

Review of Bellaboo's Play & Discovery Center posted October 14, 2009 in [The Chronicle](#)



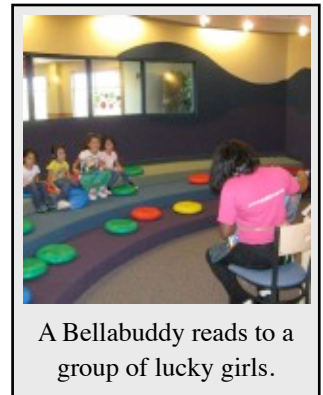
A Place to Call Their Own

For those who can remember, being a small child is a fun, enjoyable time full of new experiences, laughter and joy. Now imagine a place completely dedicated to kid's freedom, learning, fun and relaxation...[Read More](#)

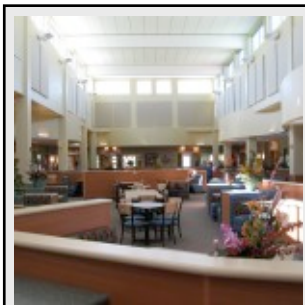
A Place to Call Their Own

For those who can remember, being a small child is a fun, enjoyable time full of new experiences, laughter and joy. Now imagine a place completely dedicated to kid's freedom, learning, fun and relaxation. A place where kids are encouraged to freely roam from activity to activity and from room to room. Kids can play, explore, investigate and manipulate their surroundings and everything in it. Nothing is off limits in this place and everything from the stools to counter tops are child-size.

Welcome to Bellaboo's Children's Play & Discovery Center.



A Bellabuddy reads to a group of lucky girls.



Bellaboo's Children's Play & Discovery Center's parent's cafe area, located in the center of the facility to allow parents to keep an eye on their children at all times. The cafe has Wi-Fi Internet access and provides moderately priced, healthy food.

Located at the intersection of I-65 and I-80/94 in Lake Station's Three Rivers County Park, Bellaboo's is a new type of play center, one that encourages children to explore and discover things for themselves with minimal guidance and structure. The idea is that children can learn by interacting and physically participating in activities rather than sitting around and having things shown to them. Kids at Bellaboo's are free to sit and have a story read to them at their choosing, and whenever they wish, they can get up and run over to the pretend village for a quick stop in the grocery store. Or, they can go play dress up and paint their faces before heading over to cooking center to make their food by hand while being assisted by a children's chef. When and where they play inside Bellaboo's huge facility, and for how long, is completely up to the children.

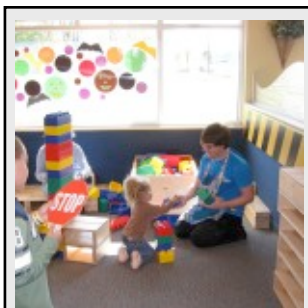
[White Hutchinson Learning & Leisure Group](#), a multi-national company who specializes in family and children-oriented entertainment, education and leisure, designed the newly built dual recreation and education center. It offers a variety of activity rooms,

each with a different theme and purpose designed to allow children to roam and play as they wish, interact with other children and ultimately gain knowledge while playing.

Bellaboo's recognizes that many children these days are over-stimulated with a variety of daily distractions like television, video games, and computers. Typically, children do not spend enough time physically playing. To address concerns like this, the center was designed as a calming, soothing and relaxing environment. There are lots of windows and sky lights to promote as much natural light as possible and the soft, pleasant color scheme creates a very charming, yet playful environment. There is an adult café area located in the middle of the complex, which is very open and inviting. The café's placement allows parents to relax while the children play in the various activity rooms. It has Wi-Fi Internet access and an artisan-style restaurant, providing a variety of healthy, delicious and well-prepared food at a fair price.



Stuffee© is a one-of-a-kind ambassador for health. He is a super-sized doll with a zipper down the middle of his chest and abdomen. When the zipper is opened you will find all of a human body's internal organs.



A Bellaboo's employee, called Bellabuddies, plays with a couple kids in Bellaboo's construction room. At Bellaboo's Children's Play & Discover Center, children are encouraged to play and investigate every aspect of the facility.

As for the kids, the various rooms and themes are both educational and fun. Each room has a staff member present who is trained in children's entertainment or education. In fact, during Bellaboo's hiring process, they actually brought children in to monitor applicant's interactions with children. Kara Mackey, general manager of Bellaboo's said they focused on hiring lots of retired pre-school teachers, children's entertainers, mothers, and grand parents, anyone who loves and interacts well with children. There are children's chefs, musicians, singers, storytellers, puppeteers and many other fun grown ups for the kids to enjoy, said Mackey.

"We hired people that love kids," Mackey said. "We put heavy emphasis on making sure our employees are family oriented and are good with the kids."

Because Bellaboo's caters to kids ages 10 and under, it offers a variety of rooms for kids to play in. There is a children's self-face painting area, an indoor jungle gym complete with climbing area, slides and a ball pit, a train room, water room, construction room; a pretend village

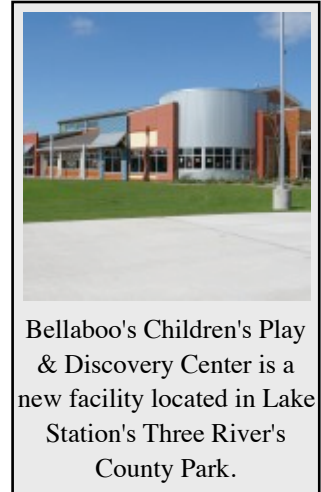
with pizza parlor, grocery store and play house, a children's arts and cooking area and a padded room dedicated to toddlers and infants. Except for the adult café area, all the rooms are built to child-sized scale. Chairs and stools are smaller, tools and tables are tiny, the entire environment is built with children in mind.

Bellaboo's has taken a variety of safety and sanitation measures to ensure kids well-being is top priority. For starters, no adults are allowed without children in Bellaboo's and, upon entering the facility, parents and kids are given matching wristbands to make sure the kids leave with the right adults. Sanitation and cleanliness are also a very high priority at Bellaboo's. According to

Mackey, it is their number one priority. People are constantly cleaning all the time. For example, employees of Bellaboo's called Bellabuddies, keep track of what toys are being played with by the children and when the kids are done with them, the toys are taken and immediately put in an automatic dishwasher to be cleaned. Even the plastic balls in the children's play pit are cleaned each night.

"We are very precautionary. We do not allow children who are visibly sick into the facility," Mackey said. "In our opinion, safety is sanitation."

Although Bellaboo's has only been open for a month, it is already beginning to set goals and plans on adding an outside compound in the future. A lot of things are on the horizon, Mackey said, and there are a lot of creative powers at work to help develop children-oriented goals. Bellaboo's is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday and 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Sundays. Prices vary from by age, for details call (219) 963-2070 or visit www.mybellaboos.com.



Bellaboo's Children's Play & Discovery Center is a new facility located in Lake Station's Three River's County Park.