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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Virginia Museum of Natural History Hopes to Inspire Children's Interest in the Outdoors with aid of Harvest Foundation funding

Children & Nature Educational Network initiative will use nature to stimulate learning, family time among students and their parents.

Martinsville, VA (May 14, 2008) – In an effort to engage children to use nature as an educational laboratory, the Virginia Museum of Natural History and The Harvest Foundation announce a new initiative entitled the Children and Nature Educational Network. The Harvest Foundation has awarded VMNH a three-year, \$215,350 grant for a program that will offer children an interactive approach to outdoor learning that will complement the content they receive in traditional classrooms in the Martinsville and Henry County school systems.

Harvest Foundation Program Officer, John Estes, reiterated the importance of this grant collaboration. "This is a unique concept. The program and the partnerships that will be developed by the VMNH will be one of a growing number of efforts around the country that have a common aim of getting children and adults off the sofa and into exploring, learning about, and appreciating the local natural resources that exist around us."

VMNH has been remarkably successful in developing community events that have enabled the public to take advantage of the state-of-the-art facilities and exhibits that the museum has to offer. However, with the help of this initiative, the museum hopes to also shed light on how valuable a resource nature can be in education. Providing learning opportunities for children in an outdoor setting not only helps children appreciate the environment, but it has also been linked to helping them develop lifelong creative thinking skills as well as healthy and physically active lifestyles.

"Put simply, the purpose of the MHC Children and Nature Program is to provide more opportunities for children to learn, enjoy, and just *be*, outdoors," said Dr. Dennis Casey, director of education and public programs at VMNH. "Today,

people are spending less time outdoors and many of the experiences are now electronic or virtual. Without real-world, outdoor experiences, the knowledge and experiences communities enjoy from natural spaces will not be passed on to future generations. This program is designed to not only provide new programming but also to tap into the many existing resources our community has to offer. And, as a natural resource agency, this project is a great fit. We will be able to participate in other efforts both statewide and on a national scale that are aimed at re-connecting children and nature."

The Virginia Museum of Natural History in Martinsville seeks to increase understanding of and appreciation for the natural history of the Commonwealth through education, research, collections, publications and exhibits. The Museum is accredited by the American Association of Museums and is a member of the Association of Science-Technology Centers, Virginia Association of Museums, Heritage Preservation, and is an agency of the Secretary of Natural Resources for the Commonwealth of Virginia. For more information please call 276-634-4141 or visit www.vmnh.net.

The Harvest Foundation researches and responsibly invests in programs and initiatives to address local challenges in health, education, and welfare. The Harvest Foundation is dedicated to making Martinsville / Henry County the residence of choice by enhancing opportunities and quality of life for all its citizens. The Harvest Foundation was established in 2002 from the sale of the Memorial Hospital of Martinsville & Henry County. For more information, please go to <http://www.theharvestfoundation.org>

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