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Children's Museums Develop Innovative Strategies to Thrive in a Changing World

MetLife Foundation and Association of Children's Museums Recognize Best Practices

Washington, D.C. – The Association of Children's Museums (ACM) is pleased to announce the winners of the *2004 MetLife Foundation and Association of Children's Museums Promising Practice Award*. The annual award honors innovative management and programming practices in children's museums and will be presented this year at the ACM InterActivity conference, May 3–5 in New Orleans, Louisiana.

This year's award recipients are the Please Touch Museum® of Philadelphia; Children's Museum of Pittsburgh and Children's Museum of the Brazos Valley in Bryan, Texas. Please Touch Museum® will receive a \$10,000 unrestricted grant, and Children's Museum of Pittsburgh and Children's Museum of the Brazos Valley will receive unrestricted grants of \$5,000 each. For the first time, an additional *Promising Practice Replication Award* was given to a previous year's winner, for continuing to sustain and build their promising practice. Madison Children's Museum, of Madison, Wisconsin, will receive an unrestricted grant of \$10,000.

Established in 1999, the *Promising Practice Award* provides recognition and inspiration for children's museums to develop programs that are inclusive, meet community needs, encourage community partnerships and promote lifelong learning. An impartial committee of museum professionals judges the award competition, which is open to nonprofit children's museums in the United States that are voting members of ACM.

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“This year’s theme explores the many ways children’s museums develop and sustain practices that help them change with the dynamic times impacting our field,” said Janet Rice Elman, ACM Executive Director. “We received more than 37 applications, many describing extraordinarily creative and innovate programs designed to help the museum adapt to changing dynamics within their communities and within the field as a whole.”

"We salute this year's recipients of the Promising Practice Award," said Sibyl Jacobson, president and CEO of MetLife Foundation. "The winning projects exemplify the many ways children's museums are adapting to increasing demand for programs and services from the community. Our grants are intended to encourage children's museums to continue in their effort to address the needs of their communities through partnerships and innovation."

Overview of 2004 Award-Winning Programs

Please Touch Museum (Philadelphia, PA) was selected to receive the \$10,000 award for their *ACES Program*, a work-based learning, enrichment and mentoring program for at risk, low-income teenagers from four of Philadelphia’s public high schools. *ACES* is a three-year program that helps students improve in school and successfully transition into higher education and meaningful employment. The students attend educational workshops and field trips in addition to working in a museum environment. The teams of teenagers, while broadening their own horizons, are also able to touch and impact museum staff and visitors alike. [Contact: Elaine Wideman Vaughn, Vice President, Education at 215.963.0667.]

Children's Museum of Pittsburgh (Pittsburgh, PA) was selected to receive a \$5,000 award for their *UPCLOSE Partnership* initiative, a program that partners the museum with Dr. Kevin Crowley and the University of Pittsburgh Center for Learning in Out-of-School Environments (UPCLOSE). It is extremely rare for a children’s museum to have an in-house, university-based director of research and evaluation. This partnership has allowed the museum to study how families use the facility and how its exhibits can support meaningful roles for parent participation in their children’s learning. The museum’s innovative partnership is an important contribution to the children’s museum field, and one that can be replicated in large and small, urban and even rural museum settings. [Contact: Jane Werner, Executive Director, at 412.322.5058 x 217.]

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Children's Museum of the Brazos Valley (Bryan, TX) was also selected to receive a \$5,000 award for their *Storytelling Guild* program—a program designed to develop strategic alliances with other service organizations that promote important life skills in individuals. Although many children's museums schedule storytelling events, the actual sponsorship and development of a Storytelling Guild through the museum as an integral part of their programming is unique. This initiative has helped the Museum promote literacy and at the same time, provides a venue in which other like-minded service organizations can come together and share ideas. [Contact Shawn Andaya-Pulliam, Executive Director, at 979.779.5437.]

Three additional museums will receive honorable mentions, which consist of a scholarship to InterActivity 2005. These museums are the Children's Museum of Portsmouth of Portsmouth, Maine, Children's Museum of Houston and Staten Island Children's Museum.

Madison Children's Museum (Madison, WI) was selected to receive the \$10,000 Replication Award for their *First Feats* exhibition, designed to create a safe, nurturing and inspiring environment for young children by using natural, non-toxic materials. Since the introduction of *First Feats*, evaluation data have reinforced MCM's commitment to "green" exhibit design. The award will fund the development of a web-based toolkit so that children's museums and other institutions can learn how to build green spaces. [Contact Brenda Baker, Director of Exhibits, at 608.256.6101.]

The Association of Children's Museums 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.

MetLife Foundation was established in 1976 by MetLife to carry on its longstanding tradition of corporate contributions to community involvement. Since its inception, MetLife Foundation has contributed more than \$230 million to support health, education, civic and cultural organizations throughout the country.

For more information on the *MetLife Foundation and Association of Children's Museums Promising Practice Award* contact ACM at 202.898.1080 or visit www.childrensmuseums.org.

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