

BREAKING THE MUSEUM MOLD TO CREATE GLOBAL CITIZENS
— *MetLife Foundation & Association of Children's Museums Awards 21st Century
Programming at Children's Museums* —

ARLINGTON, VA — Children's museums are innovating and redefining the traditional museum world by creating places where all kids can learn what it takes to become global citizens. The educational experiences are highly interactive, challenging whole families to step out of their comfort zone, and often don't take place at the museum at all. After a national search for exemplary children's museum efforts that help children develop 21st century skills, Stepping Stones Museum for Children, KidZone Museum and DuPage Children's Museum have each been selected as 2011 MetLife Foundation & ACM Promising Practice Award recipients. Grants totaling \$25,000 will be presented during an award ceremony on Thursday, May 19, at the InterActivity 2011: *Innovation is Child's Play* conference in Houston, Texas.

"Global citizens require strong literacy, cultural competency and STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) skills. Children's museums show children, families and schools how to effectively develop these skills through informal learning experiences," said Dennis White, MetLife Foundation president and CEO.

"Children's Museums engage children through play to think critically and creatively, which is key to nurturing the next generation of workers and leaders," said Janet Rice Elman, ACM executive director.

- Though technology is increasingly omnipresent in the lives of children, its use is frequently undirected or solitary and often does not achieve the greatest learning impact. The Multimedia Global Connections Initiative at **Stepping Stones Museum for Children (Norwalk, CT)** uses technology to create a fun, highly social context where kids build media and technology skills. The Initiative's inaugural project introduces children and their families to learn about tropical rainforests. The project features advanced distance learning technology capable of connecting children in the United States and Guatemala for an artwork exchange; a multi-media production explaining the lifecycle of a disease-curing plant; a "Rainforest Adventure" traveling exhibit; and partnerships with Rainforest Alliance and The Nature Conservancy.
- Knowing that children in school are often placed in classes by their language skills and that this segregation continues on through High School and can create stigma, **KidZone Museum (Truckee, CA)** decided it would engage underserved Latino families with young children. To recruit participants for its KidsReach program, KidZone Museum staff went to social service centers to meet target families and establish trust. To ensure regular programming, staff met families at their homes when roads icy. In three years KidZone Museum has increased its target audience reach by 500 percent, from serving 323 to 2,085 Latino children and parents a year. Participating children have gained needed school-readiness skills and are reported to be more comfortable playing with children who have a different background than their own.
- Recent research indicates that scores on math tests at age 5 or 6 are highly correlated with later academic success. **DuPage Children's Museum (Naperville, IL)** developed the Kindergarten Math Initiative to give kindergartener's in their county a head start toward developing math literacy. The public value of this program has been keenly highlighted as the recent economic downturn has made it difficult for schools to provide hands-on exploratory learning. At the same time, DuPage County became increasingly diverse — with more than 20 percent of its young children coming from immigrant families. Teachers report that the Kindergarten Math Initiative's hands-on experiences have led to more students meeting state learning standards in math, and have increased children's understanding of its usefulness in the real world.

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Additionally, three Promising Practice Honorable Mention museums will be recognized during the award ceremony and accept scholarships to InterActivity 2012, which is scheduled May 10-12, 2012, in Portland, Oregon.

- **Treehouse Museum (Ogden, UT)** was recognized for its One World Initiative that educates local children by sharing multicultural stories, providing immersive world geography exhibits and encouraging visitors to identify global connections close to home.
- **Children's Museum of Pittsburgh (PA)** was acknowledged for its Youth Empowerment Programs, including oneminutesjr™ and IHPE (International Heritage Photographic Experience), which empower children and teenagers to share their artistry and insights about our rapidly changing culture.
- **Bay Area Discovery Museum (Sausalito, CA)** was distinguished for its Connections Program, which delivers real-world STEM learning, the type of learning that fosters creativity in children, for low-income preschools students and their caregivers.

Finally, **Madison Children's Museum (WI)** will accept the 2011 Promising Practice Replication Award, which is open to previous Promising Practice Award recipients. Madison Children's Museums will use its \$10,000 Replication Award grant to develop an online toolkit based on its 2010 award-winning Only Local Initiative. The toolkit will provide other museums a roadmap to "go beyond green" by keeping building and exhibit projects, personnel decisions and museum purchases strictly within their community. Ideas for adopting museum processes that involve the local community and ways to evaluate sustainability and local impact will be included.

MetLife Foundation was established by MetLife to continue the company's long tradition of corporate contributions and community involvement. The Foundation supports programs that improve education, promote health, encourage parental involvement and family engagement, and help revitalize neighborhoods and stress accessibility and inclusion. The Foundation supports museums across the country because of the important role they play in educating people of all ages and the valuable resources they provide for schools and communities.

In an increasingly complex world, children's museums provide a place where all kids can learn through play with the caring adults in their lives. Association of Children's Museums provides leadership, professional development, advocacy and resources for its member organizations and individuals. Children's museums annually reach more than 30 million children and families. For links to ACM's international list of museums and information about InterActivity 2011, visit www.ChildrensMuseums.org.

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