

Leonardo's Basement stretches out in Windom

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A Maxfield Elementary student creates a project at Leonardo's Basement.

The Millennium Falcon is under construction this summer at [Leonardo's Basement](#), which has settled into a new space at 150 W. 60th St. that's nearly three times bigger than the old space.

There is room for a roller coaster, a rocket, a skateboard ramp and a forthcoming crow's nest with aerial views — enough space for “kids to build things bigger than they can imagine,” said Steve Jevning, executive director of Leonardo's Basement.



Jevning said it's fun to see how kid crazes come and go — at the moment, kids are thrilled to make fidget spinners using 3D printers.

“We have plenty of things that spin and turn,” he said. “That will be a really easy one for us to embrace.”

Along with 115 summer workshops like fidget fabrication, stilt walking, bread and cheese making and aluminum casting, Leonardo's Basement hosts birthday parties where kids can make a project of their choice. Ideas range from jewelry to a working robot.

“We have an expectation that every kids' project is going to be different,” Jevning said.

The former space in Kingfield could hold 40 kids, and the new space can accommodate 120. Six-hundred kids visited Leonardo's Basement on field trips in 2015, and next year that number will grow to 6,000.

The summer programming essentially subsidizes school-year programs, giving Leonardo's Basement funding to visit low-income schools and bus in kids for field trips.

During a recent Maxfield Magnet Elementary field trip, Jevning watched as students gravitated to different materials. Some wanted to bang on the piano, while others created a foosball table, or a dollhouse, or “virtual reality” goggles.





“Some kids don’t care what they do as long as they saw for 30 minutes,” he said. “Freedom for kids to make decisions has always been at the core... If everything is prescribed, they don’t learn how to develop those muscles.”

Risk-taking, failing and learning from mistakes are all woven together at the workshop environment, he said.

When Leonardo’s Basement launched in the late 90s, Jevning said he realized kids were losing the art of making things. Many families were two generations removed from farmers and people who could take apart cars.



Steve Jevning chats with a student at Leonardo’s Basement.

“In a group like this, 15-20 percent are natural builders and makers,” he said. “They think with their hands. Their world is a concrete world, not an abstract world.”