



Gwen Woods / Special to The Clarion-Ledger

In a recent exhibit at Grenada Elementary School's Kidzeum, Adam Liberto prepares to "perform surgery" on fellow sec-

ond-grader Jivanta Farmer. The organ apron, which features detachable organs, is used to aid anatomy lessons.

Kidzeum: Fun path to learning

By Gwen Woods

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Grinding corn, inflating pig's lungs and lassoing bulls are just a few reasons The Kidzeum at Grenada Elementary School is the winner of a major national award.

The Kidzeum, the school-based children's museum located within Grenada Elementary School, received the Leadership for Learning Award 2000 for Rural School Districts this week in San Francisco by the American Association of School Administrators.

The first full-scale school-based children's museum in the United States, The Kidzeum was selected among more than 15,000 rural school districts within the association. The museum features a grocery store, a bank, a fully-equipped kitchen and a large area for exhibits, which are rotated every nine weeks.

And it's no wonder. Every aspect of the 2,500-square-foot facility is designed to teach particular concepts through hands-on learning. As

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students open the doors to The Kidzeum, they are transported to an adventure, whether it is a winter wonderland in Russia, the Wild West or an African village.

In the recent "Stitchin' Up Stuffee" exhibit, students walked in to a "kid-sized" version of Grenada Lake Medical Center where their friend, "Stuffee," The Kidzeum's mascot, was taken with a head injury after falling off his bicycle.

Students became the emergency room staff, going through each step a regular emergency room staff member would take when someone comes into the emergency room for care. Since Stuffee had to have surgery, students became part of the surgical staff for the second phase of the exhibit.

As they entered the operating room wearing their medical scrubs, older students learned more about suturing by using a suture kit and an artificial arm. Younger students did their stitch-

ing with a specially-designed rubber stamp.

Stuffee stayed in the emergency for a few days following his surgery.

"The Kidzeum is mega-cool," said D.J. Thomas, a first-grade student at Grenada Elementary School. "It is a lot of fun. I wish I could go every day. I liked the emergency room, but I didn't like it that Stuffee got hurt."

Students wanted to make sure he had good food to help him regain his strength, so the students created a healthy meal for Stuffee by shopping in The Kidzeum Grocery, sponsored by Piggly Wiggly.

The Kidzeum has been part of Grenada Elementary School since the construction of the new building in 1995, giving students in kindergarten through third grade an opportunity to participate in the innovative program.

In that time, comparative scores of fourth graders in 1995 and fourth graders in 1998 show a significant increase.

In Iowa Test of Basic Skills scores in 1995 and

1998, Grenada saw its reading ranking in the state jump from 78th to 47th and math go from 57th to 23rd in the state. Language scores went from 36th in the state to seventh.

"The Kidzeum is a proven example of stimulating, lifelong, early learning practices for children," said Buddy Pender, superintendent of education for the Grenada School District.

Eloise Portera, director of The Kidzeum at Grenada Elementary School, said the The Kidzeum's goal is to capture the natural curiosity of children and instill the joy of learning.

"We believe that getting students to see the excitement of learning, their enthusiasm and thirst for knowledge will become a catalyst for future success and keep them in school," Portera said.

As part of the award, the school district was presented a check for \$4,000 to help support continued efforts to improve academic opportunities for students in Grenada County.