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Dance parties strike a mix of fun, exercise

By Kellie B. Gormly

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Exercise doesn't have to be done at a gym, and it doesn't have to be drudgery. In fact, it can be a lot fun -- especially for kids, who can jump around on a dance floor, goof off and have a blast.

That is the idea behind the "We Can!" Family Dance Party on Sunday afternoon at the Children's Museum of Pittsburgh. Museum visitors of all ages can hit a kid-friendly disco inside the North Side museum, where they can burn calories while dancing to popular music amidst a mirror ball, bubble machine and other disco-club features.

"The greatest thing about it is that kids don't really have an opportunity to actually go to a club; they see it on 'Hannah Montana' and all those other shows. Well, that's exactly what we do," Ronald Wos says. He is an independent DJ who goes by the name "DJ Raw Z" and does the musical entertainment at the museum's dance parties.

Wos, often called "Rozzie," plays music from "Dora the Explorer," "Hannah Montana" and other shows, along with classic kid favorites like "YMCA," the Chicken Dance and the Hokey Pokey. Wos teaches the kids how to do the twist in a way they can understand: pretend there's a doorknob on the floor, take their toes, and turn the doorknob with them.

"They always have good times," Wos says.

The parties, especially popular with younger children, aim to give kids and their parents the message that they should perform an exercise, such as dancing, for at least a half-hour every day, Wos says. Yet the museum wants to show kids how much fun moving their bodies can be, says Bill Schlageter, the museum's director of marketing.

The dance parties, which often attract 50 to 60 people, began in July 2008 at the museum as part of a partnership between the Children's Museum and the national "We Can!" program, which is designed to help children maintain a healthy weight. "We Can!" stands for "Ways to Enhance Children's Activity & Nutrition." The program is organized by UPMC Health Plan in partnership with Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh, H.J. Heinz Co., Children's Community Pediatrics and the city of Pittsburgh. The museum has hosted about eight of the dances, which have been very popular with visitors, who often are surprised by the event on a regular museum visit, Schlageter says.

"I think what's popular is, the parents know what dancing and lights and mirror balls and DJs are all about, but their kids may not," he says. "It's an opportunity

for parents to bring the kids down and enjoy something with their children that we can all do together. Kids are learning something about movement. ... It's a very positive experience.

"It's fun, and you're exercising, and you're not sitting in front of the screen," he says. "It's music, movement and laughter. It's a wonderful mix, I think, for a family."

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