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CONTACT: Taylor Mayad
214-353-8976 work
214-435-7756 cell
taylormayad@sbcglobal.net

**DALLASKIDSREAD!, A FESTIVAL CELEBRATING READING AND IMAGINATION,
SET FOR SATURDAY, APRIL 17 AT NORTHPARK CENTER**

Free children's festival benefiting Rainbow Days to feature award-winning authors and illustrators, storytelling, arts and crafts, musical entertainment, vision screenings and more

DALLAS (March 29, 2010) – Inspire a love of reading by attending [DallasKidsRead!](#), a free children's festival on Saturday, April 17, from 1 – 6 p.m. at NorthPark Center on Level One between Nordstrom and Macy's. Come meet award-winning authors and illustrators and enjoy arts and crafts, storytelling, musical entertainment, photos with storybook characters, free vision screenings and more.

The 15th-annual festival is a celebration of the imagination designed to foster a love of literature and reading among North Texas children. The event benefits **Rainbow Days**, a Dallas nonprofit that helps children overcome adversity and stay drug free. **Mrs. Laura Leppert**, wife of **Dallas Mayor Tom Leppert**, is the honorary chair.

“Strong literacy skills are so important to a child's success in school and life, and this incredibly fun, high-energy day is a great way to get kids excited about reading,” said Mrs. Leppert. “The 19 authors and illustrators invited to DallasKidsRead! are not only remarkable stars in the children's literary world, but they each have wonderful abilities to connect with kids and make their stories come alive.”

Mrs. Leppert says the stellar literary group includes a Pulitzer Prize winner, an internationally syndicated newspaper cartoonist, a writer of numerous “Barney” and “Wishbone” segments, a master actor/musician who punctuates her stories with rhythm and music, a songwriter/recording artist, a veteran meteorologist and even an author who makes math fun (*see end of release for short bios and click here for [comprehensive bios](#)*). The authors and illustrators will be available for book readings, storytelling, informal illustration workshops, photos and autographs, and their books will be on sale in the DallasKidsRead! bookstore (with partial proceeds benefiting Rainbow Days).

“Rainbow Days is extremely honored to have a chance to work with Mrs. Leppert and be part of DallasKidsRead!,” said Cathey Brown, founder and CEO of Rainbow Days, Inc. “Because being able to read well and get a good education is so crucial to all children, but especially for those who grow up in at-risk environments, this literacy event was a natural fit for us.”

At NorthPark Center, three entertainment stages (NorthCourt stage, Macy's Court stage and CenterPark stage) will feature family-friendly performances by the Critterman, Teatro Dallas, the Dallas Children's Theater and more. Favorite storybook characters will come alive for mingling, snapshots and autographs. Also planned are a variety of arts and crafts, activities and caricatures. Beginning at 1 p.m., Mayor Tom Leppert and more than a dozen community guest readers will share their favorite books, including a doctor, a TV personality, a pilot and others.

And because a child must be able to see well to read and learn well, **Essilor Vision Foundation** will be on site to provide free vision screenings to elementary schoolchildren underneath the escalator. In addition, all 25 branches of the Dallas Public Library, plus the Central Library downtown, will feature special literary programming and activities as part of the DallasKidsRead! event including visits by authors and illustrators (at select locations), special story times, crafts and more. Go to [dallaslibrary.org](#) for the libraries' schedule and names of authors.

- more -

DallasKidsRead! is supported by AT&T. Top sponsors are **Walmart, NorthPark Center, Radisson Dallas Central, Parkland Community Health Plan** and the **Gene & Jerry Jones Family Charities**. Additional sponsors are **Big Thought, Dallas Children’s Theater, Essilor Vision Foundation, First Book-Dallas, Friendship-West Baptist Church, Kids in Distressed Situations, Neiman Marcus, Northwest Bible Church** and **Protecting Our Children Outreach Ministry – A Division of the U.S. Department of Agriculture**. **Southwest Airlines** is the Official Airline Sponsor of DallasKidsRead!. Partners are the **City of Dallas Office of the Mayor, Dallas County Schools, Dallas Independent School District** and **Dallas Public Library**.

