

NEWS RELEASE

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In Mister Rogers' First Neighborhood

***THE FRED M. ROGERS CENTER FOR EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDREN'S MEDIA
ESTABLISHED AT SAINT VINCENT COLLEGE IN LATROBE***

LATROBE, PA -- The establishment of The Fred M. Rogers Center for Early Learning and Children's Media at Saint Vincent College, a unique resource planned in collaboration with the late Fred Rogers, to promote early learning, the primacy of caring relationships between children and adults, and responsible uses of media, was announced today by Saint Vincent College President James F. Will at a mid-day press conference at The Duquesne Club in Pittsburgh.

"It is my honor to formally announce the establishment of the Rogers Center at Saint Vincent College," Mr. Will said. "We approach this extraordinary opportunity with profound respect for Fred's lifelong commitment to children and families; with sincere gratitude to the Rogers family; and with deep resolve to honor the teacher, man of faith, and friend who touched so many lives."

The late Fred Rogers, a native of Latrobe (which he described as his "very first neighborhood") and a close friend of Saint Vincent College, died of cancer on February 27 at the age of 74 after working in children's television for nearly 50 years, including more than three decades as host of public television's "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood."

The College's commitment to create a center, building upon the work of Fred Rogers, was revealed on May 12 when The Heinz Endowments awarded a capacity-building grant of \$1 million to Saint Vincent College to help support part of the operating costs for the start-up of the Rogers Center.

"Fred Rogers was always a good neighbor to Saint Vincent," Mr. Will continued. "He, his parents, James Hillis Rogers and Nancy McFeely Rogers, his beloved wife Joanne, and the McFeely-Rogers Foundation,

have played important roles in the life of our College community for more than 40 years."

"Nearly three years ago, we began to collaborate with our friend and neighbor, Fred Rogers, in developing the concept for the Center which, in his name, will serve as a resource in early childhood learning and children's media," Mr. Will continued. "With Fred's untimely passing earlier this year, we are even more committed to this project that had his support and special trust."

"In the face of growing challenges to their safety, health, emotional security and intellectual development, the need for effective models of caring for and teaching young children is great," Mr. Will said. "Through his many roles as children's television host, writer, producer, author, and lecturer, Fred Rogers grasped the vast power of the communications media to help address this need in a meaningful and responsible way. His emphasis on education for the heart as well as the mind not only drew from but also influenced research on affective learning, imagination and creative play, and many related areas of study in child development and early learning. Our goal for The Fred M. Rogers Center for Early Learning and Children's Media at Saint Vincent

College is to create an environment that supports and encourages such good and important work on behalf of children and families."

In addition to Fred's personal guidance, planning for the Center drew from the expert recommendations of Dr. Milton Chen, executive director of The George Lucas Educational Foundation of California; Ellen Galinsky, president of the Families and Work Institute of New York; William H. Isler and the staff of Family Communications, Inc. in Pittsburgh; Saint Vincent College faculty and administrators; and many others.

The planning process identified five major initiatives through which the Center will carry out its mission:

- The Rogers Center will collaborate with Saint Vincent College's planned School of Communication, Education, and Social Sciences in establishing degree, certificate, and continuing education programs with emphases in early learning, media, and human and social development. These programs will adopt a distinctively interdisciplinary, research-based approach. The College expects to begin to offer the first courses and training programs for undergraduate students, educators, and others in 2004-2005.*

- *The Rogers Center will sponsor an annual program of experts-in-residence. Beginning in Summer 2004, national experts will be invited to spend time at the Center engaged in work to advance fields of study and effective practices in child development, education, media, and related areas.*
- *The Rogers Center will sponsor conferences, speakers, and other forums to promote awareness, consensus building, and advocacy on behalf of children and families. The Center's first major, invitational symposium will be held May 19-21, 2004. Intended to be a working symposium on major themes of the Center's work, it will commemorate the 50th anniversary of Fred Rogers' entry into children's television. Symposium events will include a performance by Andre Watts, the internationally acclaimed pianist and a friend of the Rogers family.*
- *A cooperative endeavor with Family Communications and others will enable the Center to provide expanded access to the wealth of archival resources documenting Fred Rogers' work, emerging research, and professional standards. Archival planning will begin later this year.*

- *An on-site early learning center will be established at Saint Vincent College where effective educational programs will be demonstrated for undergraduate and graduate students, educators, researchers, parents and caregivers, policymakers, and other child advocates.*

The first phase of the Rogers Center start-up will require \$10 million in funding, and Saint Vincent is engaged in a fundraising campaign that will provide these resources over the next two to five years. Funding for the next phase will include support for construction of a building on the Saint Vincent College campus that will house the early learning demonstration center, media capabilities, and other resources.

The College is currently working with the Rogers Center Advisory Council in conducting a national search for an Executive Director who will provide leadership for the Center's work and who will play the key role in external relations for professional networking and fundraising.

