



**NEW YORK RESTORATION PROJECT FOUNDER BETTE MIDLER CELEBRATES  
THE OPENING OF NEW YORK CITY'S FIRST CERTIFIED NATURE EXPLORE CLASSROOM  
WITH NYRP'S NEWLY DESIGNED *THE HOME DEPOT FOUNDATION COMMUNITY GARDEN***

**--Ribbon Cutting Celebration in New York's East Harlem Neighborhood  
Monday, May 18, 2009--**

New York, NY (May 18, 2009) – Bette Midler's New York Restoration Project (NYRP), a non-profit organization dedicated to developing and revitalizing parks, community gardens and public space in New York City, today celebrated the opening of *The Home Depot® Foundation Community Garden*, the first community garden and outdoor classroom in New York City to earn the national designation of a certified Nature Explore Classroom from the Arbor Day Foundation and Dimensions Educational Research Foundation. Midler was joined by The Home Depot Foundation President, Kelly Caffarelli, NYRP Executive Director Drew Becher and 20 students from East Harlem's PS 155 at the celebration where they participated in the first environmental education lesson to take place at the new garden.

"I am thrilled to be working with visionaries like The Home Depot Foundation, the Arbor Day Foundation and Dimensions Educational Research Foundation," said NYRP founder, Bette Midler. "I am grateful that these wonderful people understand that the future of the country – indeed, the world – lies in the hands of our children. We owe them the very best of everything, and how fabulous it is to be able to give the students of PS 155 a first-class introduction to nature."

The garden, the first to be designed completely by New York Restoration Project staff, meets the unique criteria for a certified Nature Explore Classroom. New York Restoration Project staff worked closely with the members of the community during the design process to ensure that the garden also meets the needs and desires of the residents who will use it. It features several unique areas dedicated to different types of unstructured play including: a reading garden, nature art area, fantasy playhouse, building area and a special messy materials area. New York Restoration Project will use the new space to host numerous classes from the organization's comprehensive, award-winning "Nature in My Neighborhood" curriculum, leveraging these unique activity areas to educate and inspire students to have a positive connection and fall in love with nature.

"The Home Depot Foundation is dedicated to creating sustainable communities, and we know that providing healthy green spaces for children and families to play and learn is critical to this effort," said Kelly Caffarelli, president, The Home Depot Foundation. "We are delighted that we had the opportunity to partner with NYRP and the Arbor Day Foundation to create this outdoor classroom in a garden setting where students can really get their hands dirty, have fun and learn about our environment."

Nature Explore Classrooms are part of the Nature Explore Program, a collaborative project of the Arbor Day Foundation and Dimensions Educational Research Foundation. Developed in response to the growing disconnect between children and nature, certified Nature Explore Classrooms are designed to help fill the void by educating young children using research-based principles for integrating nature into their daily learning. These Classrooms offer interactive elements that give children important and inspiring nature experiences.

While connecting children with nature, such unstructured play and activities are shown to enhance concentration, develop creativity and problem-solving, relieve stress and improve skills in many areas. “The Home Depot Foundation Community Garden will have a positive impact in the East Harlem neighborhood by helping to connect young children with nature on a daily basis,” said John Rosenow, chief executive of the Arbor Day Foundation. “The Arbor Day Foundation and Dimensions Educational Research Foundation appreciate the leadership role The Home Depot Foundation has made to the Nature Explore program. The community garden will serve a vital role as it introduces nature in the lives of children in New York City.”

With their sponsorship of this new community garden, The Home Depot Foundation has extended an already large partnership with New York Restoration Project. A lead sponsor of MillionTreesNYC, a PlaNYC initiative and a partnership of the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation and New York Restoration Project, The Home Depot Foundation is well known for its commitment to improving the quality of life, health and environment in local communities especially in low-income neighborhoods. Over the course of their three-year lead sponsorship of the MillionTreesNYC initiative, the organization is providing \$1.5 million to the initiative which includes the creation of a community grant program that promotes tree planting, stewardship and education.

“The generosity of partners like The Home Depot Foundation has made it possible for us to bring new and exciting programs to the children in our community,” said Drew Becher, executive director of the New York Restoration Project. “Their support will help us connect and inspire many of The City’s children to learn through nature.”

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**New York Restoration Project (NYRP)** [www.nyrp.org](http://www.nyrp.org) is a non-profit organization dedicated to reclaiming and restoring parks, community gardens and open spaces neighborhoods throughout New York City's five boroughs, and in partnership with the City of New York is leading MillionTreesNYC. Since its founding in 1995 by Bette Midler, NYRP has achieved dramatic results by investing in the greening and beautification of underserved communities throughout New York City. NYRP staff and a corps of volunteers have planted hundreds of thousands of trees, shrubs and flowers to support the restoration of the City’s parks and community gardens; removed more than 1,875 tons of garbage and debris from project sites; saved 55 community gardens from commercial development; transformed an illegal dumping ground into the five-acre Swindler Cove Park and brought the Peter Jay Sharp Boathouse to the Harlem River waterfront; and launched the largest, urban reforestation campaign in America, while continuing to serve thousands of families and at-risk youth through environmental education programs and events. For more information on NYRP visit [www.nyrp.org](http://www.nyrp.org).

**About the Arbor Day Foundation:** The Arbor Day Foundation is a nonprofit education organization of nearly one million members, with a mission to inspire people to plant, nurture, and celebrate trees. More information on the Foundation and its programs can be found at [arborday.org](http://arborday.org).

**About Dimensions Educational Research Foundation:** Dimensions Educational Research Foundation was formed in 1998 to study how science, math and literacy learning can be enhanced by the addition of more visual-spatial activities into classrooms and homes. For a number of years, the Foundation has conducted and collected research on how children best develop visual-spatial skills and how teachers and families can optimally support this development. Dimensions Educational Research Foundation’s goal is to create and deliver unique educational programming to 1) Help people better understand and appreciate the natural world by developing visual-spatial skills; and 2) Improve science, math and literacy learning through visual-spatial skills.

**About The Home Depot Foundation:** The Home Depot Foundation is dedicated to improving the health of local communities by supporting the development of affordable, healthy homes for working families and by the strategic planting and preservation of trees in parks, in schoolyards and along city streets. In 2007, The Home Depot Foundation committed to significantly increase its financial support in these two areas by awarding \$100 million in grants over the next 10 years, which will result in the development of 100,000 affordable, healthy homes for working families and the planting

and preservation of more than 3 million community trees. The Home Depot Foundation is a lead sponsor of MillionTreesNYC, a PlaNYC initiative and a partnership of the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation and New York Restoration Project.

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