



# Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation Awards \$3,855,000 Grant to LeFleur's Bluff Museum Partnership



**PRESS RELEASE • FOR RELEASE ON 12/14/2020**

**Jackson, Miss.** (Dec. 8, 2020) Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation has awarded a \$3,855,000 grant to the Mississippi Wildlife, Fisheries, & Parks Foundation for the LeFleur's Bluff State Park Education and Tourism Partnership between the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks' (MDWFP) Mississippi Museum of Natural Science and the Mississippi Children's Museum.



The LeFleur's Bluff State Park playground will be located between the MDWFP's Mississippi Museum of Natural Science and the Mississippi Children's Museum. This grant will provide essential funds to create a state-of-the-art complex for physical and educational activities through a playground, outdoor classroom and pavilion, and museum walking trail.



The 21<sup>st</sup> century playground will feature 80 play activities, 73 of these features will be inclusive to children with accessibility needs, and will be separated into different play areas based on age, for children ages 6 months to 12 years old.

The Outdoor Classroom and Pavilion will provide multiple functions for both museums, such as educational and outdoor programming for field trips and a place to showcase presentations for the award-winning Mississippi Science Festival. The pavilion will provide tables and seating for up to 50 students, as well as accommodate a larger assembly with an open-air amphitheater and grass lawn.



**MISSISSIPPI  
Foundation**

The Museum Walking Trail will provide engaging, family-oriented opportunities to travel between MDWFP's Mississippi Museum of Natural Science and the Mississippi Children's Museum, so guests can safely and conveniently visit both museums and the playground. The 8-foot wide walking trail will feature educational components from the Newbery Honor Award winning children's book, *Minn of the Mississippi*.

## **MEDIA CONTACTS**

**Angela Mitchell**  
Director of External Affairs,  
Mississippi Children's Museum  
angela@mcm.ms  
P: 601.709.8354

**Josh Carver**  
Marketing & Communications  
Coordinator, Mississippi  
Department of Wildlife,  
Fisheries, and Parks  
Josh.carver@wfp.ms.gov  
P: 601.432.2239

Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation is the signature sponsor of the LeFleur's Bluff State Park Playground, Outdoor Classroom and Pavilion and Museum Trail. Leaders of the Foundation are proud to work with the Mississippi Wildlife, Fisheries, & Parks Foundation, MDWFP's Mississippi Natural Science Museum, and the Mississippi Children's Museum to build a healthy Mississippi.

"The Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation is proud of its impact to empower lasting change that is evident in both the built environment and in the health of Mississippians," said Dr. Thomas C. Fenter, Foundation Board Chairman. "The Foundation's partnership with the Mississippi Wildlife, Fisheries, & Parks Foundation to build a myriad of inclusive outdoor opportunities will encourage Mississippians to be active."

“The LeFleur’s Bluff State Park Playground, Outdoor Classroom and 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 or learning together in an outdoor classroom setting develops life-long positive attitudes about maintaining healthy lifestyles.”

“The Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks is truly excited to partner with so many organizations to offer children and families visiting LeFleur’s Bluff State Park and our museum an opportunity to enjoy an active outdoor experience on the new playground and walking trail,” said Dr. Sam Polles, Executive Director MDWFP.

“The holiday season is brighter because of this generous gift from the Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation to the MWFP Foundation! The agency and museum staff is thankful for the opportunity to work with our partners to develop creative as well as innovative uses for this outdoor space that will benefit Mississippi’s youth, families, students, teachers, and visitors to our great state,” said Angel Rohnke, Assistant Director, MDWFP’s Mississippi Museum of Natural Science.

The Mississippi Children’s Museum is elated for the LeFleur’s Bluff State Park to receive these funds that will enhance the area and connect Mississippi children to greater experiences.

“The LeFleur’s Bluff Educational and Tourism Partnership is transformational for our state. This partnership, between two award-winning museums, will provide state-of-the-art amenities and educational opportunities for everyone who visits. The strategic plan is innovative and sparks a vision for the future of Mississippi, and we are grateful for the vision and commitment of the Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation’s board of directors,” said Susan Garrard, President/CEO of the Mississippi Children’s Museum.

#### **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](http://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 our 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](http://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](http://www.mschildrensmuseum.org).

###