

SUNDAY NEWS

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North Museum is scene of crime

New exhibit introduces children to 'CSI'-type forensics as they use powers of observation to solve a mystery.

Kids, you might be too young to stay up for television's "CSI,"

but come to the North Museum and you, too, can step into the shoes of Ted Danson and Marg Helgenberger, stars of the popular CBS crime-solving series.

OK, "CSI" and its many spinoff shows deal primarily with deciphering murders, but the North Museum's new child-friendly interactive exhibit, "The Science of Mystery," centers on tracking down some missing money.

"The Science of Mystery," which runs through Dec. 31, allows young people, second grade and up, to literally walk onto a crime scene and investigate clues that can solve the crime.

Children must keep track of suspects' statements, analyze powder found on a suspicious shoe, compare fingerprints and footprints and even use of a sniff test to match cologne samples that tie in with the crime.

It's known as forensic science, and it's a hot topic now, said Amanda Eckinger, a spokeswoman for the College Avenue museum.

Eckinger noted the popularity of those "CSI" shows, but more than feeding off a trend, "The Science of Mystery" promises to develop and build problem-solving skills.

"Forensics really brings in lots of discipline. ... It's a lot of data-keeping," Eckinger said.

The exhibit, which centers on "The Missing Money Mystery," comes to the museum courtesy of Gateway to Science, an interactive science museum in Bismarck, N.D.

The show was created about 13 years ago in collaboration with Bismarck Police Department and the North Dakota State Forensics Laboratory. "The Mystery of Science" travels throughout the country, creating "crime scenes" at museums.

At the North Museum, the exhibit benefits from local expertise as well. Robson Forensic, a nationwide forensics group based in Lancaster, is sponsoring the exhibit.

Bart Eckhardt, the company's president and chief executive, said the exhibit teaches children the skills forensics experts use every day.

"What we do is apply the scientific method to everything we do," Eckhardt said.

In addition to the crime-solving stations that make up "The Science of Mystery," Robson set up a model crash scene, which will help visitors understand the science of accident reconstruction.

Whether you are a child, parent or guardian, be prepared to get involved. This is a working exhibit, and you can't skip steps.

After all, would a real investigator do that?

"You can't just do one of the components," Eckinger said. "Each component in the exhibit kind of builds on the last one."

So sharpen your observational skills, future "CSI" investigators. "The Science of Mystery" might have some cool things to look at, but you'll be put to work, too.

For more information, call 291-3941 or log on to northmuseum.org.