



MEDIA ALERT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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EARLY LEARNING COALITION OF PASCO AND HERNANDO COUNTIES, INC. HOSTS FREE “STORYBOOK FOREST” EVENT AT CREWS LAKE WILDERNESS PARK

The event is in honor of Children’s Week 2012, a statewide celebration of Early Childhood Education that brings awareness to legislators and community leaders.

The Early Learning Coalition of Pasco and Hernando Counties, Inc. is hosting its 3rd annual “**Storybook Forest**” event on **Saturday, February, 4 from 11 AM to 2 PM**, at Crews Lake Wilderness Park, 18739 Crews Lake Drive, Spring Hill, 34610, to support Children’s Week and Early Childhood Literacy.

The Coalition will open the park’s train to guests, conducted by Central Pasco & Gulf Railroad (CP&G), a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving railroad heritage. CP&G typically operates the train on the 2nd Saturday of each month.

Other **FREE** entertainment includes:

- Hula Hoop Fitness class (for all ages)
- Appearance by Clifford the Big Red Dog
- Appearance by McGruff of the Pasco County Sheriff’s Office
- Storytelling by costumed Storytellers
- Puppet shows by experienced Puppeteers

Early Childhood Educators in Pasco and Hernando counties will create interactive displays based on children’s novels. Children will learn about the story and create a related make-and-take project at each display. Past stories have included “Jack and the Beanstalk,” “Cat in the Hat,” and “Where the Wild Things Are.”

Thanks to sponsors including Target, Paul & Jerry’s Storage and UPS, **The Storybook Forest** offers a **FREE** afternoon of family fun, including:

- **FREE** VPK Registration
- **FREE** Music
- **FREE** Crafts
- **FREE** Food

Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) is a **FREE** program for all children four years old on or before September 1 of the program year. There are no income requirements to be eligible for VPK.

Storybook Forest guests planning to register children for VPK for the 2012-2013 must bring proof of age (such as a birth certificate) for each child as well as proof of residence. For more information about accepted documents or to view the VPK application, visit www.phelc.org/VPK.

The Storybook Forest is one of hundreds of events held throughout Florida to celebrate Children’s Week (January 29—February 3) by raising awareness for children’s issues.

“Children’s Week activities put a much needed spotlight on issues facing our children,” said Children’s Week organizer Jason Zaborske. “This is a great opportunity to bring thousands of parents, children, professionals, advocates, community leaders and concerned citizens together to share valuable knowledge and information about children’s issues across the state and in our state Capitol.”

To learn more about Children’s Week, visit www.ChildrensWeek.org.

For more information about this event, contact Sharon Hayes at (727) 233-8291 or s.hayes@phelc.org.

For more information about the ELC and its services, visit www.phelc.org.

The Early Learning Coalition of Pasco and Hernando Counties, Inc. is one of 31 Early Learning Coalitions in Florida. It works to ensure that programs and services are available to assist families with young children during their formative years. Florida’s Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) program is for all children who are four-years old on or before September 1st. School Readiness provides assistance for low-to-moderate income working families by paying a portion of the childcare costs on a sliding fee schedule. Starting as separate organizations in 2000, Pasco and Hernando counties joined forces to form the Early Learning Coalition of Pasco and Hernando Counties in 2005. The non-profit serves over nine thousand children between infancy and five years old, working with over 300 providers in the counties.

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