



The LeFleur's Bluff Playground, a Gift for Mississippi's Children, Opens This December



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Jackson, Miss. – A new state-of-the-art playground will open at the LeFleur's Bluff Education and Tourism Complex on Friday, December 10, 2021.

The LeFleur's Bluff Complex is the shared campus between the MDWFP's Mississippi Museum of Natural Science (MMNS) and the Mississippi Children's Museum (MCM). The multi-purpose complex will be used for recreational and educational activities featuring a playground, an outdoor pavilion, and a museum walking trail.

Children who play and learn in nature are more physically active, more engaged in learning, and more emotionally healthy. "Outdoor experiences build visual-spatial skills, strengthen observation and creativity, improve concentration, and enhance motor and imagination skills," said Angel Rohnke, Director of the LeFleur's Bluff Complex.

The first phase of the project is a 21st century playground which will feature 80 play activities, 73 of these features will be inclusive to children with accessibility needs. A custom We-Go-Swing will allow accessibility to children with and without wheelchairs.

The 30,000-square-foot playground is separated into different play areas based on age, for children ages 6 months to 12 years old. The playground features a unique play structure for ages 6-23 months, the Wedra, which is the first play structure in the world with this design. Another feature is the Hedra[®] Tower, which is designed for children ages 5-12 and is the fourth play structure in the country with this design. Shade structures cover 75 percent of the playground, making the area below up to 30 degrees cooler for year-round outdoor play.

"All structures on the playground promote physical activities - from providing greater freedom to run, jump, and climb, to supporting reduced stress levels," said Emily Hoff, Executive Director for the Mississippi Children's Museum.

The Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation is the signature sponsor of the LeFleur's Bluff Playground, Outdoor Pavilion and Museum Trail. The Foundation's generous \$3.86 million grant for improving the health and well-being of Mississippians made this innovative project possible.

"The LeFleur's Bluff Playground, Pavilion, and Museum Trail align with the Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation's strategic focus to provide sustainable health and well-being opportunities for Mississippians," said Sheila B. Grogan, Foundation President. "Encouraging children, families and others to spend more time outside engaging in fun play activities, taking a walk develops life-long positive attitudes about maintaining healthy lifestyles."

Beginning December 10, the LeFleur's Bluff Playground will be open seven days a week (M-F: 8 a.m. - 5 p.m., Sat: 9 a.m. - 5 p.m., and Sun: 1 p.m. - 5 p.m.) Parking is available in the park and at both museums. Admission to the park is free and open to the public. MCM and MMNS welcome you to visit both museums during your visit to the park.

Spotter's Adventure Trail (a museum walking trail) and The Den (an outdoor pavilion) are scheduled to open in early summer 2022.

The 8-foot-wide Spotter's Adventure Trail will be located east of the playground and will lead the way to conveniently visit both museums and the playground. The trail will feature a fun and interactive outdoor experience with Spotter the Otter and friends.

The Den will be located west of the playground and will include tables and seating for up to 50 students. The Den will be used for field trips, events, and programs by both museums, including the award-winning Mississippi Science Festival. An adjacent sloped lawn allows the structure to be used as an open-air amphitheater for large assemblies.

About Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation

The Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation has a vision for a healthy Mississippi and provides targeted grants to fund initiatives and programs to improve the health and well-being of Mississippians. Through its vision and mission, the Foundation is impacting Mississippi's communities and taking a leadership role in setting the future course for healthy living among all Mississippians. Visit www.healthiermississippi.org to learn more about the Foundation or its initiatives and programs.

About Mississippi Wildlife, Fisheries, & Parks Foundation

The mission of the Mississippi Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks Foundation is to augment the state's efforts to ensure the conservation and enhancement of our fish and wildlife resources so they survive and thrive for current and future generations.

About the MDWFP's Mississippi Natural Science Museum

The Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks' Museum of Natural Science is located in Jackson, tucked within historic LeFleur's Bluff State Park. The museum overlooks a 300-acre natural landscape, an open-air amphitheater, and 2.5 miles of nature trails. Inside, enjoy face to face encounters with more than 200 species of live fish, turtles, alligators, and other animals in a 100,000-gallon aquarium network of underwater habitats. Explore 73,000 square feet of exhibits featuring natural Mississippi settings filled with native plants and wildlife including deer, waterfowl, fossils, and Mississippi's endangered species. For nearly 90 years, the museum has thrilled and entertained visitors while pursuing its mission to promote understanding and appreciation of Mississippi's biological diversity through collections, research, scientific databases, education, and exhibits; and to inspire the people of our state to respect the environment and to preserve natural Mississippi. The museum is accredited by the American Alliance of Museums and is a member of the Association of Science - Technology Centers. Please visit www.mdwfp.com/museum for more information about the museum.

About the Mississippi Children's Museum

The Mississippi Children's Museum (MCM) is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that provides unparalleled experiences that ignite a thirst for discovery, knowledge, and learning in all children. MCM is dedicated to inspiring Mississippi's children from all backgrounds to discover and achieve their potential. The museum features 40,000 square feet of exhibit space designed around five primary initiatives: Literacy, STEM, Health and Nutrition, Cultural Arts, and Mississippi History. The museum's exhibits, programs, and outreach opportunities provide engaging, explorative, hands-on educational activities for children of all ages. To learn more about MCM visit www.mschildrensmuseum.org.