



— Photos on this and facing page by David Blakeman, courtesy City of Tempe

Life's a Zoo: A free art event for families in Tempe

By Barbi Walker-Walsh

Get messy and dive into a wild adventure at Life's a Zoo, a roaring fusion of fun and learning where families with young explorers will embark on a global animal safari through art, music and sensory play. Say program planners: Unleash your inner explorer and let the zoo come to you!

The Free Art Fridays event, most recently staged Nov. 17 at the Edna Vihel Arts Center in conjunction with the city of Tempe, is partially funded by a grant from the noted service group, Tempe Diablos.

"This is an arts event for the very young and their grownups or caregivers to be in a space that is purposely designed for them," said Maja Aurora, Tempe community arts manager.

November's theme allows children to

learn about animals from around the world while they create an aquarium squishy bag, have their face painted with their favorite animal, and listen to local musicians Saraswathi Jones and Emily Brusco, licensed music therapist. Some will even come dressed as their favorite animal, Aurora said.

"Be messy with us," she said. The idea is to play with a variety of arts. "Some are experiencing new art materials, these

are art materials beyond markers and crayons — that levels it up. “What they are touching and looking at they’ve not ever seen before,” Aurora said.

On Free Art Fridays, families can bring their little ones and experience all types of hands-on art without worrying about making a mess at home, Aurora adds. During the morning-hours event, when older kids are in school, parents and caregivers can play and connect with their little ones in a fun, engaging and age-appropriate space, Aurora said. All the projects are age-appropriate and ideal for children ages 1-5.

At a sensory section — from touch to texture, planners note — children can even learn the very basics of counting and measuring with a bin of beans, Aurora said. It’s taking exploring and playing to the next level.

The event is an extension of classes and arts-learning available at the center that features center artists and their works.

Families can experience the art, socialize with other parents of small children and enjoy the outdoors while listening to music.

At December’s upcoming Free Art Friday, children can make artistic gifts for family and friends.

More events are scheduled in February, March and April 2024. Check out dates and themes at www.tempe.gov/freetartfriday.

Whenever you arrive or however long you stay, take your time and have fun, go at whatever pace is comfortable for you and your kids, Aurora said.

“Even if you arrive at 11, you still have time to have fun and participate.”

