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MAYOR BLOOMBERG AND ARCHITECT DAVID ROCKWELL OPEN IMAGINATION PLAYGROUND AT BURLING SLIP

Mayor Michael Bloomberg and architect David Rockwell today opened Imagination Playground at Burling Slip, an innovative playspace conceived and designed pro-bono by Mr. Rockwell to encourage child-directed, unstructured free play. With a focus on loose parts, Imagination Playground offers a changing array of elements that allows children to constantly reconfigure their environment and to design their own course of play. The Mayor and Mr. Rockwell were joined by Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, Borough President Scott Stringer, Council Member Margaret Chin, Community Board 1 Chair Julie Menin and Parks & Recreation Commissioner Adrian Benepe.

“Imagination Playground is a dynamic new way for children to discover and create while they are playing and having fun,” said Mayor Bloomberg. “The playground continues the revitalization of Lower Manhattan, it furthers our *PlaNYC* goal to create new parks and open spaces, and it also reaffirms our Administration’s commitment to ‘Excellence in Design’ by collaborating with our city’s top architects, designers, and artists to create exceptional structures and spaces.”

“I am so proud to introduce the first permanent Imagination Playground,” said David Rockwell, founder and CEO of Rockwell Group. “As an architect, father and local resident, I am incredibly grateful to the City of New York and all of our partners for enabling the children of our community and beyond to play in a creative and collaborative space that is just plain fun.”

“The creation of Imagination Playground furthers our mission to cultivate the minds and bodies of young New Yorkers while demonstrating that once again New York City is the international leader in the design and construction of state-of-the-art playgrounds,” said Parks & Recreation Commissioner Adrian Benepe. “This project would not be possible without the partnership between the Rockwell Group and the Parks Department. Together we are bringing ‘free play’ to kids throughout the five boroughs with ‘Imagination Playground in a Box,’ a portable version of the flagship playground opening today in lower Manhattan. By bringing ‘loose parts’ parts into our playgrounds we create newer and better oases for imaginative fun and effortless fitness.”

“This truly interactive playground will stretch both the physical and creative capacity of our city’s youth,” said Manhattan Borough President Scott M. Stringer. “I am proud to stand today next to Mayor Bloomberg, Commissioner Benepe and architect and designer David Rockwell to celebrate a magical space that will teach our children valuable skills that will enrich their lives.”

(more)

The project was made possible by a \$4.5 million grant from the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation (LMDC), which is funded through Community Development Block Grants from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) also provided \$3 million for the relocation of two water mains and a sewer line into the adjacent street. The New York City Economic Development Corporation (EDC) played an instrumental role in coordinating this project, including giving up its parking lot as the site for the playground.

Imagination Playground provides a flexible environment for many types of play, rather than prescribed activities, through three key components: an open multi-level space with large sand and water features; a huge array of loose parts, essentially a variety of toys and tools; and trained staff on-site who maintain and manage the site. These elements enable children to play in an intuitive way: build something, tear it down, and start all over again. In addition to giving the playground design to New York City, Rockwell Group is raising, in collaboration with the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, an endowment fund to ensure that Imagination Playground is properly maintained for decades to come.

Rockwell Group's design and efforts have resulted in a playground that captures Burling Slip and South Street Seaport's rich maritime and commercial history, with elements such as a cascading water channel, a climbing rope, masts and pulleys, and a lookout ramp with telescopes. The built landscape also incorporates amphitheater seating and a "crow's nest" that has a double function as a storage unit for the playground's loose parts.

There is also a portable version of the playground called Imagination Playground in a Box, which consists of a kit of parts suitable for a variety of outdoor and indoor sites that offers an easy-to-install, cost-effective means to give children opportunities for unstructured, free play. David Rockwell has partnered with Darell Hammond of KaBOOM!, a national non-profit dedicated to saving play, to bring Imagination Playground in a Box to communities across the country. The first Imagination Playground in a Box was launched at the Brownsville Recreation Center playground in Brooklyn, NY in July 2008. In addition to many other sites in the U.S. and beyond, this summer there are Imagination Playground in a Box sets in 10 parks throughout all the New York City boroughs. For more information about Imagination Playground in a Box and an interactive world map of all the public sites where these sets can be found, please visit: www.nyc.gov.

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