit Lansing.

The title to this article, "Learning at the Learning Center," starts with recognition that the learning you are engaged in starts not with the exhibits, but with the young children you will observe at the exhibits.

On my first visit, I was surrounded by kids not yet in their teen years. I was reminded that their lives, future, freedom, and pursuit of happiness was tied to their learning the importance of our judicial system and in eventually supporting and helping to protect it.

If those exuberant, smiling, and carefree faces did not begin the process of having respect for our democracy and the judiciary's role in that democracy, then it is very possible they and we will lose it.

Looking at them, I "relearned" how lucky we all are.

Yes, visiting the Learning Center will remind us all of a lot of facts, information, and data about our court system. Even more importantly, if you visit and you are surrounded by those kids, you will learn and relearn what it means in human terms. Please go—take a child.

The Learning Center opened to the public in October 2002 when the Hall of Justice was dedicated. The facility is unique in the

continental U.S., and other states look to the Learning Center as a model.

The Learning Center encompasses a variety of topics and was designed to provide a rich experience for visitors of all ages and levels of knowledge of the law. Elementary students gain a new understanding of Michigan's judicial branch of government, comparing the role and structure of the court system to that of the legislative and executive branches. Older students see how the law affects their expanding rights and privileges, while adults learn more about the history of Michigan's court system and how particular issues and cases have shaped it.

Visitors come to the Learning Center from around the state, the country, and the world. Most visitors call greater Lansing or metro Detroit home, but they also travel from further away. Visitors from places as distant as California, Oregon, and Florida as well as Germany, Russia, and the Czech Republic have been impressed by their experience at the Learning Center.

As it continues to strive for excellence, the Learning Center needs the support of the legal community. The Center continually seeks volunteers to conduct tours and to provide assistance with programs and materials. Many current volunteers have a connection with the court system, including the cur-

rent, former, or future practice of law. For more information about volunteering, contact Rachael Drenovsky at 517.373.5027 or drenovskyr@courts.mi.gov or visit <http://courts.michigan.gov/plc/>.

Thousands visit the Learning Center every year, but more are always welcomed. Please visit the Learning Center and spread the word about this amazing resource at the Hall of Justice. You can stop by the Learning Center for a self-guided tour, and guided group tours are available with a reservation. For more information about visiting the Learning Center, contact Sheila Kallish at 517.373.7229 or kallishs@courts.mi.gov or visit <http://courts.michigan.gov/plc/>.

The Learning Center also offers materials and information for those who speak to the public about the court system. For more information, visit <http://courts.michigan.gov/plc/> or contact Rachael Drenovsky at 517.373.5027 or drenovskyr@courts.mi.gov.

Donations, which support ongoing educational initiatives, can be made through the Michigan Supreme Court Historical Society Learning Center Fund. For more information, visit <http://www.micourthistory.org/aboutus/supportmschs.php> or call 517.373.7589. ♦

Note: Thank you to Rachael Drenovsky, Learning Center Coordinator for her contribution to the article.

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Share your thoughts/concerns

Please forward comments to voice@mail.michbar.org