

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: April 6, 2005

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ERIKSON INSTITUTE NAMED GREAT FRIEND TO KIDS — Association of Children's Museums Recognizes Institute's Impact to the Field of Early Childhood Development —

WASHINGTON, DC — The Association of Children's Museums (ACM) will present its *Great Friend to Kids Award* to the Erikson Institute, one of the nation's leading graduate schools in child development, at its annual conference InterActivity 2005. The Award honors organizations and individuals who have made significant and outstanding contributions towards strengthening education and advancing the interests of children. ACM selected the Institute for its commitment to expanding the understanding of child development and to generating research that improves the way children and their families are served. Samuel J. Meisels, Ed.D., president of Erikson Institute, will accept the award on behalf of the school.

"It's in the first years of life that children build an understanding of who they are, the world around them and how they fit into the world," says Janet Rice Elman, ACM executive director. "For nearly 40 years, Erikson Institute has helped children create a solid foundation for lifelong learning through its rigorous graduate training programs for childcare professionals and compelling research."

The U.S. Department of Education reports in its 2001 National Household Education Survey Report that more than 60 percent of children under the age of five — nearly 12 million children — are being cared for in out-of-the-home childcare settings. Research over the past ten years has shown the relationship between a teacher's level of education and student performance. The Institute has played a major role in providing educational opportunities and in making a strong case for the need to educate early childhood care practitioners.

The Institute was founded in Chicago's Hyde Park neighborhood in 1966 to provide early childhood teacher training to professionals serving in the newly launched Head Start program. Four prominent child advocates launched the institute: businessman and philanthropist Irving B. Harris; educator and activist Barbara Taylor Bowman; social worker Lorraine Wallach; and child psychologist Maria Piers. The Institute was named for Erik Erikson (1902-94), the German-born psychoanalyst who first proposed that children are not simply biological organisms but also products of society's expectations, prejudices, and prohibitions.

The Institute's approach creates practitioners who understand and respect the differences among children and families — differences that profoundly affect how children learn to organize their environment, which language they learn to speak, how they occupy their leisure time, the kinds of problems they will see, and the strategies they will use to solve these problems.

Over the years, the Institute has produced influential research in the areas of teaching assessment, children and violence, intercultural understanding and the effects of early intervention on brain development. In addition, the Institute has introduced innovative teaching initiatives, collaborated with like-minded organizations to advocate for the need to invest in early education, responded to families' childcare concerns by establishing community networks and provided training scholarships.

ACM inaugurated the *Great Friend to Kids Award* in 1991. Last year's award was presented to Kevin Clash, Emmy award-winning puppeteer and co-executive producer of "Sesame Street" in recognition of

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his lifetime commitment to develop smart, sensitive and educational characters for children and families. Past recipients include former First Lady Barbara Bush Barbara Pierce Bush (2003), UNICEF (2002), Dr. David Elkind (2001), Dr. Robert Coles (2000), Children's Television Workshop (1999), former First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton (1998), Dr. James P. Comer (1997), Fred Rogers (1996), Dr. Ernest L. Boyer (1995), Peggy Charren (1994), Marian Wright Edelman (1993), Dr. Howard Gardner (1992) and Michael Spock (1991).

The Association of Children's Museums (ACM) is a professional service organization for children's museums around the world. ACM's mission is to bring children and families together in a new kind of town square where play inspires creativity and lifelong learning. Founded in 1962 as a support group for directors of children's museums in the United States, ACM has broadened its services and purpose as an international association. Currently, ACM has 466 members, of which more than 280 are children's museums based in the United States and abroad. For more than 100 years, children's museums have succeeded in their mission of stimulating curiosity and motivating learning in young children. The museums complement efforts in schools, childcare centers, and homes, enriching the lives and education of children. Currently, children's museums represent the fastest growing cultural institution in the United States. Over the last fifteen years, the number of children's museums in the United States has grown by 100%, reaching nearly 30 million children and families in 2004.

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