



MAKING PLAY A PRIORITY: KABOOM! NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION NAMES KENNER AMONG 151“PLAYFUL CITY USA” COMMUNITIES

- COMMUNITIES FIGHTING PLAY DEFICIT BY IMPLEMENTING POLICIES TO INCREASE PLAY OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN -

September 29, 2011

For Immediate Release

Contact:

Ken Marroccoli, City of Kenner Parks & Recreation Dept., kmarroccoli@kenner.la.us, 504-468-7211

Mike Vietti, KaBOOM!, mvietti@kaboom.org, 785-320-2137 or 202-327-0086

WASHINGTON, D.C. – With only 1-in-5 children in the U.S. currently living within walking distance of a park or playground, 151 cities and towns, including Kenner, earned recognition from national non-profit KaBOOM! as 2011 Playful City USA communities for their efforts to increase play opportunities for children.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, play is important to healthy brain development and allows children to use their creativity while developing their imagination, dexterity, and physical, cognitive, and emotional strength. Today’s children spend less time playing outside than any previous generations in part because only 20-percent live within walking distance of a park or playground. This play deficit is having profound consequences for kids physically as well as mentally and socially because children need a place to play every day in order to be active and healthy.

A key platform in combating the play deficit is Playful City USA, a national program advocating for local policies that increase play opportunities for children. KaBOOM!, the national non-profit organization dedicated to saving play, created Playful City USA in 2007 to help local governments address the play deficit by ensuring their children have the time and space they need to play.

“Playful City in Kenner has been a source of pride and motivation to improve play opportunities for all children,” says Kenner Director of Parks and Recreation Ken Marroccoli. “As a designee for the fifth year in a row, we have been able to improve the existing play spaces and find ways to add new play spaces that will benefit the community as a whole. This has been a fantastic partnership over this time frame and we look forward to working hard in the future to keep this great status.”

Hailing from 38 states and one territory, the 151 Playful City USA honorees range in size from five-time honorees such as Atlanta and San Francisco to first-time recipient Gypsum, Colo. (population: 4,000). These Playful City USA communities are making a commitment to play and physical activity by developing unique local action plans to increase the quantity and quality of play in their community. In doing so, some of the most innovative concepts and cost-effective programs are being developed in Playful City USA communities.

In the fifth year of the annual program, 19 Playful City USA communities received recognition for the fifth consecutive year, while 24 earned honors for the fourth time, 29 for the third time, 30 for the second time and 49 claimed their first Playful City USA designation.

Each of the 2011 Playful City USA communities demonstrated creative commitments to addressing the play deficit. Playful City USA celebrates and highlights these unique initiatives developed by communities across the country. A primary goal of Playful City USA is to encourage cities and towns to share creative ideas, concepts and programs in an effort to increase play opportunities for children. City initiatives include:

Fargo (N.D.), West Fargo (N.D.), Moorhead (Minn.) – The tri-city region created a partnership within their Playful City USA application so that all three communities will turn city streets into playstreets at the StreetsAlive! festival.

Dothan (Ala.) – The city uses the community build model for all playground construction, which builds community cohesion and spirit, but also saves 20-25% on overall cost. The last build, a universally accessible playground, featured 400 volunteers and \$600,000 of community-raised funds.

Pittsburgh (Pa.) – The Pittsburgh Association for the Education of Young Children created a traveling playground program featuring the Imagination Playground system. The Imagination Playground rotates on a monthly schedule between schools and child development centers.

KaBOOM! also selected Kenner for its outstanding dedication to play. Kenner has several joint-use agreements with the school district through which the city and schools share playgrounds, parks and gymnasiums. The city realized a need for more space existed, but had little room to expand on its own property so the joint-use agreement was created to share space on school property.

“The play deficit continues to harm our children and stifle their mental and physical development, while directly facilitating the ongoing childhood obesity crisis,” said Darell Hammond, KaBOOM! Founder and CEO and author of The New York Times Best Seller [*KaBOOM!: How One Man Built a Movement to Save Play*](#). “These 151 Playful City USA communities have joined KaBOOM! in making a collective statement that we will no longer accept the misconception that play is a luxury when the reality is that play is an absolute necessity for children. Kenner is committed to the well-being of children and serves as an outstanding role model for the rest of America as we continue to strive toward the KaBOOM! vision of a great place to play within walking distance of every child.”

The 151 Playful City USA communities are now eligible for grants via Let’s Play - a community partnership led by Dr. Pepper Snapple Group to get kids active nationwide. The first Let’s Play initiative is a \$15 million, three-year commitment to KaBOOM!. Together, through Let’s Play, Dr. Pepper Snapple Group and KaBOOM! will build or fix up 2,000 playgrounds by the end of 2013, benefiting an estimated five million children across North America. Recipients of 2011 Let’s Play grants via the Playful City USA program will be announced on Monday, Sept. 19.

For more information on the KaBOOM! Playful City USA program, including Let’s Play grants and applications for 2012, visit www.kaboom.org/playfulcityusa. For more information on the City of Kenner Parks & Recreation Department, visit www.kenner.la.us.