

## **Grant to California University Helps Children Grow Up Great With Science**

### **PNC Foundation supports project to build school readiness skills**

CALIFORNIA, PA (April 21, 2009) — A grant awarded to California University of Pennsylvania will prepare preschool children for school by developing vital science knowledge and skills. Teachers will receive training to enhance their ability to provide children with exciting outdoor experiences that focus on learning about local plants, animals and geography.

The Cal U Center for Excellence in Elementary Science and Math Education will receive \$379,198 over two years from Grow Up Great With Science, PNC's new initiative to help foster a foundation in science for young learners.

Cal U's grant is one of 15 Grow Up Great With Science awards announced today by the PNC Foundation.

The award will fund professional development training for early childhood educators, as well as hands-on outdoor activities for preschoolers and their parents. Education faculty members from Cal U will lead the project in collaboration with:

- The Private Industry Council of Westmoreland/Fayette Inc., which operates Head Start classes;
- The Pittsburgh Association for the Education of Young Children, which trains early childhood educators in southwestern Pennsylvania;
- Ohiopyle State Park, Pennsylvania Bureau of State Parks, where the outdoor activities will be held.

The project will train 60 early childhood educators each year to use outdoor activities, easily accessible science equipment and inexpensive supplies to create lessons that connect children with science and nature. Pre-service teachers from Cal U's College of Education and Human Services, Cal U Education faculty and experienced early childhood educators will collaborate in teams that will teach preschoolers basic science skills such as making detailed observations, posing scientific inquiry questions, conducting investigations and explaining things they see.

The project will involve about 250 children each year. It targets

preschoolers in Fayette County, where research shows that critical social conditions place many young learners at risk for low educational achievement. Parents and PNC volunteers also will be invited to participate in some outdoor activities.

“One of the most magnificent human gifts is the natural curiosity that bubbles forth as children explore the world around them,” says project leader Dr. J. William Hug, assistant professor of Early Childhood/Elementary Education at Cal U.

“Encouraging this fragile sense of wonder in a child at an early age can lead to the development of foundational skills that translate into later school success.”

The Grow Up Great With Science grants announced today support projects in seven states and the District of Columbia. They are an investment of the PNC Foundation, which receives its principle funding from The PNC Financial Services Group (NYSE: PNC). The announcement celebrates the fifth anniversary of PNC Grow Up Great, a 10-year, \$100 million investment in early childhood education.

The PNC Foundation has pledged up to \$6 million in grants to fund regional science centers over three years and conduct independent evaluations of the program’s success.

“Our support of California University’s Center for Excellence in Elementary Science and Math Education is another strategic investment to help our nonprofit partners, preschools and caregivers develop stronger, smarter and healthier families and communities,” says Eva Blum, director of Community Affairs for PNC and chair of the PNC Foundation. “Through these grants, we expect children will have experiences that would not otherwise be possible.”

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The Center for Excellence in Elementary Science and Math Education is an initiative of Dr. Angelo Armenti, Jr., president of California University, whose visionary support of elementary science and math teacher education make the Center at Cal U possible.

In addition to Cal U education faculty members J. William Hug, Deborah Farrer, John Shimkanin, Jane Bonari and Nancy Steeley, the Grow Up Great with Science project team consists of Sandra Hall and Tonya Groves-Pierce of the Private Industry Council of Westmoreland/Fayette County; Michelle Figlar, executive director of the Pittsburgh Association for

the Education of Young Children; and park manager John Hallas, assistant manager Stacey Faust, and environmental education specialist Barb Wallace at Ohio State Park.

Located just 35 miles from Pittsburgh, Cal U has been educating teachers since 1852. Today it offers more than 150 undergraduate majors and concentrations, along with 50 graduate programs, in traditional classroom settings and through its Global Online program. With an enrollment of 8,500 students, Cal U was among the universities profiled by The Princeton Review in its Best Northeastern Colleges: 2009 Edition. For more information, visit [www.cup.edu](http://www.cup.edu).

For more information about Grow Up Great With Science, contact Joe Balaban, manager of external communications for PNC Financial Services Group, at 412-768-5095.