

The Fort Bend Children's Discovery Center

Located on the grounds of a former sugar refinery in the Container Warehouse, the [Fort Bend Children's Discovery Center \(FBCDC\)](#) now serves as a focal point for the children and parents of Sugarland and Fort Bend County. The FBCDC, which opened in May 2016, is located on the first floor of the building and offers a variety of child-centered exhibits, special events and educational outreach events. The [Sugar Land Heritage Foundation](#) and the [City of Sugar Land Convention and Visitors Bureau](#) occupy the second floor of the building which features a museum of the history of Sugar Land, a gift shop, and the visitors center. Plans are underway to transform this iconic site into a larger proposed mixed-use lifestyle center that will include upscale retail, restaurant and office space, a boutique hotel, and a multifamily residential complex.



Figure 1. The former Imperial sugar refinery building and tanks.

The history of the site is quite unique going back to the mid 1800's when it was utilized for sugar milling and processing operations. The Imperial Sugar Company operated at the site until 2003 when the plant closed. The site remained vacant for number of years, until efforts were made to redevelop the property.

The long-term use of the property as a sugar refinery had left behind contamination in soil and groundwater. This contamination, which included metals, total petroleum hydrocarbons, volatile organic compounds, polychlorinated biphenyl and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons required assessment and cleanup before the property could be brought back to productive use.

In July 2012, the site was entered into the [Voluntary Cleanup Program](#) and after considerable remediation efforts, was determined to meet cleanup requirements for petroleum storage tank (PST) sites and the Texas Risk Reduction Program standards. Large quantities of soils were excavated and removed from the site. Samples collected afterwards confirmed the site met standards for residential land use, and a final certificate of completion was issued in July 2015.



Figure 2. Children outside the discovery center.

The FBCDC was approached to consider operating at the former Imperial Sugar Mill and a capital campaign was started to raise the money to redevelop the site. With the efforts of the community and contributions from individuals and foundations, they were able to raise \$4.6 million. Of that amount, \$2.1 million was used for the refurbishing of the site which incorporated the silos from the refinery and the building of the new exhibits. The FBCDC has been able to serve more than 102,341 children and their families on-site and 7,103 with educational outreach programs. The center has 5 exhibits currently and are working on opening their 6th exhibit.