

work



Work with me: Ruth Shelly

Creating an enriching environment for the young (and young at heart)

From Ruth Shelly's quiet office, it's easy to forget about the rambunctious occupants she shares her workspace with: A roost of chickens who roam on the top floor, a fiberglass cow who hangs from the ceiling downstairs and a steady stream of curious children and adults who stop by to visit.

But as executive director of Madison Children's Museum, Shelly wouldn't have it any other way. "I can't say I have a typical day, [which] keeps it interesting. Every aspect of my job is enjoyable," she says.

Shelly's journey to her current position began back in eighth grade after a visit to the Milwaukee Public Museum. Enthralled with the exhibit designs, she wrote a letter asking if she could volunteer. And 35 years later, she's still in the business.

A Madison resident since 2003, the children's museum has also become a part of daily life for her family. Shelly's husband volunteers in the exhibits department and their 17-year-old daughter works as a gallery guide. "Being here tends to be a family affair. When you work in a children's museum where families come to have fun, it's a natural fit," she explains.

And when asked what her favorite part about the new and improved downtown location is, Shelly admits she's taken a strong liking to those rooftop hens. "I'm like a proud mother...I don't know how many other executive directors can go home with eggs that were laid at their workplace and [make] an omelet [with them] the next day." It's safe to say: not many. —Kailey Bender

*Ruth's
tips...*

For a family outing to the Madison Children's Museum

Wear comfortable shoes and clothing: "It's hard to do the big gerbil wheel in heels! We really encourage adults and kids to play together and [to be] ready to have fun."

Start or end on the roof: "People come in this time of year with their coats on. It's easiest to stay all bundled up and go to the roof first or see it on your way out."

Explore downtown with your kids: "There's so much more to do downtown than just the children's museum. We really pride ourselves as being the gateway to downtown for children and we're really eager for kids to get to know and enjoy their city center."