Media partners are **CBS 11 KTVT-TV, TXA 21, La Voz del Pueblo 1270 AM, KDXX 107.1 FM Recuerdo, 97.9 The Beat, 94.5 K-Soul, Radio Disney AM 620, Al Dia** and **North Texas Kids**.

DallasKidsRead! is free and open to the public. For easy access, ride DART. Activities will take place at NorthPark Center between Nordstrom and Macy’s.

For more information, please call 214-871-3028 or go to DallasKidsRead.org.

About Rainbow Days, Inc.

Rainbow Days, Inc. inspires children to live a life filled with hope and promise by teaching the skills and providing the support they need to make healthy choices, stay drug-free and believe they have a purpose. Located in Dallas since 1982, the nationally recognized nonprofit has served over 107,000 children in the Dallas area and trained more than 30,000 professionals across America to create support groups or prevention programs in their own communities. Currently, Rainbow Days serves more than 9,500 children and 200 parents at 82 community-based sites including elementary schools, homeless shelters, transitional living centers, domestic violence centers, after-school programs and recreation centers in the four-county Dallas area. For more information, please go to rdikids.org or call 214-887-0726.

Children’s literary luminaries light up DallasKidsRead!

The literary luminaries for DallasKidsRead! will include award-winning artist and investigative writer **Karen Blessen**, the first graphic artist to win the Pulitzer Prize; **Lamberto Alvarez**, award-winning painter, sculptor, author and contributor in a Pulitzer Prize winning series; **Kittie Beletic**, Screen Actors Guild member and award-winning author of more than 50 musicals, 300 songs and most recently “What Color is Your Dream?,” which won Best Children’s Picture Book for USA Book News; and co-founder of Repertory Company Theatre; **Hector Cantú**, co-creator of the syndicated newspaper comic strip “Baldo”; **Gwendolyn Hooks**, fiction and nonfiction children’s book author; **Kristine Kahane**, veteran meteorologist and children’s book author of “Katie and the Magic Umbrella: On Snowflake Trail”; and **Jennifer Kindert**, instructor and children’s book illustrator of “Mommy’s Bed” and “Hurry Up” of the Scholastic’s “Just For You!” series, and most recently, “Katie and the Magic Umbrella: On Snowflake Trail.”

Others will include **Toni Simmons**, internationally renowned and award-winning animated storyteller and author of “The Cheese Chase: Why Dogs Chase Cats,” an I-Parenting Media Award winner; **Michael Anthony Steele**, entertainment writer of several well-know movies and TV shows including “Barney” and “Wishbone”; **Darleen Bailey Beard**, award-winning children’s book author known for writing many true-story tales which have been turned into plays and chosen as “Junior Library Guild Book Selections”; and **Willy “Mr. Willy” Welch**, storytelling performer, author and recording artist/songwriter of over 35 songs for “Barney and Friends” among others, and winner of the 2009 Parent’s Pick Award for “Best Dallas/Fort Worth Party Entertainer” by Nickelodeon ParentsConnect.

Known for writing and illustrating will include New York City-native **Nina Crews**, award-winning and commended children’s book author/illustrator who uses real-life photography in her books, a Junior Library Guild selection, recipient of the Kirkus and School Library Journals award for one of the Best Books of 2004, and two-time recipient of the American Library Association’s (ALA) Notable Children’s book award; **Matthew Holm**, author, illustrator and co-creator of the award-winning “Babymouse” graphic novels series; and **Betsy James**, award-winning author and illustrator of 16 books including “Listening at the Gate,” which recently was named New York Public Library Best Book for Teens and was designated a Tiptree Award Honor Book.

Other top-name talent will include **Icy Smith**, a Chinese-American historian and award-winning author who received the Clarion Award for best nonfiction book in 2002, the 2009 Chinese American Librarian Association Best Children’s Book Award, the 2008 Moonbeam Children’s Book Award and the Independent Publisher Book Award; **Benjamin Sáenz**, novelist, poet, essayist, and author, who has received the Wallace Stegner Fellowship, the Lannan Fellowship and an American Book Award; **Anastasia Suen**, author of 115 books and SMU professor; **Edith Tarbescu**, award-winning author/playwright of four children’s books including the Scholastic Hello Reader, “Bring Back My Gerbil”; and **Cathy Weiskopf**, author, speaker and acclaimed math enthusiast.