

'It's a Nano World' after all: Collaborative exhibit opens at Epcot

The world too small to see is revealed in a traveling science museum exhibition, "It's a Nano World," which is on view at Innoventions at Epcot in Lake Buena Vista, Fla., through March 1. It is the first exhibit at Innoventions to highlight nanotechnology.

"Nanotechnology, innovation on the molecular scale, will impact our lives in very big ways, as Innoventions guests will experience at this extraordinary exhibition," said Barry Van Deman, section head for science literacy at the National Science Foundation. The 3,000-square-foot traveling exhibit is a result of a unique collaboration between Main Street Science (the education program of the Nanobiotechnology Center at Cornell), the Sciencenter in Ithaca and Painted Universe, a design/fabrication team in Lansing, N.Y.

The exhibit will be located at Innoventions at Epcot, which is a unique attraction filled with hands-on, interactive exhibits for guests to discover how cutting-edge science and technology can simplify and enhance life today and in the future. This interactive playground allows guests to be among the first to experience new products and services and to understand how these new methods will change the way we live.

The "It's a Nano World" exhibit is part of a vibrant educational outreach program whose mission is to foster a lifelong interest in science and technology by teaching people of all ages about the nano world. Entering through the gateway of "It's a Nano World," visitors are transported into the wonders of biology at the nanometer scale, experiencing the scientific and technological discoveries of the Nanobiotechnology Center. The exhibition has a number of hands-on activities where visitors can view the nano world using a variety of tools. An important tool in nanobiotechnology, a cell sorter, is transformed into an interactive exhibit where visitors sort balls (representing cells) with a series of vacuum hoses and collect "cells" in hoppers.



Frank DiMeo for the Ithaca Sciencenter

"It's a Nano World" traveling science museum exhibition visitors, at the Sciencenter in Ithaca, learn how cells can be sorted in the "nano" world.

"It's a Nano World" is the result of three years of work by the team, which included scientists, educators, museum staff and artists. "Over 200 concepts were evaluated, some prototyped and most discarded on the way to finalizing the six exhibit clusters," said Catherine McCarthy, the project coordinator at the Sciencenter. Prior to brainstorming sessions to create a list of possible exhibits, the team interviewed young children to understand their perspectives of the nano world. What they discovered is that most children had little understanding of things that were too small to see. The smallest thing that they could think of was typically the

smallest thing that they could see with the naked eye. The exhibition, therefore, was created with a heavy emphasis on size and scale.

Scientific content was not the only driver of the exhibit. "One of the most important perspectives that the collaboration brought to the exhibition was the idea that it should be fun for kids and informative for adults," said Anna Waldron, director of education for the Nanobiotechnology Center at Cornell. A National Science Foundation-supported Science and Technology Center, the Nanobiotechnology Center was founded in 2000.