

Challenger Learning Center of South Dakota
Watertwon, SD
Implementation Plan

Date of Submission: 22 July 2021

Lead Institution: [Lake Area Technical College](#)/Challenger Learning Center of South Dakota

Address:

Watertown Development Company
1 East Kemp
PO Box 332
Watertown, SD 57201
Phone: 605.884.0340
Cell: 605.868.1201

Organizational Point of Contact:

Michael Cartney, Board Chair
Lake Area Technical College
PO Box 730, 1201 Arrown Ave
Watertown, SD 57201
(605) 881-6198 (Cell)

Projected Opening Date: Fall 2022

Partner Institutions:

Lake Area Technical College
Mother of God Monastery
The Harmony Hill Watertown Project
City of Watertown
Watertown Development Company

HYPERLINKS:

www.lakeareatech.edu
www.watertownbenedictines.org
www.harmonyhillwatertown.com
www.watertownworks.com
www.watertownsd.us

Proposed Location: Harmony Hill, Watertown, South Dakota

SECTION 2 – The Community

Watertown, South Dakota is the state’s fifth largest city, offering many activities and historical sites without big-city crowds. Visitors can explore the history of this “coteau” region at attractions such as the first Governor of South Dakota’s home, the Mellette House, the Codington County Heritage Museum or the newly restored Goss Opera House in the historical downtown district. Many folks come to experience the wide open spaces of the prairie, the vast wildlife of the area and Americana Art by Terry Redlin at the Terry Redlin Art Center. Watertown is host to one of only two zoos in South Dakota, the Bramble Park Zoo, certainly a destination not to miss.

Watertown is also home to Lake Area Technical College (LATC)*, one of the Nation’s leading two-year technical colleges and a recipient of the Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence. LATC is known for its wide array of academic programs and focus on STEM education and careers.

Soon, the Watertown community will have an additional, unique feature: the Challenger Learning Center of South Dakota. The Learning Center will be built on the Harmony Hill Watertown campus. Harmony Hill Watertown is home to the Benedictine Sisters of Mother of God Monastery. This square mile is being developed into a synergistic, multifaceted, intergenerational community that will be the host site of the Challenger Learning Center of South Dakota and the 24 acre Challenger Park.

SECTION 3 – Your Strategic Objectives In STEM

Conceptual and mission aligned with the Challenger Learning Center of South Dakota, The Voyager Solar System will help broaden both the expose to STEM education and STEM occupations through the wonders of the Universe.

We envision the Voyage Mark II solar system model to be a feature and a compliment to the Learning Center. As the primary feature of the park, the Voyage will allow the theme, “From the Prairie to the Stars” to be made visible through the placement of the thirteen stanchions and accompanying trails. The impact we hope to achieve with the Voyage Solar System is to offer a tangible tool for educators and parents to discuss the vastness of our solar system; something that is very hard to do in the classroom and difficult for the developing student brain to visualize. Having a perfectly measured model of our local system will be an incredibly valuable teaching aid.

SECTION 4 – Proposed Community Engagement

There are few things that can offer an experience of the enormity of space and our place in this magnificent universe. As the primary feature of Challenger Park, the Voyage Solar System will be such an experience as well as enhance this destination for tourists - adults and youngsters alike.

The community has already established the Challenger Learning Center of South Dakota 501.c(3) organization. Standing members on CLCSD Board include President of Lake Area Technical College, Mayor of the City of Watertown, Director of the Watertown Development Company, and Superintendent of the Watertown School District. The Benedictine Sisters of Mother of God Monastery are leaving a legacy gift to Watertown focused on a Community of Caring, and are stepping forward to financially support the CLCSD, Challenger Prk, and the Voyager Solar System. Additionally, the local Hospital CEO, STEM instructors from both LATC and Watertown School District, and several pillars of the community volunteered to serve on the board of directors, and to fund this venture along side the Challenger Learning Center of South Dakota. We view the Voyager Solar System as the key feature in the 24-acre Challenger Park adjacent to the CLCSD. This public park will be free and open to the public.

A unique approach being taken by the board is to engage, feature, and highlight South Dakota's space and STEM related industries and occupation. This partnership will ensure the initial viability, as well as the long-term sustainability of this inspirational display.

SECTION 5 – Conclusion

There are over 30,000 K12 students within 90 minutes of Watertown, and over 130,000 students enrolled in public schools in SD. Further, the unique tie with Lake Area Technical College* makes the STEM focus a natural for Watertown and SD.

** Lake Area Technical Institute is ranked as the #1 community college in the nation, and 100% focused on the technically skilled workforce pipeline. They were blessed to be one of MacKenzie Scott's impact gift recipients for their outstanding efforts in supporting the first responders and healthcare workers with PPE while they stayed open and face-to-face throughout the pandemic. Lake Area Tech is the recipient of the coveted Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence, and is commonly ranked as the top community college in the nation by a number of sources (see attached). In addition to winning the Aspen Prize, Lake Area Tech's work in student success, workforce focus, industry partnership, and advocating the value of community colleges has been acknowledged on International Public Radio's Take Away series, Kentucky Public TV's Dropping Back In Series, The White House's Champions of Change summits, Forbes, New York Times and TIME magazine. LATC was one of four colleges featured in the Aspen Institute's publication "Structural Equity: Big-Picture Thinking & Partnerships That Improve Community College Student Outcomes." LATC is only the 93rd college in history to have a sitting president deliver the commencement address in 2015 and, was invited to testify to the US Senate Commerce Committee on how the United States can address the skilled workforce gap and make the country competitive.*

On a beautiful, forty-acre campus in Watertown South Dakota, Lake Area Technical College is the oldest and largest technical college in South Dakota. Lake Area Technical Institute is a public, two-year technical college with a student population nearly 2,500 offering 29 career focused programs of study. Our graduation rate is nearly twice the national average and we place 99% of our graduates. And those graduates earn 27% more than other new starts in the region. Our student loan default rate is about half the national average. Although

student-focused, we are a Community/Industry facing organization, meaning we take our cues, set our goals, and establish performance measures based upon the needs what we see in our surroundings. Our hallmark is caring for our students, our employees, our community, and our state. Our legacy of success drew President Obama to be our graduation commencement speaker in 2015, President Cartney was invited to testify to the US Senate Commerce Committee on how the United States can address the skilled workforce gap and make the country competitive. With our story covered in national publications such as Time Magazine, Forbes, the Wall Street Journal, and US News and World Report -- Lake Area Tech won the Aspen Prize in 2017 and continues to be ranked at or near the top community colleges in the nation.