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Family Festival Brings Children of All Abilities Together

WASHINGTON, May 13, 2009 – Vibrant art workshops and dynamic stage performances will enliven the Kogod Courtyard of the Smithsonian American Art Museum from June 5-6 as *VSA arts* presents its annual Start with the Arts Family Festival. Named after Start with the Arts, *VSA arts*' early childhood educational resources for teachers and parents, the festival spotlights the work of performing and teaching artists with disabilities and brings children of all abilities together through the arts. This year's festival goes "green," with activities focused on helping take care of the Earth.

"*VSA arts* is committed to creating opportunities for all people to come together and create together. The Start with the Arts Festival allows us as a community to celebrate creativity," said Soula Antoniou, president of *VSA arts*. "This year's art activities are especially relevant, as our society tries to be more environmentally friendly."

The 2008-2009 *VSA arts* Teaching Artists Fellows and others will lead lively, interactive art workshops on both days. Children of all ages can decorate their own canvas bag with Karen Brown and Kong Ho. Fran Sillau and Shaq Kalaj will bring participants on a creative journey involving storytelling and the visual arts as they delve into the adventures of Anansi the Spider. Children and adults alike can make and play musical instruments from household materials with Derek Mortland and Glenn McClure.

On Friday only, environmental arts troupe Bash the Trash will teach children how to create musical instruments from recycled materials and then give a concert with these unique instruments.

Family-friendly performances are also scheduled throughout Saturday. Featured performers include The Dancing Wheels Company and **Little Theatre of the Deaf**. The Dancing Wheels Company revolutionizes the concept of physically integrated dance, opening the doors for thousands of artists with and without disabilities to perform together on an equal basis. **Tony Award®-winning Little Theatre of the Deaf will present its new production *Tree Wise*, which tells the story of a boy who has Deaf parents and has made a friend at school. Through the help of an extraordinary tree, the boy learns how to help his new friend and classmates understand more about Deaf culture. The tree teaches sign language to the children (and audience) through games.**

Concurrently, the children's art exhibition "Celebrating Who I Am" is also on display at Union Station, 40 Massachusetts Ave., N.E., from June 1-21. The exhibition includes artwork from a child in each state and the District of Columbia who were selected in response to *VSA arts*' and CVS Caremark All Kids Can's joint call for art earlier this year. Reproductions of ten pieces of artwork from the Union Station exhibition will also be on display in Kogod Courtyard.

The festival is free and open to the public from 11:30 a.m.-5 p.m. both days. The Smithsonian American Art Museum is located at 8th and F Streets, NW. For more information, please visit www.vsarts.org or call (202) 628-2800.

VSA arts is an international nonprofit organization founded 35 years ago by Ambassador Jean Kennedy Smith to create a society where people with disabilities learn through, participate in, and enjoy the arts. VSA arts provides educators, parents, and artists with resources and the tools to support arts programming in schools and communities. VSA arts showcases the accomplishments of artists with disabilities and promotes increased access to the arts for people with disabilities. Each year millions of people participate in VSA arts programs through a nationwide network of affiliates and in 54 countries around the world. VSA arts is an affiliate of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. For more information about VSA arts, visit www.vsarts.org.

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