

For immediate release

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FIRST LADY LAURA BUSH VISITS LOUISIANA CHILDREN'S MUSEUM

Spotlight on LCM efforts to improve children's post-Katrina mental health

Museum offers families safe haven from recovery

New Orleans, LA, January 7, 2007 – First Lady Laura Bush will visit the Louisiana Children's Museum (LCM) on Tuesday, January 9, 2007 to spotlight the Museum's efforts toward improving children's and families' mental health since Hurricane Katrina. LCM, in conjunction with the Children's Museum of Manhattan, recently opened the Play Helps program for children at specific schools in St. Bernard and Orleans parishes. LCM and Play Helps offer children and families therapeutic, structured ways to release stress and cope with the continuing ramifications of loss, displacement and rebuilding.

Children from two of those schools, Andrew Jackson Elementary in Chalmette, and Benjamin Franklin Math & Science Elementary in New Orleans, will participate in Play Helps activities at the Museum during Mrs. Bush's visit.

"Louisiana Children's Museum has become a safe haven for children, and really for families, in the wake of Hurricane Katrina," says LCM Executive Director Julia Bland. "Play is a very important way families can connect and can relieve the stresses of our everyday lives. We're all living under enormous burdens, especially children – who have had to grow up in ways no parent could imagine – and coming to the Museum is a way to return to the *real* work of childhood – play."

During her visit, Mrs. Bush will tour the exhibits and on-site Play Helps activities. She is also expected to talk with children visiting the Museum to gain a greater understanding of what activities have helped them cope. Bland and Dr. Valerie Wajda-Johnston, LCM psychologist and Tulane University Healthy Sciences Center Assistant Professor of Clinical psychiatry, will explain the purpose and function behind the art, construction, music and literacy workshops.

“Two things all children need – consistency and predictability – have been missing for many of us in the wake of Katrina,” says Dr. Wajda-Johnston. “When they don’t have these things, children manifest stress in many ways, from general anxiety to anger. One of the greatest ways to help children of any age is to let them be children. Play with therapeutic value that is developmentally appropriate can help children release and work through the effects of this experience.”

Since 1986, the Louisiana Children’s Museum has been New Orleans’ most playful place for children and families to explore, experience and learn. The Museum features more than 30,000 square feet of hands-on fun, engaging exhibits and exciting programs – all designed for curious kids of all ages. Pilot a towboat down the Mighty Mississippi. Shop in a pint-sized grocery story. Hoist yourself up a wall. Dine in a five-star, role-play café, create a masterful work of art and much more.

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Editor’s Notes:

Members of the media who would like to be part of the pool during Mrs. Bush’s visit may contact Bo Shannon at 816-896-5300 to submit credentials for consideration.

Louisiana Children’s Museum is open to the public Wed. – Saturday, 9:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m., Sundays 12 noon – 4:30 p.m.

*For more information on Museum activities and exhibits, call **504-586-0725** or visit us on the Web at www.lcm.org.*

More information on how to help your child and family cope with post-Katrina life can be found on the LCM website: www.lcm.org.