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FLORENCE HILL ELEMENTARY HOSTING REAL PEOPLE EVENT APRIL 16

Take-A-Walk's Jane Kirkland to be Guest Speaker

Grand Prairie, Texas – [April 10, 2009] – An award-winning author and outdoor education advocate who celebrates the wonders of nature in the most unlikely places will speak this Thursday, April 16 at REAL School Gardens' next REAL People Networking Event.

Jane Kirkland, author of the acclaimed Take-A-Walk® book series, will present her captivating program, "I Saw a Bald Eagle Soaring over My Grocery Store" at Florence Hill Elementary School in Grand Prairie from 4:30-6:30 p.m. The event is free and open to the public with advanced reservation by contacting csassman@realschoolgardens.org.

Prior to her presentation, informal tours of the REAL School garden at Florence Hill will be student-led followed by a light dinner and networking opportunities. REAL School Gardens fosters a collegial environment where like-minded people interested in connecting children to nature can exchange lesson plans, share success stories and provide advice for those beginning to work with children in the outdoors.

Kirkland shows how children don't have to travel to a forest or nature preserve just to discover the beauty and wonder of the environment. They can be found in a strip mall parking lot or your own backyard by simply taking a 20-seconds-a-day nature break to observe and enjoy the outdoors.

"I'm hoping that everyone will take from my presentation the realization that nature is ubiquitous, and that experiencing the outdoors is a rite of passage for every child," she said. "Because today's kids are more drawn to what's indoors than what's out, they need our help to unplug."

Tracy Hollis, REAL School Garden coordinator for the Grand Prairie Independent School District, said students and teachers are eagerly awaiting Kirkland's presentation to learn from her experiences and research. "She comes to us with a wealth of knowledge and an ability to bring nature into our classrooms and into the lives of our children," Hollis said.

Kirkland's Take-A-Walk® book series has won many awards, including the National Arbor Day Foundation's Education Award for 2005 and a Teachers Choice Award in 2006, among others. The series is endorsed as an important resource for students, educators and parents, by the National Science Teachers Association and Animal Planet TV star Jeff Corwin of *The Jeff Corwin Experience*. The latest in the series is "No Student Left Indoors: Creating a Field Guide to Your Schoolyard."

REAL School Gardens is “helping to ensure that today's kids get to feel the sun on their faces and taste the fruits of their labor” Kirkland said of the organization’s efforts to make gardens and outdoor education a key element of school curricula.

“Kids are natural gardeners; they are nurturing and caring and, in a child's garden, seeds aren't the only things that grow,” she remarked. “Through gardening, children develop a heightened awareness of their environment as well as their own capabilities.”

Hollis concurs with Kirkland. Since joining the REAL School Garden network in December 2008, Grand Prairie ISD elementary schools have flourished with the non-profit’s support and professional development. Currently, the district has 13 active schools in the REAL School Garden’s network, with five additional school gardens soon to come.

For the past eight years, Grand Prairie ISD has included gardens and outdoor learning as part of its educational mission. Hollis asserts that REAL School Gardens’ support has advanced the district’s outdoor education efforts.

“We are finding that schools that embrace gardens and outdoor learning areas as part of their school community are enriching the lives of their students on so many levels, and it’s showing in their ability to understand the world around them and the importance of protecting it,” she said.

About REAL School Gardens

The mission of REAL School Gardens is to cultivate relationships with elementary school communities to create learning gardens that raise hope, spark imaginations and connect children to nature. Currently, REAL School Gardens works with 57 schools, ensuring that more than 30,000 children and more than 1,300 educators have daily access to nature through school gardens in North Texas. With plans to reach more students and school communities across the country, the organization is itself growing. On the Internet, visit www.realschoolgardens.org.

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