



**BlueCross BlueShield
of Kansas Foundation**

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FOR RELEASE: UPON RECEIPT

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TO: *Kansas Media Outlets*

**SUNFLOWER FOUNDATION,
BLUE CROSS AND BLUE SHIELD OF KANSAS FOUNDATION
FUND OUTDOOR EXPANSION
OF KANSAS CHILDREN'S DISCOVERY CENTER**

Two state-based foundations with a common mission of improving the health of Kansans are assuring that visitors to the Kansas Children's Discovery Center (KCDC), Topeka, will have the opportunity to experience the benefits of walking by making major donations to the center's Outdoor Learning Environment.

The Sunflower Foundation: *Health Care for Kansans* and the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas Foundation each provided a leadership gift to fund the cornerstone piece of the Discovery Center's 4.5 acre outdoor space, according to B. Kent Garlinghouse, KCDC founding board chair. The Sunflower Foundation contributed \$100,000 and the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas Foundation donated \$50,000, allowing for today's outdoor groundbreaking.

The Outdoor Learning Environment's master plan features spaces for children to climb, run, dig and explore the great outdoors. Fabric canopies, musical instruments, bridges, water, grassy hills and native plantings will create a hidden oasis that children "discover" along a yellow walking path and among the trees in the outdoor space surrounding the Discovery Center's building at 4400 SW 10th St., in Topeka's Gage Park.

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Garlinghouse said funding from the two foundations will ensure that the Yellow Concrete Walking Path is in place when the Discovery Center opens June 1. The walking path connects all outdoor exhibit areas and the perimeter fence ensures a safe and secure environment for visitors. A learning plaza, which also will serve as an outdoor lunch patio, will allow a myriad of outdoor programming.

“These leadership gifts, along with previous support from the Kansas Health Foundation (KHF) and the Greene Family of Topeka, fulfill the first major step in completing the outdoor space,” said Joanne Morrell, KCDC executive director. “I want to personally thank Billie Hall (Sunflower Foundation), Andy Corbin (BCBSKS Foundation), Steve Coen (KHF) and their respective boards for their tremendous leadership and vision – not only for the Discovery Center but for the overall health of our great state.”

Morrell added that it was Hall, president and CEO of the Sunflower Foundation, who suggested the outdoor space include a walking path for young children and their adult companions.

“Outdoor play is so important to children and their health,” Hall said. “The idea of a walking path seemed a perfect fit to the center, providing children and their families the opportunity to enjoy the beautiful outdoor environment and, at the same time, reaffirming the importance of physical activity.”

For Corbin, president of the BCBSKS Foundation, supporting the Discovery Center was a natural fit for the foundation’s mission.

“Creating opportunities for our children to be more physically active is critical to combating childhood obesity and to improving the overall health of future generations of Kansans,” Corbin said. “The Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas Foundation is pleased to assist the Discovery Center in providing the infrastructure for the outdoor exhibits, including the walking path.”

With the key infrastructure in place, Morrell said, remaining items to be added to the outdoor environment include a 13’ x 30’ indoor/outdoor sunflower climber, a 1/3 acre nature explore classroom, an airplane/control tower, and adventure treehouse, a paleontology dig and the tin man outdoor water area.

These recent gifts increased the center’s fundraising total to more than \$7.1 million.

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“The drive to attain the Mabee Challenge grant created extraordinary community momentum on which the Discovery Center continues to capitalize,” Garlinghouse said. “There are many whose interest heightens the closer we get to the grand opening, and we are grateful for their enthusiastic support.”

Morrell added that building construction is 99 percent complete and exhibit installation is 75 percent complete; crews remain on pace for the Discovery Center’s grand opening June 1. Visit www.kansasdiscovery.org for more information.

About the Kansas Children’s Discovery Center

The Kansas Children’s Discovery Center will open to the public June 1. Its 15,708 square foot building is nestled within four wooded acres of Topeka’s Gage Park, on land generously donated by the City of Topeka. Through educational and interactive exhibit areas, the Discovery Center will provide numerous opportunities for “Serious Fun,” outdoor exploration and discovery. The energy-efficient building creates a positive learning environment and a wonderful connection to the outdoors. From the dramatic roofline that collects rainwater, to the rainbow colored glass wall, to the illuminated beacon vestibule, children and families will enjoy hours of fun in this unique and creative space that excites and expands young minds!

About The Sunflower Foundation: *Health Care for Kansans*

The Sunflower Foundation: *Health Care for Kansans* was created in 2000. The mission of the foundation is to serve as a catalyst for improving the health of Kansans, which it supports through a program of grants and related activities. The foundation’s funding priorities include health care access, healthy behaviors and prevention, capacity building and advocacy.

About the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas Foundation

The Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas Foundation was incorporated in July 2005 by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas to further strengthen its role in promoting the good health of Kansans. The BCBSKS Foundation focuses its giving on key health issues that can impact the lives of many Kansans, funding programs which are, at their core, health-related. The BCBSKS Foundation seeks out programs that promote health improvement, health care access, health education, healthy behaviors and prevention initiatives. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas Foundation and Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas are independent licensees of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association, and serve all Kansas counties except Johnson and Wyandotte.