



NEWS RELEASE

April 11, 2011

CONTACT: Estella Espinosa
Work (832) 395-7022
Cell (832) 465-4782

“Festival of Abilities” Highlights **Mayor's Office For People With Disabilities Relocation** **Grand Opening of Vale-Asche Foundation Playground** **and New Adaptive Trail at MMSC**

Metropolitan Multi-Service Center A One-Stop Service Location for People With Disabilities

Mayor Annise Park, the Houston Parks Board and the Houston Parks and Recreation Department will celebrate the Grand Re-Opening of the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities, the new Vale-Asche Foundation Playground Without Limits, and the new Adaptive Trail at the Metropolitan Multi-Service Center (MMSC) with a ***Festival of Abilities on Saturday, April 16, 2011 at the MMSC, 1475 West Gray***. Festivities run from 9:00 am to 2:00 pm with a **special ribbon cutting ceremony** for the Vale-Asche Foundation Playground scheduled for **11:30 am**.

The Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities' primary mission is to make Houston the most accessible city in the nation by working to remove physical and attitudinal barriers at all levels of City government and throughout the greater Houston community. It recently relocated from downtown offices to the Metropolitan Multi-Service Center.

“I am excited that the City of Houston can provide amenities that any Houstonian can use,” said Mayor Parker. “The people with disabilities population deserve a happy, fun and interactive place to play a sport or just enjoy the beautiful outdoors. With the new Mayor’s Office for People with Disabilities in the same building, it’s a convenient one-stop-shop.”

The MMSC Playground Without Limits, allows children with physical and sensory disabilities a place to play and interact with their friends and family members. The playground is the gift of the Vale-Asche Foundation and is the second barrier-free playground in Houston funded by the Foundation.

"The Festival of Abilities will highlight the many services, activities and programs we have available at the Metropolitan Multi-Service Center for People with Disabilities both inside the building and outside," said Joe Turner, Director Houston Parks and Recreation Department. "The addition of the Vale-Asche Foundation Playground, the refurbished Beep Baseball Field and Tennis Courts and the new Adaptive Trail will extend the recreational and exercise programs we can offer our users. We are also very excited that the Mayor's Office for People With Disabilities will now be housed at MMSC. This gives us the ability to offer a One-Stop Service location where people with disabilities can receive a variety of services."

The Vale-Asche Foundation Playground Without Limits' bright and inviting play structures give children with different abilities the opportunity to interact with their peers on an elevated play structure and let their imaginations and personalities play freely. The playground features a wheelchair-accessible poured-in-place pad. Numerous ramps, bridges & large decks connect an array of play components including slides, climbers, play panels, balance beams and pods and a 38' curved sensory panel (approximately 4' tall).

"The addition of the Vale-Asche Foundation Playground Without Limits is greatly appreciated," said Chuck French, HPARD Adaptive Recreation Supervisor. "It is the shining star on top of a number of other improvements and additions that have been made to MMSC so that we can better address the needs of our user group. Inside the center we have resources for wheelchair basketball, a heated pool for exercise as well as a fitness center for use by people with disabilities. Now with the addition of the new Vale-Asche Foundation Playground and our new Adaptive Trail as well as the refurbished tennis courts and beep baseball field we will be able to offer numerous ways for people with disabilities to get exercise outdoors as well as inside the center."

The new adaptive trail is a 1650 linear foot trail of 10' wide concrete trail with sidewalk connections. It will be open to people of all abilities and its unique features will challenge people with mobility & vision disabilities to improve skills needed in every day life. The trail system will also provide a place where rehabilitation specialists can teach wheelchair & hand bike mobility skills like driving control, spatial awareness, road safety & back wheel balancing (a skill necessary for climbing curbs). The MMSC Adaptive Trail Project was funded in part by a \$100,000 Texas Park and Wildlife Department grant.

The Beep Baseball Field was refurbished by HPARD staff. The 28,000 sq foot field has been graded and leveled as well as resodded. A new irrigation system was also installed to keep the field maintained at a high quality and to provide a safe and level playing field for participants. The tennis

court has also been resurfaced and a return wall was installed. This will improve and provide a better court surface for participants who enjoy wheelchair tennis.

About the Playgrounds Without Limits Campaign

The Playgrounds Without Limits Campaign was created to address the limited play opportunities faced by children with disabilities. Philanthropist Carolyn Farb chairs the project which is designed to seek funding for playgrounds that exceed ADA requirements and allow children of all abilities the opportunity to play together on the same playground. The Houston Parks Board, a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization, working in conjunction with the Houston Parks and Recreation Department, oversees the funding and building of the playgrounds in City of Houston parks.

About the Houston Parks Board

The Houston Parks Board, a non-profit organization founded in 1976, is funded primarily by the generous donations of private donors including individuals, families, neighborhood groups, foundations and corporations. During its 35-year history, the Houston Parks Board has acquired and improved over 75 percent of Houston's parkland, expanding the city's park space by over 13,000 acres and making over \$75 million in capital improvements. The Parks Board works closely with Houston's Mayor and the City's Parks and Recreation Department in fulfilling its mission to create, improve, protect and advocate for parkland in the Greater Houston Region.

About the Houston Parks and Recreation Department

The Houston Parks and Recreation Department (H.P.A.R.D.) stewards and manages over 38,992 acres of parkland and greenspace for the City of Houston and develops and implements recreational programming for citizens of all abilities. For more information on Playgrounds Without Limits, Adaptive Recreation, or the Houston Parks and Recreation Department, call (832) 395-7022 or visit www.houstonparks.org.