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***FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE***

**ARCHITECT DAVID ROCKWELL & NYC PARKS DEPARTMENT  
TO RESHAPE CHILD'S PLAY WITH  
IMAGINATION PLAYGROUND AT SOUTH STREET SEAPORT**

***LOOSE PARTS and PLAY ASSOCIATES  
ALLOW FOR CREATIVITY AND EXPLORATION***

Tuesday, February 20, 2007 (New York, NY) – Architect David Rockwell of Rockwell Group Architecture and Design and the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation today announced that they were given approval today by the Landmarks Preservation Commission to create **Imagination Playground**, a paradigm shift in the community playground, at Burling Slip in the South Street Seaport area, as part of a public/private collaboration. The Landmarks meeting was the final hurdle in a series of community board meetings that provided the necessary approvals for a playground designed to complement traditional playgrounds with their fixed equipment for physically active play, while also presenting a way for children to play in diverse and creative ways in an environment that can be manipulated. This will be a destination where kids will be able to do what they love best: explore, invent, build and dream.

Imagination Playground has three key components: an open multi-level space with large sand and water features; a huge array of “loose parts”, essentially toys and tools; and play associates, trained staff on site who set the stage for children to engage in self-directed play. Rockwell Group and the City worked with experts in the fields of play, including Roger Hart, co-director of the Children's Environments Research Group ([www.cerg1.org](http://www.cerg1.org)) and professor of environmental psychology at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, and Susan Solomon, author of *American Playgrounds: Revitalizing Community Space*, to design Imagination Playground as a place to enhance a child's play experience by creating an environment that is interactive, engaging and constantly transformed.

“It was an incredible experience to collaborate with our partners at City Parks,” said David Rockwell, CEO of Rockwell Group. “We are proud to be at the forefront of a growing movement in the U.S. to shift the way we think about children's play. And as a creative firm that exists to design places for people to gather and share experiences, as well as for me as a father, it was truly exciting to turn our attention to a less well-served group—children.”

“We were very excited when Rockwell Group approached us about working together to create a new template for children’s play in the City,” said Adrian Benepe, Commissioner of New York City Department of Parks & Recreation. “We viewed the Burling Slip site at the Seaport as an ideal location, given its status as an iconic family destination and a booming residential district as well.”

Over the last decade, the South Street Seaport residential population has swelled more than thirty-five percent. More than 15,000 apartments are being added to the area, drawing a growing number of families with children under nine, the age group Imagination Playground is meant to serve.

Given that the playground is located at the Seaport, Rockwell Group’s design captures Burling Slip’s rich maritime and commercial history and engages the messy vitality that characterizes New York City’s dynamic waterfront, with elements such as climbing ropes and a lookout ramp with telescopes. The built landscape also incorporates amphitheater seating and a multi-level “crow’s nest” that has a double function as storage for loose parts.

The Imagination Playground is designed to suggest options and provides a flexible armature for many types of play, rather than prescribed activities. In its place are the raw materials of creativity and sensory exploration, including sand and water, as well as play props, including building blocks, buckets, shovels, wheelbarrows, and other safe tools that facilitate children’s play. These elements will enable children to play in an intuitive way: build something, tear it down, and start all over again.

“Free play”, where children direct their own activities, alone and with their peers is fundamentally important to their social, intellectual and emotional development” said Hart, a consultant on Imagination Playground. “If we design a diverse environment, rich with “loose parts”, it will afford them with a range of opportunities for free play that is much more varied than just running, climbing, sliding and swinging, and they will play for hours!”

Successfully implemented in European models, “play associates” will staff the Imagination Playground. These trained adults will work with the children, spurring their imaginations, by creating and managing “the stage” for their play. Play associates are an important part of the Imagination Playground concept, allowing children to play in cities in ways that would not be possible without a staff to make play resources available and well-maintained. Like the beloved “Parkies” the City stationed at playgrounds to distribute sports and play equipment in the 1970s, the play associates will circulate through Imagination Playground to provide children with safe tools and props that can be used for digging, molding, hauling sand or carrying water, so that the children poised to discover new ways to play, whether it is their 50th visit or their first.

Imagination Playground was initiated as a pro-bono project by the Rockwell Group. The Lower Manhattan Development Corporation has provided a grant for the construction of the Playground. Rockwell and the City are seeking to raise additional monies for an endowment. Construction is slated to begin late 2007.

**Rockwell Group** is an award winning, cross-disciplinary 200-person architecture and design practice founded by David Rockwell. Based in New York City, Rockwell Group specializes in hospitality, cultural, healthcare, theater and film design. Recent commissions include the Children's Hospital at Montefiore, a series of public school libraries for the Robin Hood Foundation's Library Initiative, the Ertegun Jazz Hall of Fame at the Time Warner Center; Town restaurant and Chambers hotel (New York City); W New York and W Union Square (New York City); the renovation of the FAO Schwarz Flagship on Fifth Avenue; Cirque du Soleil (Orlando, Florida); the Broadway musicals "Hairspray" and "Dirty Rotten Scoundrels"; the Academy Awards' Kodak Theatre; and numerous restaurants located internationally including New York restaurants Nobu Fifty Seven, Country, Bar Americain, as well as Gordon Ramsay's Maze in London and Roppongi Hills in Tokyo.

**New York City Department of Parks & Recreation** is the steward of almost 29,000 acres of land --14 percent of New York City --including more than 4,000 individual properties ranging from Yankee Stadium and Central Park to community gardens and Greenstreets. We operate more than 800 athletic fields and nearly 1,000 playgrounds; we manage four major stadiums, 550 tennis courts, 51 public pools, 34 recreation centers, 12 nature centers, 13 golf courses, and 14 miles of beaches; we care for 1,200 monuments and 22 historic house museums; we look after 500,000 street trees, and two million more in parks. We are New York City's principal provider of athletic facilities. We are home to free concerts, world-class sports events, and cultural festivals. For more information about Parks, visit our website at [www.nyc.gov/parks](http://www.nyc.gov/parks).

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