Members of the Advisory Council include Joanne Byrd Rogers, honorary chair; Robert C. Wilburn, president and CEO of the Gettysburg National Battlefield Museum Foundation, chair; Doreen E. Boyce, president, The Buhl Foundation; Milton Chen, executive director, The George Lucas Educational Foundation; Nancy E. Curry, professor

emeritus-University of Pittsburgh and director of child development; Joseph F. Dominic, director of education program, The Heinz Endowments; Ellen Galinsky, president, Families and Work Institute; David Hartman, television producer; William H. Isler, president, Family Communications, Inc.; Thomas C. Mans, vice president for academic affairs, Saint Vincent College; Archabbot Douglas R. Nowicki, O.S.B., chancellor, Saint Vincent College; James R. Okonak, executive director, McFeely-Rogers Foundation; James J. Ragan, director, master of professional writing program, University of Southern California; and James F. Will, president, Saint Vincent College.

"Our plans for the Rogers Center admittedly are ambitious -- in the best sense of the word," Mr. Will concluded. "Our ambition is inspired by Fred Rogers and driven by a commitment to the continued study and application of his approach to understanding, communicating with, and otherwise serving children and families."

In addition to Mr. Will, remarks were made by Robert C. Wilburn, president and CEO, Gettysburg National Battlefield Museum Foundation, a member of the Saint Vincent College Board of Directors and chair of the Rogers Center Advisory Council; Milton Chen, executive director, The George Lucas Educational Foundation (videotaped in San Rafael,

California); Ellen Galinsky, president, Families and Work Institute (videotaped in New York City); Joseph Dominic, director of education program, The Heinz Endowments; Archabbot Douglas R. Nowicki, O.S.B., chancellor, Saint Vincent College; and Joanne Byrd Rogers, honorary chair, Rogers Center Advisory Council.

Dr. Wilburn noted that Fred Rogers was a personal friend of his "for many, many years. I first met him when I was in state government serving as Secretary of Education. For many years, we ran into each other almost daily in the locker room at the Pittsburgh Athletic Club after swimming. And, when I was in Williamsburg, he spent a couple days with us. Williamsburg had hosted scores of heads of state and countless other celebrities over the years. No one generated the excitement that Fred did during those two days."

Mr. Rogers' widow, Joanne Rogers, expressed her "sincerest gratitude to so many who have given me such loving support since our dear Fred went to heaven over six months ago...I am so grateful to Saint Vincent College for continuing the plans for this Center -- plans which were in the works before Fred's death. Archabbot Douglas, as chancellor of Saint Vincent College, will again be involved in his earliest field of endeavor -- the service of early childhood health and education -- which

originally brought him to Fred. That close friendship with Fred and me continues to be a great blessing and joy. I look forward to working with the College in the formation of the Rogers Center, which has the potential of unique leadership in helping to advance early learning and children's media."

Saint Vincent College has had a close relationship with the Rogers family for more than 40 years. The McFeely-Rogers Foundation, established by Fred's parents, James and Nancy Rogers, was among the first of Saint Vincent College's neighbors to help with support for rebuilding after a major campus fire in 1963. That same year, James Rogers was honored with the conferral of an honorary Doctor of Humanities Degree.

In 1973, Saint Vincent College conferred an honorary Doctor of Letters Degree on Fred Rogers in recognition of his work in children's television at the commencement ceremony where he was the principal speaker.

The McFeely-Rogers Scholarship Fund was established in 1978 to assist Saint Vincent College students from the Latrobe area and other students with financial need. About 25 students annually receive these scholarships.

In 1979, Saint Vincent College coordinated and hosted a national symposium, Childhood and Creativity, as a tribute to Fred Rogers' 25th anniversary in children's television. In 1981, Fred Rogers delivered a lecture on Children and Families as part of the Saint Vincent College lecture series, Issues in Parenting and Child Development.

In 1996, at the 150th anniversary celebrating the founding of Saint Vincent, Fred Rogers delivered the keynote address. "Saint Vincent was part of my very first neighborhood," he said in an essay titled 'The Final Word Is Love' published in Saint Vincent: A Benedictine Place" which was published in conjunction with the celebration. "Growing up in Latrobe, I was always aware of its presence. Nevertheless, the bonds of friendship are what made it real to me."

In 2000, Fred Rogers delivered the commencement address at Saint Vincent College and the College presented him with its Presidential Medal of Honor. The College also conferred an honorary Doctor of Musical Arts Degree on Joanne Byrd Rogers.

The College launched a new website today for the Rogers Center at www.fredrogerscenter.org, to provide information on the Center's purpose and activities, advisory council, news, and events. Further information is available by contacting the Center at Saint Vincent

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info@fredrogerscenter.org.***

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