



The *magic* of invention

I'm standing in a hallway with about 20 energetic kids who are dressed in various combinations of khaki and navy-colored pants, shirts and skirts. These middle schoolers from a Braddock charter school and I are about to tour Inventionland, the world's largest invention factory, located in O'Hara Township.

Surrounded by stark, white walls, we are facing large doors that remind me of the entrance to a hospital ward. I don't know what's behind those doors, but I suspect it's going to be a lot more fun than a trip to the ER.

Madie Weiser, Inventionland's Marketing and Events Manager and our tour guide today, explains the importance of confidentiality before we walk into what she describes as a "high security area where inventions might not be released to the world yet."

She opens the door and we enter a brightly lit, futuristic office. Video screens line the walls and the huge, glowing orb/phone that sits in the middle of the conference table reminds me of a gadget from a science fiction movie. This is Mr. D's office, where George Davison, founder and CEO of Inventionland, works, creates, tinkers and presumably gets to play with the immersive gaming chair in the corner whenever he wants.

Jelly! As the kids would say.

"What do you think we do at Inventionland?" Madie asks.

After a brief pause, one boy bravely raises his hand.

"Create opportunities for anyone who has an idea to make that opportunity into a reality," he says.

Nailed it.

For over a decade, corporations, retailers and entrepreneurs have come to Inventionland seeking help to research, design,

prototype, engineer, package and market their product ideas. This place is serious about inventing. However, as the kids and I are discovering, serious invention can be remarkably fun.

Madie presses an unseen button and a wall slides opens to reveal the place where "all the magic happens."



"WHOOAAA!" the kids collectively exclaim as they walk into a whimsical fantasy world, which looks to me like a cross between Disneyland's Main Street and Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory.

"Is this a fun house?" a surprised boy asks.

We gather in front of a fountain that spouts bright blue water before Madie leads us through the complex to see the 16 themed sets that provide distinctive "offices" for the talented employees, who do everything from metalworking to laser cutting to sewing.

Pirate Ship Discovery, which has a

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<p>June 16-22, 2019 Camp Conrad Weiser Wernersville, PA <i>(transportation provided from our Harrisburg office)</i></p>	<p>June 23-29, 2019 Camp Fitch North Springfield, PA <i>(transportation provided from our Pittsburgh office)</i></p>
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All campers must possess the ability to function within both small and large groups **without** one-on-one assistance or supervision. Independent self-care skills (including toileting, bathing, communication, feeding skills, and more) are required. If your potential camper needs more assistance, please call the EAACP to ask about our Camp Firefly program. Camp Frog session fees range from \$550-\$750, but Camp Frog scholarships are available during the registration process which can cover up to 100% of the session fees.

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big, benign octopus clinging to its hull, is where the model builder constructs cardboard prototypes. The electrical engineer, aka "circuit board wizard," works in a huge robot named Invention 54, and other workers conduct research in a giant shoe worthy of Old Mother Hubbard. There's a cave, a treehouse, a cupcake, a castle with a drawbridge, waterfalls and a pet shack.

Although Inventionland seems like an unusually laid back work environment, Madie tells us that employees relieve stress by playing with remote control cars on the Inventionland Motor Speedway.



Above our heads, a humming conveyor belt carries hundreds of packaged products that went through the Inventionland process.

"I see that on YouTube!" one kid exclaims, pointing.

Before we enter the Hall of Inventors, which pays homage to ten inspiring creators, the kids read a sign that asks "who is the world's most creative person?"

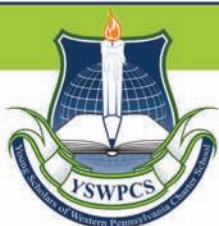
"Better not be Albert Einstein," quips a cheeky child.

In addition to this "edutaining" tour, Inventionland offers a prepared curriculum for grades three through college. The Inventionland Institute provides instructor training for this class, which gives students the opportunity to consider a problem based on personal experience, and invent something that solves that problem. About 70 schools have participated in the curriculum over the last two years.

Every spring, the Inventionland Institute also hosts the annual Regional Invention Contest, which gives kids from all over Western Pennsylvania and beyond the chance to explore the real world of inventing.

Inventionland isn't just a magical place for students and teachers to visit. The curriculum and annual contest are valuable educational resources that create opportunities, which, as a smart child in Braddock said, can turn an idea into reality. ■

Writer Ann K. Howley isn't going to divulge the secret person who is the most creative in the world, but she wants to point out that a creative person named Albert Einstein once said, "Logic will get you from A to B. Imagination will take you everywhere." Sorry kid.



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