



# Press Release

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## Fourth annual *El Día de los Niños* celebration honors children everywhere

*San Antonio, TX* – Children in cities around the country will voice their wishes, hopes and dreams for the future on April 30, when they celebrate the fourth annual *El Día de los Niños Celebrating Young Americans*.

Children's days are traditionally observed in Latin America and other countries to honor children in the family and community; no such day, however, currently exists in the United States. The national holiday, which is up for its third declaration by the U.S. Senate, is a gift from the Latino community to celebrate children everywhere and to ensure their health and well-being. For *El Día de los Niños Celebrating Young Americans* to become an official national holiday, the senate resolution must pass four consecutive times.

Encouraged by the first passage of U.S. Senate Resolution 278, in 1998, declaring the day, young Americans in dozens of cities signed petitions and testified before city councils to ask for local recognition of the celebration. This year, over 100 cities, ranging from Hermiston, Ore., to Charlotte, N.C., to New York City, will participate.

"What started as a celebration with a Latino flavor has become a unifying event for all the cultures of a community," says Rebeca Barrera, president of the National Latino Children's Institute, which began organizing the event in 1998.

*El Día de los Niños Celebrating Young Americans* is unique, Barrera says, in the way each community celebration builds on the cultural heritage and strengths that helped forge the community. "Because *El Día de los Niños* honors all children, everyone feels welcome to bring their own cultures and background to the celebration."

This year, in New York City, over 1,000 children are expected to attend a day of storytelling, games, arts and crafts, and puppet shows at Central Park's Belvedere Castle on April 27. Children will be invited to play traditional Mexican games such as *Serpientes y escaleras* (Snakes and Ladders), and ballet folklórico and mariachi music groups will perform. Thirteen/WNET New York and the Mexican Cultural Institute of New York are presenting the festivities in honor of PBS's *American Family*, television's first Latino drama series.

NLCI, one of PBS's national partners on the series, is working with local PBS stations and communities to organize activities in conjunction with *El Día de los Niños*.

"Many cities are working with us in partnership with their PBS stations to strengthen families by building our understanding of who we are and where we came from," Barrera says. "We're proud to support the program, and we encourage everyone to get involved by exploring their own family histories and heritage."

In Hermiston, Ore., the public library will host an *El Día de los Niños* festival with craft-making booths for noodle necklaces, play putty sculptures, glitter rocks and candy flowers. Storytellers will tell Asian and Native American folktales, and a marimba group will play. Like many libraries around the country,

the Hermiston Public Library will incorporate *El Día de los Libros* into the festivities to promote the importance of books in children's lives.

In Columbus, Ohio, Nationwide Insurance will host a citywide children's parade and festival, with bilingual storytelling, informational booths on home and fire safety, piñatas, and Latin American drumming and dance mini-workshops.

Some celebrations include as many as 10,000 children and others are smaller, with only a few hundred children or individual families.

"In some ways the celebration is like Mother's Day and Father's Day, when families spend time together recognizing the relationships between parent and child, brother and sister, teacher and student," Barrera says. "Adults do special things for children—fix their favorite meal, attend a family festival or help decorate a tricycle for the children's parade in their town."

U.S. Rep. Rubén Hinojosa, D-Texas, who has participated in every celebration since its inception, sees the holiday as an opportunity to evaluate the status of the youngest citizens of a city—as a vehicle for change. By asking elected officials to "give them their day," young Americans are asking adults and policymakers to include youth and children in their plans for the future, Hinojosa says.

"*El Día de los Niños* provides a bridge for children to learn more about being an American. Their first hands-on civics lesson is to ask their city council to declare the day. What better way to be a contributor to American culture?" he adds. "Young Americans have told the nation what it should be doing. They have accepted the gift of a special day from the Latino community and are building a national celebration of hope and diversity for all children in the United States."