

## OFFERINGS IMPRESS VISITING EXPERTS

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The City Museum has attracted nearly 70,000 visitors, 1,400 paid memberships and 300 volunteers in its first four months - far more than anyone hoped.

"I thought that if we had 300 or 400 members the first year, that would be great," Gail Cassilly, the museum's executive director, said Wednesday.

She said she and Bob Cassilly, her husband and the museum's creative director, have been amazed by the museum's popularity.

"It's grown much faster than expected," she said.

One recent visitor, a professional museum consultant who visits scores of museums annually from his company base in Petaluma, Calif., said he was enchanted by the City Museum.

"It was really delightful," said Bob Bailey of AMS Planning and Research Corp. "This is a place that inspires people to explore their creativity. I was reluctant to leave."

Bailey and Mack West, a consultant with the Washington-based firm Informal Science Inc., spent Sunday and Monday at the City Museum. The two are doing an assessment of the museum to determine whether it can qualify for \$1.6 million in state tax credits over the next four years.

As a museum consultant, Bailey is a connoisseur of the genre. He said that museums all over the country have elements of what can be found at the City Museum: hidden tunnels, enchanted forests, creative-art areas. But while no single element of the City Museum is inherently unique, Bailey said the overall scope is phenomenal.

"No one else really brings all of it together in one large place like this," Bailey said. "I think it is really a testament to the creative genius of Gail and Bob."

Bailey was also impressed with the museum's attendance figures, educational offerings and special events. He got there on Sunday, in the midst of the Junkanoo festival, which celebrated African-American History Month, and said he was impressed by what a good time visitors were having.

"It is hard to capture in words what that place is like," Bailey said. "Maybe a video made during Junkanoo or some festival like that would be a good place to start."

January is typically a flat month for family-entertainment venues, said Bailey, adding that he was surprised to find the City Museum's attendance figures for December and January the same - about 17,000 for each month.

Most of the attendance has been spurred by word of mouth, and Bailey said one of the consultants' goals will be to help the museum develop a marketing plan. He estimates the museum will attract about 250,000 visitors a year.

The consultants' report to the state and to the museum will include assessments of the museum's staffing, organizational and board structures, financial viability and educational offerings. Bailey said they will suggest ways to institutionalize aspects of the museum without draining its entrepreneurial spirit or artistry. Their report is expected to be out in April.

Jean McLane, the museum's assistant director, said the staff of 16 hopes to get useful advice and information from the report.

"We can use this," she said. "We've been flying by the seat of our pants."

- Caption: PHOTOCOLOR Photo - J.B.FORBES / POST-DISPATCH - City Museum attendance exceeds expectations - Visitors tour the City Museum at 701 North 15th Street in downtown St. Louis on Wednesday. It has drawn more than 70,000 visitors since it opened in October. The museum hopes to qualify for \$1.6 million in state tax credits.

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