



January 4, 2011
For Immediate Release

Contact: Jessa Thomas,
Executive Director Keep Mesquite Beautiful
Telephone: (972) 329-8331

Lawrence Homestead Outdoor Classroom Earns National Certification As Nature Explore Classroom

(Mesquite, TX) –It was announced today that the Lawrence Homestead Outdoor Classroom in Mesquite, Texas, earned the national designation of a certified Nature Explore Classroom from the Arbor Day Foundation and Dimensions Educational Research Foundation. The space is a collaborative effort between Keep Mesquite Beautiful, Inc. and Historic Mesquite, Inc.

The national certification places the Lawrence Homestead Outdoor Classroom in a select circle. It is the first certified Nature Explore Classroom located in Mesquite, first Keep Texas Beautiful Affiliate to be certified in the state of Texas and the first to be constructed at a historical park in the United States. The first Nature Explore Classroom is located in the Tree Adventure attraction at Arbor Day Farm, the Arbor Day Foundation's interactive conservation venue in Nebraska City, Neb.

Nature Explore Classrooms are part of the Nature Explore program, a collaborative project of the Arbor Day Foundation and Dimensions Educational Research Foundation. Developed in response to the growing disconnect between children and nature, certified Nature Explore Classrooms are designed to help fill the void by educating young children using research-based principles for integrating nature into their daily learning.

These classrooms, which are being developed across the country, offer interactive elements – including musical instruments made of natural materials, climbing structures, wooden blocks,

small waterways, garden areas, and natural materials for building and creating art – that give children important and inspiring nature experiences. While connecting children with nature, such unstructured play and activities are shown to enhance concentration, develop creativity and problem-solving, relieve stress, and improve skills in many areas.

The Lawrence Family Homestead is located at 701 E. Kearney Street in Mesquite. Outdoor classrooms that are designed according to principles described in the Dimensions Foundation’s *Learning With Nature Idea Book* are eligible to become certified Nature Explore Classrooms. In a certified Nature Explore Classroom, children can create visual masterpieces in a nature art area, build with natural materials, climb on natural structures, and practice their balance, agility, and creativity in areas designed for music and movement.

“Keep Mesquite Beautiful, Inc. and Historic Mesquite, Inc. have taken an important leadership role in a profoundly needed initiative to connect young children with nature, setting a wonderful example for education centers across the country,” said Susie Wirth, Nature Explore outreach director for the Arbor Day Foundation. “Everyone at the Arbor Day Foundation and Dimensions Educational Research Foundation appreciates the commitment these two organizations have made to the Nature Explore program and to providing nature education opportunities for young children.”



Pictured: Mesquite ISD third grade students explore the Lawrence Family Homestead Outdoor Classroom during a field trip.

The mission of **Keep Mesquite Beautiful, Inc. (KMB)**, in affiliation with Keep America Beautiful and Keep Texas Beautiful, is to educate and engage individuals to take responsibility for improving their community environment. **KMB’s** vision is to make Mesquite the cleanest, most beautiful city in which to live, work and visit.

-end-