



NEWS RELEASE

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Children's Museum Professionals Explore Strategies for a Changing World at the Association of Children's Museums' *InterActivity* Conference

Children's museums, the fastest growing type of cultural institution in America, are quickly becoming recognized national leaders of innovation and creativity in learning. In addition to becoming town centers where families can learn together, children's museums are becoming the key institution in communities where children's creativity and hands-on, engaged learning is nourished.

As America shifts into a new economic era requiring lifelong engaged learning, what is the role of children's museums both as a community institution and a learning institution? As children's museums move toward the future, how will they ensure that their missions and business models allow them the flexibility and capacity to meet both the challenges and opportunities, including an increased demand for programs and services, that these changing times present?

For three days, May 3 – 5, in New Orleans, Louisiana, more than 500 museum professionals, educators and researchers will address these issues at *InterActivity 2004*, the annual conference of the Association of Children's Museums (ACM). The conference will be hosted by Louisiana Children's Museum.

"Over the last decade, children's museums have grown at an unprecedented rate, both in terms of physical space and in number of children and families served primarily because we are meeting a need and demand from families for a place where children can explore, follow their own natural curiosity and learn in an engaging way," said Janet Rice Elman, Executive Director of the Association of Children's Museums. "Our speakers at this conference are all at the forefront in the national discussion on the power of creativity and engagement in helping children and their communities shape the future."

Speakers at the conference will include:

- **Kevin Clash**, the creator and voice of Elmo from "Sesame Street" will accept the *Great Friend to Kids Award* and present a keynote address reflecting on the importance of providing children and families with sensitive and educational role models through the media. [May 3, 9:30 am]
- **Richard Florida, Ph.D.**, author of *The Rise of the Creative Class*, will discuss his theories about the "Creative Economy" and their implication for the future of cultural institutions like children's museums. [May 4, 10:00 am]

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- **Roberta Michnick Golinkoff, Ph.D. and Kathy Hirsh-Pasek, Ph.D.**, authors of *Einstein Never Used Flashcards: How Our Children REALLY Learn – and Why They Need to Play More and Memorize Less*, will explore the ways in which children are taught, and how they often run counter to scientific evidence about how children become active, lifelong learners. [May 5, 11:00 am]

Given the difficult economic times and ever-increasing competition, the conference will explore children's museums need to creatively strategize for the future with a lens toward issues of capacity and sustainability. *InterActivity 2004* will offer museum professionals the opportunity to examine and discuss strategies for success in the children's museum field, as well as explore trends on the horizon for cultural institutions as a whole. Keynote speakers will expand on this theme.

Elman continued, "From a professional development view, this conference will give us – both individual institutions and the field at large – insight into how children's museums will address future trends and challenges and how we can position ourselves to thrive in a changing world."

The *Great Friend to Kids Award* was initiated in 1991 by ACM to honor individuals and organizations that have made outstanding contributions toward strengthening education and improving the lives of children. ACM is pleased to present the *2004 Great Friend to Kids Award* to Kevin Clash, in recognition of his lifetime commitment to developing smart, sensitive and educational characters for children and families.

Four children's museums will be honored for their innovative programming and management practices that illustrate success in adapting to changing times. *The MetLife Foundation and Association of Children's Museums Promising Practice Awards* will be presented in a ceremony on May 4.

InterActivity 2004 is supported by Civil Society Institute, The Children's Museum of Houston, The Children's Museum of Indianapolis, Kids First!® Coalition for Quality Children's Media and Please Touch Museum®.

ACM is the professional service organization that endeavors to expand the capacity and further the vision of children's museums around the world. ACM's vision is to bring children and families together in a new kind of town square where play inspires lifelong learning. Founded in 1962 as a support group for directors, ACM has broadened its services and purpose as an international association with over 400 members.

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