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**Marion is one of five South Carolina cities to make  
Non-Profit Organization KaBOOM!'s 2011 list of "Playful City USA" communities**

*Communities Make Play a Priority, Fight Play Deficit  
by Implementing Policies to Increase Play Opportunities for Children*

WASHINGTON, D.C. – With only one in five children in the U.S. living within walking distance of a park or playground, 151 cities and towns, including Marion, earned recognition from national non-profit KaBOOM! as 2011 Playful City USA communities for their efforts to increase play opportunities for children.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, play is important to healthy brain development and allows children to use their creativity while developing their imagination, dexterity, and physical, cognitive, and emotional strength.

Today's children spend less time playing outside than any previous generation, in part because only 20-percent live within walking distance of a park or playground. This Play Deficit is having profound consequences for kids physically, as well as mentally and socially, because children need a place to play every day in order to be active and healthy.

Earlier this year, Marion Mayor Rodney Berry and City Council members proclaimed each September as Recreation Month in Marion and Sept. 17 as a "City-wide Play Day. Investing in children and in maintaining parks in which they can play, Berry said, is a priority for the city.

Berry added that the city is committed to the national platform that seeks to combat "the Play Deficit." Playful City USA is a national program advocating for local policies that increase play opportunities for children. KaBOOM!, the national non-profit organization dedicated to saving play, created Playful City USA in 2007 to help local governments address the Play Deficit by ensuring their children have the time and space they need to play.

This year, 151 Playful City USA honorees were named. In South Carolina, Marion is joined by Camden, Greenville, North Charleston and Spartanburg. Spartanburg has received the designation five years in a row. The cities include Atlanta, San Francisco and others who make a commitment to play and physical activity by developing unique local action plans to increase the quantity and quality of play in their community.

In the fifth year of the annual program, 19 Playful City USA communities received recognition for the fifth consecutive year, while 24 earned honors for the fourth time, 29 for the third time, 30 for the second time and 49 claimed their first Playful City USA designation. Florida is the state with the most Playful City USA communities.

Each of the 2011 Playful City USA communities demonstrated creative commitments to addressing the Play Deficit. Playful City USA celebrates and highlights these unique initiatives developed by communities across

the country. A primary goal of Playful City USA is to encourage cities and towns to share creative ideas, concepts and programs in an effort to increase play opportunities for children.

USA Today Weekend announced the selected cities in newspapers this past Sunday. The online story is available at <http://www.usaweekend.com/article/20110902/HOME02/110902001/Where-playgrounds-are>

KaBOOM! selected Marion for its outstanding dedication to play, which will, among other things, work with the city's physical education teachers to assess what additional programs could be offered after school hours, to complement the schools' programs and provide a comprehensive approach to healthy living.

One such event was conducted this summer. The city's had its first QuickStart Tennis camp created and produced by Marion High School tennis coach and teacher Iris Stackhouse, Recreation Department Director Frank Page said.

"The Play Deficit continues to harm our children and stifle their mental and physical development, while directly facilitating the ongoing childhood obesity crisis," said Darell Hammond, KaBOOM! Founder and CEO and author of *The New York Times* Best Seller [\*KaBOOM!: How One Man Built a Movement to Save Play\*](#).

"These 151 Playful City USA communities have joined KaBOOM! in making a collective statement that we will no longer accept the misconception that play is a luxury when the reality is that play is an absolute necessity for children. Marion is committed to the well-being of children and serves as an outstanding role model for the rest of America as we continue to strive toward the KaBOOM! vision of a great place to play within walking distance of every child," he added in a press release issued Monday.

The 151 Playful City USA communities are now eligible for grants via Let's Play - a community partnership led by Dr Pepper Snapple Group to get kids active nationwide. The first Let's Play initiative is a \$15 million, three-year commitment to KaBOOM!.

Together, through Let's Play, Dr Pepper Snapple Group and KaBOOM! will build or fix up 2,000 playgrounds by the end of 2013, benefiting an estimated five million children across North America. Recipients of 2011 Let's Play grants via the Playful City USA program will be announced on Monday, Sept. 19.

A total of 103 grants worth \$2.1 million are available to Playful City USA recognized cities and towns between 2011-13. Grants range in values of \$30,000, \$20,000 and \$15,000. The \$30,000 and \$15,000 grants are available for projects relating to joint-use agreements and the \$20,000 grants will be awarded to cities using the community playground build process. Cities also are eligible to receive multiple grants during the three-year period. Dr Pepper Snapple Group, a member of the leadership circle within the KaBOOM! National Partner Program, is providing the funding for the grants.

For information on the KaBOOM! Playful City USA program, including Let's Play grants and applications for 2012, visit [www.kaboom.org/playfulcityusa](http://www.kaboom.org/playfulcityusa).