



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CHOM Announces Closing and Transition to IGNITE at the Saban Center: A New Era for Children's Discovery in Tuscaloosa

Tuscaloosa, AL — After nearly four decades of sparking curiosity and creativity in children across West Alabama, the Children's Hands-On Museum (CHOM) will officially close its doors on August 1, 2026. In its place, a bold new chapter begins as CHOM transitions to IGNITE at the Saban Center—a future-forward space dedicated to discovery, innovation, and lifelong learning.

This announcement launches a year-long celebration of CHOM's legacy and its exciting future. The campaign, titled "Celebrating 40 years of CHOM's History," will feature monthly social media spotlights and sponsor highlights that honor the museum's impact on generations of Tuscaloosa families.

"Since 1986, CHOM has been the iconic place in Tuscaloosa for children to have hands-on experiences, grow, and play. We've been given an incredible opportunity to move to the Saban Center and rebrand as IGNITE. It is now time to announce that we will be closing CHOM, and I could not be more excited about our future." — Liz Obradovich, Board Chair

CHOM's story began in the early 1970s when Helene Warner Hibbard toured children's museums across the country and envisioned one for Tuscaloosa. In 1984, she partnered with Frances Alexander, a retired educator, to bring that vision to life. With support from local leaders and the University of Alabama, CHOM opened in 1986 in Smith Hall, featuring exhibits designed by children. Just two years later, it relocated to its permanent home in downtown Tuscaloosa.

"My mom, Mary Louise Armstrong, loved CHOM and wanted to leave a legacy in my dad's name, Cliff Armstrong. When CHOM was searching for a new home she offered to purchase the building to give CHOM a permanent location and she loved coming to visit and see all the children playing. My grandkids also loved playing and learning at CHOM. We are happy that this has been a wonderful children's museum for many years." — Pat Patton, Past President and Board Member

As CHOM prepares for its next chapter, the museum will remain open for the coming year, inviting families to revisit favorite exhibits, share memories, and celebrate a beloved community treasure. A public celebration is in the works, with more details to be announced soon.

The search for IGNITE's Executive Director is currently underway and will remain open through September 21, 2025, ensuring strong leadership to guide this exciting transformation.

About IGNITE

IGNITE is an interactive platform for STEAM-based learning designed for all ages. The new facility will feature state-of-the-art learning environments, including maker spaces, digital media labs, and immersive science zones—all built to spark imagination and foster lifelong learning.

Mission Statement:

IGNITE enhances our community by inspiring curiosity, creativity, and meaningful moments through lifelong learning and interactive experiences in STEM with the Arts—opening opportunities that connect and impact every generation.

For updates, follow CHOM on social media and visit: <https://www.chomonline.org>

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