



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **GRAND OPENING OF CITY OF ST. LOUIS' FIRST INCLUSIVE PUBLIC PLAYGROUND**

*It all began with feedback from the Variety Family Council. They couldn't find a public playground where their children with disabilities could play with their siblings.*

**ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI— October 7, 2005** — The City of St. Louis' first inclusive public playground is set to open Saturday, October 22 at 9 a.m. in Forest Park. St. Louis Variety, formerly Variety Club, announced the name of the playground - the Dennis and Judith Jones Variety Wonderland - at a July 26, 2005 groundbreaking in Forest Park. The general public is invited to attend. This all-inclusive playground is located adjacent to the Dennis and Judith Jones Visitor and Education Center, and across the street from the Dwight Davis Tennis Center in Forest Park. The playground was designed so that all children, able-bodied children and children with disabilities, could experience playtime together. St. Louis Variety identified seven local donors to fund the design and construction.

Secret donors of the "Big Challenge" play area will be announced during the grand opening. Also planned are two separate unveilings, one of which is a permanent artistic piece. The Variety Children's Chorus will sing, Variety's poster child, Libby, will join lead donors in burying a time capsule inside the playground and Variety child, Robbie, who has an augmentative speech device, will count down the ribbon cutting. Roaming characters will be on-site.

The \$2 million state-of-the-art playground design meets the newest national trends in playground design. It also meets all Forest Park guidelines. This first-of-its-kind playground in the City of St. Louis includes 29 pieces of equipment on a 10,100 square foot soft, porous surface. The playground is divided into several sections designed according to age, physical strength and abilities. One section called the "Secret Garden," will contain 14 colorful perennials that will attract, feed and house butterflies. This is particularly appealing because the butterflies will be free in a natural habitat. Learning stones will teach children about the life cycle of Monarchs.

Equipment includes a medal slide for children with cochlear implants, Braille and clock panels for the blind, talk phones, surface fountains and 8' high ramping so children can experience a tree house affect. Other equipment includes a spyro slide, double slide, corkscrew climber, swings with bucket seats, spring pods, disc swing monkey bars with a vertical ladder, a pipe barrier with a steering wheel, and more. The design team included Powers Bowersox Associates, Inc. (PBA) and HOK. The playground was constructed by BSI.

The Variety Family Council, a committee of St. Louis Variety, shared their challenges when attempting to take their children with disabilities to local public playgrounds. Children with disabilities could not play on public playgrounds. Instead, the children would watch their siblings play, or they would opt to stay home. The council, however, did not want a playground constructed solely for children with disabilities. They wanted an inclusive public playground where all children of all abilities in the Greater St. Louis region could play together. Playtime is one of the strongest teachers. Children will naturally learn about various forms of diversity, disability and acceptance while developing increased strength, coordination, confidence and social skills while playing in this educational wonderland.

Lead donors are Dennis and Judith Jones. Additional donors include Mary Ann Lee, Jill and Sam Hamacher, the Steven F. Schankman family, Ed and Margie Imo in honor of Mary Alice Jennings and family members in honor of Barbara Hagnauer Muckerman and Richard I.C. Muckerman. The "Big Challenge" area donors will be announced for the first time during the grand opening.

Formerly Variety Club, St. Louis Variety serves children with physical and mental disabilities in the Greater St. Louis region, whose needs would not be met, were it not for St. Louis Variety's sustained commitment. St. Louis Variety President, Tony Ponturo, is vice president of global media and sports marketing for Anheuser-Busch Inc. St. Louis Variety Executive Director is Jan Albus. Serving 1,300 families, St. Louis Variety helps children with physical and mental disabilities from infancy through the age of 21. St. Louis Variety provides medical equipment, transportation, on-going development programs and a resource referral center to help children with disabilities live as independently as possible. St. Louis Variety also provides financial support for 77 partner agencies whose programs benefit children with physical and mental disabilities. Serving a total of 200,000 local children, every dollar raised in St. Louis, stays in the Greater St. Louis region.

Established in 1928, Variety has grown to international prominence, helping children through 52 Variety chapters in 14 countries around the world, including chapters in Canada, England, Ireland, Israel, Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand South and West Australia and South Africa.

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