

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 7, 2008

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**PLEASE TOUCH MUSEUM® AT MEMORIAL HALL WILL OPEN TO THE PUBLIC  
ON SATURDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2008**

**Museum will close its 21st Street home on Labor Day then bring its Play Patrol  
into the community during seven-week downtime**

PHILADELPHIA, PA – Nancy Kolb, President and CEO of Please Touch Museum, today announced Saturday, October 18, 2008 as the grand opening date for Philadelphia's new children's museum at Memorial Hall in Fairmount Park. The current Please Touch Museum at 210 N. 21st Street will close on Labor Day (Monday, Sept. 1), launching an ambitious seven-week moving period in which staff will prepare to open the new museum while continuing to serve its young audience through the Play Patrol, a 'mobile museum' appearing at community events throughout the Greater Philadelphia region.

"This is the realization of a ten-year dream," Kolb said today during a hardhat tour of the Memorial Hall construction site, where crews were busy restoring the marble floors of the Great Hall while exhibits were being installed in nearby galleries. "This extraordinary building has been through a lot over the years, and to see it now, at this stage of the restoration, is mind-blowing. I cannot wait to see the expressions on kids' faces when they walk in here and realize that this incredible museum is all for them."

The grand opening of Please Touch Museum, Memorial Hall will be the next chapter in the unique history of this National Historic Landmark, constructed to be the Fine Arts Gallery of the 1876 Centennial Exhibition and the first home to the renowned Philadelphia Museum of Art (1877-1928). Over decades, the architectural treasure became the community's recreation center with a basketball court and indoor swimming pool, and housed the Fairmount Park Commission and the Accident Investigation Unit of the Philadelphia Police Department. Please Touch Museum, itself founded in celebration of the Bicentennial in 1976, has embraced the challenge of creating a contemporary children's museum in the restored and revitalized building that embodies the spirit of the Victorian age. The museum's galleries will more than triple in size at Memorial Hall and the museum will also offer visitor amenities like on-site parking and a family cafe.

"This building was one of Philadelphia's first museums, and it is enormously gratifying to bring it full circle and make it a 'first museum' for children," said Laura Foster, Executive Director of Please Touch Museum. "Our exhibits and education staff has done a fabulous job of utilizing the grandeur of Memorial Hall to create active, hands-on learning experiences that bring the past, present, and future together."

Just like in the real world, at Please Touch® opportunities for learning are everywhere. Memorial Hall will be home to six exhibit zones: Roadside Attractions, which takes the familiar theme of transportation and integrates it into the experiences of working in a garage, driving a bus and designing vehicles; Flight Fantasy, where kids can row a flying machine, pedal a propeller bike or play hopscotch on clouds; City Capers, which offers a realistic urban environment with buildings from Philadelphia's skyline, a supermarket and medical center, and other 'neighborhood' activities; Wonderland, a ride down the rabbit hole into an enlarged version of the museum's current Alice exhibit; River Adventures, where children play with water, combining elements of science, nature and weather; and Centennial Exploration, a bustling train station filled with the sights and sounds of Philadelphia in 1876.

In Centennial Exploration, visitors can play with and explore inventions unveiled at the fair, including the telephone, the typewriter, and a model kindergarten, and make comparisons between the worlds of 'then' and 'now.' The highlight of this zone is a detailed scale model of the Centennial's buildings and fairgrounds as they appeared in 1876. This 20 x 30 foot model, built in 1889, is a miniature representation of the more than 200 buildings that stood in Fairmount Park for the Centennial, all but two of which are now gone.

Please Touch is currently putting the finishing touches on a new glass and steel Carousel House on the east side of Memorial Hall. The 9,000-square-foot addition will house the 1924 Dentzel Carousel that originally operated at Woodside Park, located less than 10 blocks from Memorial Hall. The carousel, which contains 52 hand-carved, multi-colored animals and two chariots, has been in storage for decades and was once in the collection of the Smithsonian Institution. The carousel is on long-term loan to Please Touch from the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. It is being restored by Todd Goings of Carousels & Carvings in Marion, OH.

This spring, Philadelphia artist Leo Sewell will be in the new museum's Great Hall building an incredible 40-foot-tall replica of the Statue of Liberty's Arm and Torch, created out of toys, games and other playful found objects. The subject matter of this 'monument to play' holds a special place in Philadelphia's history: The original Statue of Liberty Arm and Torch was displayed in Fairmount Park during the Centennial Exhibition, just up the road from Memorial Hall, as part of a fundraising effort to build the pedestal that now holds the full statue in New York Harbor.

This summer, Please Touch Museum will say farewell to 21st Street, its home since 1983, with a series of 'moving' events. The beloved SEPTA Bus will leave the gallery floor on Sunday, June 1. Visitors can enjoy story times and "Wheels on the Bus" sing-alongs, and decorate the museum's beloved icon as it gets it ready for its next stop, Memorial Hall.

In July, Please Touch Playhouse will debut a new theater show, The Moving Show, to prepare young visitors for the changes that come with a big move. Farewell activities will also be held on Labor Day weekend as Please Touch closes the doors on 21st Street. Children can still experience Please Touch Museum between Labor Day and Grand Opening. The museum's Play Patrol will bring the essence of the museum out on the road and into the community, with appearances slated in both the city and suburbs. Kids and their grown-ups can enjoy the Play Patrol's travel-sized version of the museum, including activities which represent the annual ABC Games, arts and crafts projects, self face-painting, story times and more. A full schedule of Play Patrol appearances will be announced this summer and will appear on the museum's website, [www.pleasetouchmuseum.org](http://www.pleasetouchmuseum.org).

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Please Touch Museum® is dedicated to enriching the lives of children by creating learning opportunities through play. Recognized locally and nationally as one of the best children's museums, Please Touch is open seven days a week from 9 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. through Monday, Sept. 1. Admission is \$10.95 for adults and children age one and over. Children under one are free. Please Touch Museum at Memorial Hall, 4231 Avenue of the Republic, opens to the public on Saturday, Oct. 18, 2008. For more information, please call 215-963-0667, or visit [www.pleasetouchmuseum.org](http://www.pleasetouchmuseum.org).

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