



City of New York
Parks & Recreation
Michael R. Bloomberg, Mayor
Adrian Benepe, Commissioner

rockwellgroup



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ARCHITECT DAVID ROCKWELL AND NYC DEPARTMENT OF PARKS & RECREATION TO BREAK GROUND ON IMAGINATION PLAYGROUND, AN OASIS FOR CHILD-DIRECTED FREE PLAY AT SOUTH STREET SEAPORT ON MAY 7

Flagship Playground to Provide Children with a Creative Downtown Destination While Portable Imagination Playground in a BOX Rolls Out Across the Country

May 7, 2009 (New York, NY) - Architect David Rockwell of Rockwell Group, First Deputy Mayor Patricia E. Harris, New York City Department of Parks & Recreation Commissioner Adrian Benepe and Developer Kent Swig today announced that they will join local school children in the groundbreaking of the first-ever **Imagination Playground** (www.imaginationplayground.org), a paradigm shift in the community playground, at Burling Slip in the South Street Seaport area, as part of a public/private collaboration.

Imagination Playground is the product of over five years of David Rockwell's extensive research on play and playgrounds. It is a progressive concept in children's play that offers a rich environment of diverse materials that encourage unstructured, child-directed "free play," where children determine their own activities, alone and with their peers. After developing Imagination Playground, Rockwell Group approached the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, who collaborated to realize this new play space at Burling Slip in lower Manhattan.

"Imagination Playground at Burling Slip meets two of Mayor Bloomberg's major goals: innovative design and creative public-private partnerships to improve parks," said First Deputy Mayor Patricia E. Harris. "From skate parks to adventure courses, we are pushing the envelope on creative recreation throughout the five boroughs. Thanks to our successful partnership with the Rockwell Group and the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation we are creating a new template for children's play in New York City."

"Imagination Playground is an entirely new concept in playground design, allowing children to exercise their minds, as well as their bodies," added Adrian Benepe, Commissioner of New York City Department of Parks & Recreation. "The Burling Slip site at the South Street Seaport is an ideal location, given its status as an iconic family destination and as a rapidly growing 24-hour community. I would like to thank the Rockwell Group, the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, and everyone involved in making today's groundbreaking possible."

A complement to traditional playgrounds with fixed equipment for physically active play, Imagination Playground provides a flexible armature for many types of play, rather than prescribed activities. Imagination Playground has 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 Play Associates, trained staff on site who maintain and manage the site. These elements will enable children to play in an intuitive way: build something, tear it down, and start all over again. In addition to gifting the playground design to New York City, Rockwell Group has raised an endowment fund to ensure that Imagination Playground is properly maintained for decades to come.

“The groundbreaking of Imagination Playground is a dream come true for me both as a father and a designer,” said David Rockwell, founder and CEO of Rockwell Group. “Being keenly aware of the value of shared spaces and knowing firsthand about the types of play that engage children, Imagination Playground is proving to be a child-centered destination that fosters the type of creative, collaborative play that parents wish for.”

Rockwell Group’s pro-bono design and efforts have resulted in a playground that captures Burling Slip and South Street Seaport’s rich maritime and commercial history and engages the messy vitality that characterizes New York City’s dynamic waterfront, with elements such as climbing rope and a lookout ramp with telescopes. The built landscape also incorporates amphitheater seating and a multi-level “crow’s nest” that has a double function as a storage unit for the playground’s loose parts.

“It is of great personal pride and satisfaction to contribute something special to the children and families of the FiDi community, and to honor the memory of my twin brother, Bob, who passed away almost ten years ago,” said Kent M. Swig, President of Swig Equities, LLC.

The project is 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. The Department of Environmental Protection has also provided \$3 million for the relocation of two water mains and a sewer line into the adjacent street.

“This great playground will serve as a true urban oasis for our neighborhood’s children. We at LMDC remain committed to working with our wonderful partners in the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation to continue to provide outstanding parks, playgrounds and open spaces for the residents and visitors of Lower Manhattan. It is because of these types of great projects that this once business-only district has become a 24/7 thriving community that people not only work in but live and play,” stated Avi Schick, Chairman, Lower Manhattan Development Corporation.

