Please Touch Museum explores Muslim culture

Bobbie Bonner
Sharyn Flanagan

T he high pitched, joyful squawks and happy chatter reverberated through the filled main floor of the historic and expansive building that houses Please Touch Museum on Friday. But it wasn’t just a regular day at the museum in Municipal Hall, which primarily caters to excited 2- through 10-year-olds. It was the only run of their new, groundbreaking exhibition “American to Zanzibar: Muslim Cultures Near and Far” which runs Saturday, Feb. 2 through Sept. 2, 2019.

The first documented Muslims to come to America were enslaved. While the exact number is unknown, it’s been estimated that one-third of the enslaved population were from present-day Muslim parts of West Africa. From then until today, Black Muslims continue to make up the largest segment of American Muslims in the country.

Get the story, hear the story, see four people — and over 200 kids in Philadelphia identifying as Muslim, the intergenerational event draws visitors of all ages to explore Muslim history. It’s a kid-friendly comfort of the Please Touch Museum.

President Patricia Wellenbach said the exhibition is about “reaching a new audience,” and the effort is to educate and serve, even if it just improves a child’s perspective.

“This week only get more important as we get closer to Eid. We have more opportunities to dialogue and reflect on the past two years have unfolded,” she said.

To ensure the exhibition reflects the rich diversity, history and values of the region’s Muslim population, Please Touch has collaborated with Muslim leaders, community leaders and cultural institutions to ensure the depth of Muslim con-

The exhibition teaches children about the conservation and importance of water in all communities.

The many sponsors of the exhibition will allow hundreds of schoolchildren from across the region to visit Please Touch Museum in 2019.

The Philadelphia’s Please Touch Museum, at 2301 Avenue of the Republic, is all decked out for its latest exhibit “American to Zanzibar: Muslim Cultures Near and Far” that will run through Sept. 2, 2019.

The Philadelphia region is home to an estimated 200,000 Muslims and Please Touch Museum has customized its exhibit to reflect Philadelphia’s Muslim community.

Robert J. Bunch

This part of the Muslim exhibition shows the various textiles that are bought and sold across the culture. It started with a poster on a banner at the Children’s Museum of Manhattan in New York and has now been custom-fitted for Philadelphia’s Please Touch Museum.

Mayor Jim Kenney and Please Touch Museum President Patricia Wellenbach help a few children cut the ribbon Friday, Feb. 1 for the new Muslim exhibition. (JESSICA KOURKOUTIS / Staff Photographer)

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Please Touch Museum is housed inside of Fairmount Park’s Memorial Hall, a Beaux-Arts-style building that had been part of the Philadelphia Zoo from 1874 to 1926.

For more information, visit www.plasheetouchmuseum.org.