



**For Immediate Release**  
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***Smokey Bear & Woodsy Owl: Home Sweet Home***  
**Premieres at The Children's Museum October 1, 2016 – January 16, 2017**

**West Hartford, CT** – On Saturday, October 1, The Children's Museum will debut *Smokey Bear & Woodsy Owl: Home Sweet Home*, a new hands-on, educational exhibit in which two American icons come to life.

Created by Betty Brinn Children's Museum in collaboration with the U.S. Forest Service, the exhibit reinforces an important message: caring for the environment starts at home and children can be active participants in the process. Smokey Bear and Woodsy Owl highlight ways to reduce, reuse and recycle as they guide visitors through urban, woodland, and stream settings. The exhibit features a variety of educational activities (presented in English and Spanish), props, costumes, and puppets that underscore the importance of protecting ecosystems. Activities will be especially engaging for children ages 2 – 8, providing young children with open-ended play opportunities that help build fundamental academic, motor, and social skills.

“Smokey Bear has existed as an important educational icon almost as long as our Museum has served the community,” stated Michael Werle, Executive Director of The Children's Museum. “We're very excited to engage children, families, and schools with meaningful science and nature-based learning opportunities—especially through an exhibit that has such important, timely environmental and recycling elements.”

The U.S. Forest Service has a long and proud tradition of reaching out to Americans on behalf of conservation. Smokey Bear is perhaps one of the most recognized symbols, by both children and adults, for his wildfire prevention message; while Woodsy Owl's message covers multiple areas of conservation. As Gail Kimbell, Chief of the U.S. Forest Service notes, “we're working with partners on dozens of projects around the country to get kids away from the TV, away from the computer, away from their PlayStations and out into the forest—face to face with nature, up close and personal.” This immersive new exhibit will help bring kids to nature and nature to kids.

The Children's Museum will feature associated activities throughout the exhibit's duration, including programs and wildlife demonstrations at its West Hartford-based Museum as well as hikes and nature-based programs at its Canton-based location, Roaring Brook Nature Center. "We hope the exhibit inspires families to explore and care for the great outdoors together, which is why we are inviting visitors to also discover our trails at the Nature Center and learn more about what's in our own backyards," stated Jay Kaplan, Director of Roaring Brook Nature Center.

The Children's Museum will feature *Smokey Bear & Woodsy Owl: Home Sweet Home* on Saturday, October 1, 2016 through Monday, January 16, 2017. The exhibit is locally sponsored by Vernon D. and Florence E. Roosa Family Foundation, William and Alice Mortensen Foundation, Legrand, and Farmington Bank Community Foundation. More information on upcoming special educational programs and hikes can be found at [www.roaringbrook.org](http://www.roaringbrook.org) and [www.thechildrensmuseumct.org](http://www.thechildrensmuseumct.org).

### **At Home In the Great Forest**

Smokey Bear and Woodsy Owl greet visitors under a leafy forest canopy where visitors will learn the story of the real Smokey Bear and how human activities can impact our natural environment. A ranger's station and lookout tower, complete with a pretend two-way radio, interactive map, fire safety activity, computer workstation and sighting tube, encourage children to explore the roles of the forest ranger, cartographer and firefighter. Photos and video clips provide views of real forests, reforestation and areas affected by wildfires. On the nature trail, children make their way over a tipsy bridge, through a hollow log, and across a rock climbing wall as they discover the sights, sounds and creatures that live in the forest. Along the way, children can create a performance at Woodsy's puppet tree using audio effects, costumes and scripts that promote conservation messages. A pretend campfire and sing-along, stump seating, tent, camping gear and first-aid supplies provide ways for children to experience the fun of outdoor recreation, while learning the importance of safety. A stop at Woodsy's recycling station helps remind children to "leave no trace."

### **At Home in the Urban Forest**

A cityscape mural provides the backdrop for a pretend house with a small yard and garden shed that encourages visitors to explore the concept of urban ecology. Children can pretend to install green building materials, practice recycling and reducing water consumption, and discover the amount of energy it takes to power household appliances. In the yard, children can plant a tree sapling, turn the compost tumbler, and guide a pretend raindrop from the garden shed roof into a rain barrel that feeds a kid-sized plot of vegetables and flowers. Other backyard activities include creating a pretend picnic, assembling a birdhouse made of recycled materials, and enjoying a variety of related reading materials.

### **The Bridge Home**

A pretend bridge and stream provide a transition between the forest and urban settings, helping introduce the concepts of interdependence and our responsibility for protecting the environment. In and along the pretend stream, children can guide a pretend raindrop around rocks and logs to a beaver's dam, follow animal tracks, compare the differences in the urban and forest shorelines, learn about water safety, and pretend to fish from a kid-sized rowboat. A directional signpost provides information about local outdoor recreation venues.

### **About the Betty Brinn Children's Museum**

The Betty Brinn Children's Museum is a private, nonprofit organization dedicated to providing educational resources that promote the healthy development of children in their formative years – from birth to age 10. The Museum's mission is supported by the development of age-appropriate, hands-on exhibits and programs for children, and adult education programs that focus on early childhood brain development, learning styles, parenting skills and how the Museum environment can be used to promote a young child's cognitive, emotional, social and physical growth. The Museum has benefited more than 2 million children and adults since opening in 1995.

### **About the U.S. Forest Service**

The U.S. Forest Service is an agency under the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and as such is part of the federal government's executive branch. The mission of the U.S. Forest Service is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. The agency manages 193 million acres of public land and is the largest forestry research organization in the world.

Milwaukee is home to the Forest Service's Eastern Regional Office. The Eastern Region is one of nine Forest Service administrative Regions and consists of more than 12 million acres spread across 17 national forests and one national tallgrass prairie in the East and Midwest. The Region's Urban Connections Program, along with the U.S. Forest Service Washington Office, has worked with the Betty Brinn Children's Museum for more than two years to help bring this exhibit to life.

### **About The Children's Museum**

The Children's Museum and Roaring Brook Nature Center are the region's premiere destinations for exploration and education. Home to over 100 live animals, the Museum features hands-on exhibits, out-of-this-world digital planetarium shows, and programs for young children and families.

The Children's Museum and Preschool are located at 950 Trout Brook Drive in West Hartford and Roaring Brook Nature Center is located at 70 Gracey Road in Canton. More information is available at [www.TheChildrensMuseumCT.org](http://www.TheChildrensMuseumCT.org).

For more information on sponsoring an educational exhibit or program at The Children's Museum or Roaring Brook Nature Center, please contact Julie Barnofski Portfolio at [jportfolio@thechildrensmuseumct.org](mailto:jportfolio@thechildrensmuseumct.org) or (860) 231-2830 x510.

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