



For Immediate Release

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**“Won’t You Be My Neighbor?” Days
March 15 – 20
And while you’re at it,
Won’t You Wear A Sweater on March 20?**

(Pittsburgh) – Since 1968, when *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood* made its national public television debut, Fred Rogers began each episode with his simple signature question in song: “Won’t You Be My Neighbor?”

This year, more than 30 Southwestern Pennsylvania organizations are planning to show just how neighborly they can be as the first-ever “Won’t You Be My Neighbor?” Days celebration takes place March 15 – 20 as part of Pittsburgh’s 250th anniversary.

“It started simply enough,” explains Margy Whitmer of Family Communications, Inc. (FCI is the nonprofit company founded in 1971 by Fred Rogers.) “We wanted to recognize Fred in a way that would reflect his deep appreciation of what it means to be a caring neighbor.”

So, “‘Won’t You Be My Neighbor?’ Days – WYBMND for short, although not by much – was born as a means of promoting neighborliness throughout the region.

“We’re also planning something special on what would have been Fred Rogers’ 80th birthday on March 20,” says David Newell, FCI’s public relations director and *Mr. McFeely*. “We’re asking everyone everywhere – from Pittsburgh to Paris – to wear their favorite sweater. It doesn’t have to have a zipper down the front like the one Mister Rogers wore on the program, it just has to be special to you.”

Throughout WYBMND (March 15 – 20), organizations ranging from libraries (Carnegie Libraries of Pittsburgh and others throughout Southwestern Pennsylvania), to museums (The Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh, the Westmoreland Museum of American Art, the Senator John Heinz History Center and The Carnegies) to other venues (The New Hazlett Theater, The Pittsburgh Opera, the Pittsburgh Zoo and the PPG Aquarium, the National Aviary and Gilda’s Club Western Pennsylvania) have signed up to participate. Highlights of the celebration also include performances by musicians including members of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra.

“What’s been so encouraging,” says FCI President Bill Isler, “is the enthusiastic response from leaders at the cultural treasures in our region. By offering free or reduced admissions, they are providing opportunities for children and families that may change and enrich their lives in unexpected, wonderful ways. Through the generosity of these caring ‘neighbors,’ children will be able to enjoy puppet making, musical presentations and other activities.”

Tickets for Kids® Charities is joining the WYBMND celebration by partnering with its 800 social service agencies and dozens of participating cultural and civic organizations. The goal is to assure that deserving children and families throughout Southwestern Pennsylvania are included in the numerous events and activities taking place to commemorate Fred Rogers’ impact and enduring legacy.

About Community Connections:

Community Connections is a grassroots initiative of Pittsburgh 250 supporting projects that encourage civic engagement throughout Southwestern Pennsylvania, commemorate the region’s 250th anniversary, and provide lasting value to communities and the region as a whole. More than 500 applications for funding were submitted by individuals, community groups, and organizations to celebrate the “Pride and Progress” of Southwestern Pennsylvania—the theme of Community Connections. A region-wide community decision-making process selected 100 projects to share \$1 million in funding for events and activities occurring throughout the anniversary year of 2008.

About The Sprout Fund:

The Sprout Fund is a nonprofit organization supporting innovative ideas and grassroots community projects that are catalyzing change in Pittsburgh. Founded in 2001, Sprout is designed to facilitate community-led solutions to regional challenges and supports efforts to create a thriving, progressive, and culturally diverse region. With strong working relationships to many community organizations and regional stakeholders, The Sprout Fund is one of Southwestern Pennsylvania’s leading agencies on issues related to civic engagement, talent attraction and retention, public art, and catalytic small-scale funding.



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