



OmniGlobe Educates, Inspires and Impresses at the Rory Meyers Children's Adventure Garden

Children live with one foot in the real world and the other in fantasy worlds of their own making. They have their active imaginations to thank for that and now, at the Dallas Arboretum's Rory Meyers Children's Adventure Garden, opening September 21, 2013, the OmniGlobe too.

The OmniGlobe is a cutting-edge spherical display projection system, five feet tall, which allows for top-quality interactive animations of the Earth, the moon, other planets, even fictional galaxies. Using a touch screen, teachers can create interactive presentations by selecting images or sequences showing the changing Earth to demonstrate lessons about continental drift, ocean currents, geology, and ecosystems around the world. The Arboretum's OmniGlobe is one of only five in the state of Texas, one of 50 worldwide, and is the showstopper inside the 9,100-square-foot Exploration Center, the Garden's main building.

Those who have experimented with the OmniGlobe routinely express wonder, awe ... and jealousy. "I've become fascinated with it," says Joe Buskuhl, a member of the Garden's Architecture and Construction Committee. Travis McElroy, Owner of The Old State House of Design and Development—no stranger to technology, as the Garden's technological consultant—says that of the many impressive technological features the Garden boasts, the OmniGlobe is the one he most wants for his own house.

"Everybody who's seen the OmniGlobe says pretty much the same thing: I need one of those," adds Brian Shivers, Chairman of the Arboretum's Board of Directors. "In fact, someone from *National Geographic* came to look at it, and now he desperately wants to get one for their office."

Created by ARC Science Simulations out of Loveland, Colorado, the OmniGlobe consists of a rear projection film bonded to an acrylic shell, which makes it durable and scratch resistant. It comes with more than 50 installed programs, programs which are far from Earth-bound: the OmniGlobe can project other planets, stars, our moon—even fictional celestial constructions like the Death Star from the Star Wars films. Not to mention Halloween jack o' lanterns. "If it's a sphere, we can do it," says Maria Conroy, Vice President of Education at the Arboretum.

But there's little reason to venture away from Earth, as the OmniGlobe is capable of jaw-dropping animations reflecting environmental and geological movements right here at home. For example, children can watch an animation of supercontinent Pangaea and how it slowly began to

break apart 200 million years ago. They can see what the Earth looked like when dinosaurs reigned over the Jurassic Era. They can follow the movements of hurricanes and tsunamis; learn about thermohaline circulation, the “ocean conveyor belt”; understand the impact climate change is having on the planet; and they can see real-time weather around the world, thanks to an Internet connection straight to NASA.

The OmniGlobe can even depict social issues like literacy rates by nation, human suffering based on food, water and illness, the effects of deforestation, and disappearing languages.

Many of these programs directly relate to what children will have already learned in other parts of the Garden, making the OmniGlobe a fitting climax for school tours. “It’s really a great asset,” says Andy Roller, Prime Consultant at Van Sickle & Roller, the Children’s Garden exhibit designer and lead designer for the project. “Children can look at vegetation across the world, different types of biomes—things which tie literally into being an arboretum. You can pinpoint its use to just about every single gallery in the Garden.”

The educational value of the OmniGlobe is apparent, but its emotional appeal should not be overlooked, the rare opportunity it offers to sit quietly and reflect upon the beauty of our planet. During a recent demonstration, Conroy fiddled with the touch screen and for a moment, the OmniGlobe went dark. When it came alive again, the projection spinning slowly, bright patches of light shone on the continents.

“This is from NASA,” Conroy explained. “From space, the night lights.” She paused the screen. Nobody spoke for a long time.

“Isn’t it beautiful?” Conroy finally whispered.

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