The N.Y.C. Economic Development Corporation (EDC) has played an instrumental role in coordinating this project, including giving up its parking lot as the site for the playground.

“The Bloomberg Administration is implementing a long-term vision for Lower Manhattan that supports a 24/7 neighborhood with enhanced open space and improved infrastructure, and the Imagination Playground is an important part of that,” said Deputy Mayor Robert Lieber. “In addition to this innovative playground at Burling Slip, we are reconstructing the Fulton Street Corridor and helping small businesses revitalize their storefronts to improve the retail and pedestrian experience here. And later this summer, we will begin work on three additional parks to add to Lower Manhattan’s already vibrant character.”

Additionally, a portable version of the playground called Imagination Playground in a BOX, a product of a partnership between Rockwell Group and KaBOOM!, the nation's leading not-for-profit dedicated to bringing play back into the lives of children, is being piloted at schools and centers around the United States in Washington DC, New Orleans, Miami and New York. The first installation of Imagination Playground in a BOX was launched at the Brownsville Recreation Center playground in Brooklyn, NY in July 2008 and New York City's Department of Parks and Recreation is rolling out 10 more of them across the City, including the outer boroughs.

Imagination Playground in a BOX is a colorful container on wheels, reminiscent of trunks full of treasures. The sides and top of the boxes open to reveal a variety of loose parts such as foam blocks and sand and water tools, and found items such as tarps, fabric and milk crates, all of which may be layered into an existing playground.

"We think Imagination Playground in a BOX has the capacity to revolutionize the way kids play by fostering increased levels of creativity and cooperation, as well as a direct connection between children and their environment," said Darell Hammond, CEO and co-founder of KaBOOM!. "Working with Rockwell Group to implement Imagination Playground in communities across the nation has allowed us to come one step closer to a great place to play within walking distance of every child in America."

Imagination Playground is expected to open in summer 2010. For more information, visit www.imaginationplayground.org

Rockwell Group is an award winning, cross-disciplinary 140-person architecture and design firm specializing in cultural, hospitality, retail, product, and set design. Based in New York, with satellite offices in Madrid and Dubai, the firm crafts a unique narrative and an immersive environment for each project. Rockwell's interest in theater has informed much of the firm's work, including: the W Hotel, Union Square; Adour Alain Ducasse at The St. Regis New York; the central Marketplace of the JetBlue terminal at John F. Kennedy International Airport; Canyon Ranch Miami Beach; set design for the 2009 Oscar ceremony; the Kodak Theatre, Los Angeles; Nobu restaurants worldwide; set design for Broadway's "Hairspray," and the upcoming "Catch Me If You Can;" The Elinor Bunin-Munroe Film Center at Lincoln Center; the Walt Disney Family Museum; and the Imagination Playground initiative. David Rockwell is the 2008 recipient of the Smithsonian's Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum's National Design Award for Interior Design.

New York City Department of Parks & Recreation is the steward of almost 29,000 acres of land --14 percent of New York City --including more than 4,000 individual properties ranging from Yankee Stadium and Central Park to community gardens and Greenstreets. We operate more than 800 athletic fields and nearly 1,000 playgrounds; we manage four major stadiums, 550 tennis courts, 51 public pools, 34 recreation centers, 12 nature centers, 13 golf courses, and 14 miles of beaches; we care for 1,200 monuments and 22 historic house museums; we look after 500,000 street trees, and two million more in parks. We are New York City's principal provider of athletic facilities. We are home to free concerts, world-class sports events, and cultural festivals. For more information about Parks, visit our website at www.nyc.gov/parks.

KaBOOM! is a national non-profit organization that envisions a great place to play within walking distance of every child in America. Since 1995, KaBOOM! has used its innovative community-build model to bring together business and community interests to construct more than 1,600 new playgrounds, skateparks, sports fields and ice rinks across North America.

KaBOOM! also offers a variety of resources, including an online community, free online trainings, grants, publications and the KaBOOM! National Campaign for Play, which includes Playful City USA and Playmakers – a national network of individual advocates for play. Headquartered in Washington, D.C., KaBOOM! also has offices in Chicago and San Mateo, Calif. For more information, visit www.kaboom.org.

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