



A collaborative project of



www.worldforumfoundation.org/nature



February 23, 2009

Dear Colleague:

You are invited to attend a community forum on Saturday, March 28, 2009 from 8:30 AM to 1:00 PM at the Doubletree Hotel, 1 Bigelow Square, Pittsburgh, PA to discuss how Pittsburgh can become a model for connecting children and nature. This forum is being convened by Arbor Day Foundation (www.arborday.org) and Dimensions Educational Research Foundation (www.dimensionsfoundation.org) to raise community awareness and interest in efforts to connect children with nature and to improve the quality of early childhood experiences and children's health.

Research shows that when children have regular contact with nature they learn and grow better...physically, developmentally and in relationship to the natural world. Studies document numerous benefits children gain from spending time outdoors including: increased math and science skills; improved observation skills; enhanced balance, coordination, agility and other large motor skills; and improved concentration, even among children with behavioral challenges.

In October of 2006, participants from over 25 countries attended the Working Forum on Nature Education for Young Children. All concurred that fostering a love of nature in young children will help them become better stewards of the environment as adults. There was detailed discussion about the decline of outdoor play caused by poorly maintained parks in low-income neighborhoods and larger houses on smaller lots of land in more affluent neighborhoods, along with busy working families, overscheduled children and the influence of TV and video games. Participants agreed nature education is a way of helping the environment, bringing families and children together in healthy activities, reasserting the importance of free play in children's lives, and encouraging more physical activities to combat the growing obesity problem in children. They also took away numerous ideas about expanding outdoor learning opportunities and addressing a range of local concerns. One of those ideas was to host community forums to bring key decision makers from diverse backgrounds together to address effective ways to reconnect young children with the natural world. When the Working Forum on Nature Education reconvened in July of 2008, that regional forum model had generated action and interest in communities across the country.

Pittsburgh has long been a leader in education, conservation and children's health efforts. You have received this invitation as a member of a prestigious group of educators/administrators, conservationists, architects/designers and health care professionals who care about issues impacting young children. Our vision is to increase the connections between children and nature in backyards, neighborhoods, public spaces and educational settings as a means of enhancing early childhood education, public school education, family health and well-being, lifelong learning, community revitalization and environmental stewardship. Since 1998, Dimensions Educational Research Foundation has been studying how preschool and elementary children develop visual-spatial skills and how families and educators can best support this important learning. At the March 28 meeting, Arbor Day and Dimensions Foundation Nature Explore Outreach Director, Susan Wirth will describe the initiatives of demonstration sites and present a set of principles that can guide deliberations and strategies.

This forum has been made possible through generous support from Doubletree Hotels. Doubletree is also the proud sponsor of the new Traveling Exhibit, "Exploring Trees Inside and Out," which opened at the Children's Museum Pittsburgh on February 7, 2009 where it will run through April.



We hope you are able to join us on March 28th to help develop a plan that will put Pittsburgh in the forefront of this important global movement. Please complete the registration form by March 20, 2008 and return by mail or fax, or register on-line by going to <http://www.arborday.org/explore/nacc/register.cfm>. Please feel free to call or e-mail Lana Gilson at 402-873-8709 or lgilson@arbordayfarm.org if you have questions.

Sincerely,

Susan Wirth
Nature Explore Outreach Director