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100th playground planned

SUN HERALD

-- After Hurricane Katrina struck the Coast, KaBOOM!, a national nonprofit that helps communities build playgrounds, made a commitment to build 100 playgrounds in the areas hardest hit.

On June 14 in Bay St. Louis, KaBOOM! will reach this goal.

"When KaBOOM! began Operation Playground just three months after Hurricane Katrina struck, those outside the area were incredulous, believing that playgrounds were the last thing people needed in the midst of the devastation," said Darell Hammond, KaBOOM! CEO and co-founder. "But we knew that the Gulf Coast's youngest residents needed safe places to escape the stress of the rebuilding effort and reclaim their childhood."

On Dec. 17, 2005, more than 600 residents and other volunteers came together at Carol Vegas Park in Bay St. Louis to build a new playground, the first new permanent structure in the town after Katrina.

KaBOOM! and its partners then worked with community organizations to build playgrounds in cities from Houston to Mobile, with the generous support of donors such as Jim and Donna Barksdale, The Home Depot, Playworld Systems Inc., Fannie Mae, NBA Cares, the DJR Foundation, AmeriCares, ESPN and ING Direct. KaBOOM! has channeled \$8.2 million into the area and mobilized more than 21,399 volunteers.

Thirty-nine playgrounds were built in New Orleans alone, with 37 across the Mississippi Coast.

On June 14, KaBOOM! will lead its 100th Operation Playground project at Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Park. Like all KaBOOM! projects, the process started off with a design day where neighborhood children gathered to draw their dream playground. For this build, their pictures included a slide, a basketball court and a Ferris wheel.

"While their parents took their ideas into consideration, the Ferris wheel didn't make the cut," said Hammond. "This playground will give these neighborhood kids a great place to play every day. We also need to use victories like our 100th build to thank our committed sponsors and to draw national attention to the ongoing needs of those living in the Gulf."

The 100th and 101st playgrounds are two of seventeen playgrounds made possible by a partnership between KaBOOM! and the Mississippi Hurricane Recovery Fund, the Gulf Coast Community Foundation, Fannie Mae and the Foundation for the Mid South.

For more information, visit kaboom.org.

Operation Playground fact sheet

Operation Playgrounds has:

- Channeled more than \$8.2 million from Houston to Mobile.

- Reclaimed 118,932 square feet of park space and empty lots.
- Activated 21,399 volunteers who donated 185,661 hours of time.
- Moved, raked and compacted more than 13,666 cubic yards of mulch - enough to cover 77 football fields.
- Mixed and moved more than 8,614 bags of concrete by hand. That much concrete weighs more than 344 tons, or the same as 70 elephants.
- Installed more than 1,602 new play activities, including 272 slides, 41 Adventure Tubes, 148 Rock Blocks, 18 monorails, 92 bridges, 172 swings, 11 Superdomes, 6 Playwebs and 5 Boulders.

Mississippi parks:

15 cities, 37 playgrounds

- Bay St. Louis: 5 playgrounds
- Biloxi, Gulfport, Kiln: 4 playgrounds
- Gautier, Jackson, Long Beach, Moss Point, Ocean Springs: 2 playgrounds
- D'Iberville, Pascagoula, Pass Christian: 3 playgrounds
- Picayune, Saucier, Waveland: 1 playground each

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