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Outdoor LEGO® Brick Sculpture Exhibit Coming to The North Carolina Arboretum this Summer

ASHEVILLE, N.C. (June 6, 2020) – Visitors to The North Carolina Arboretum, a 434-acre public garden located just south of Asheville, will enjoy a fun, toy-filled outdoor adventure this summer at the Arboretum's newest exhibit, *Nature Connects®: Art with LEGO® Bricks*. Originally set to open in May but delayed due to the COVID-19 crisis, the exhibit will open July 1 with an extended schedule and remain on display through November 1, 2020.

Composed of nearly 500,000 LEGO bricks, *Nature Connects* includes 16 nature-inspired sculptures constructed on a larger-than-life scale by renowned artist Sean Kenney. Featuring a five-foot tall colorful peacock, giant dragonfly, bonsai tree and massive monarch butterfly, this family-friendly exhibit draws inspiration from the living world and combines play with science to create an innovative intersection of education, entertainment and the environment.

“Due to its size, uniqueness and magnitude, *Nature Connects* is a one-of-a-kind exhibit that truly appeals to all ages, groups and interests,” said George Briggs, executive director of The North Carolina Arboretum. “Artist Sean Kenney does a terrific job of bringing together art and nature using an iconic toy, the LEGO Brick, to help connect guests with the natural world. We look forward to hosting this new edition of the exhibit at the Arboretum and are excited about the many new sculptures added to the collection.”

Upon arrival to the Arboretum, guests are invited to view a special *Nature Connects* map, which will help guide them throughout the gardens and discover the LEGO Brick sculptures. Daytime admission to *Nature Connects* is free; however, a standard \$16 parking fee applies to non-Arboretum members. For more information about the Arboretum or *Nature Connects*, please visit ncarboretum.org or call 828-665-2492.

ArborEvenings featuring *Nature Connects*

As dusk settles, *Nature Connects* will be brought to light as part of the Arboretum's ArborEvenings summer after-hours series. This year, the Arboretum will be extending the dates and times of ArborEvenings. The event will be held every Thursday, Friday and Saturday, July through September, from 8 to 11 p.m. (some exclusion dates apply, please check website for details). Visitors will sip and stroll through the Arboretum's beautiful gardens and discover the illuminated LEGO Brick sculptures while listening to live music amongst flowers and friends. Sweet and savory snacks are available for purchase from the Arboretum's Bent Creek Bistro along with alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages. A special admission price of \$5 per person is required, collected at the door. Parking fees do not apply. Proceeds from ArborEvenings will support The North Carolina Arboretum Society, the Arboretum's 501(c)(3) non-profit that provides financial assistance to further support the Arboretum's mission and educational programming.

ArborEvenings will also raise a special glass this year to those who are affected by the COVID-19 crisis. Ten percent of all proceeds from this year's event series will be donated directly to MANNA FoodBank, the Feeding America food bank serving over 100,000 people facing hunger across 16 counties of Western North Carolina.

Members of The North Carolina Arboretum Society will also have the opportunity to attend a special “Membership Connects” ArborEvenings event on the third Wednesday of each month, July 15, August 19 and September 16, from 8 to 11 p.m. This event is only open to Arboretum Society Members and their accompanied guests; entry fees will be waived with a valid membership card. To further support MANNA FoodBank, the Arboretum will have a food collection bin on-site for Arboretum members to donate to at the “Membership Connects” nights. A list of recommended foods can be found on the Arboretum's website, ncarboretum.org/events.

The North Carolina Arboretum is located off the Blue Ridge Parkway at Milepost 393. From I-26, take Exit 33 and follow Blue Ridge Parkway signs for two miles to the entrance ramp. Please visit www.ncarboretum.org for parking fees and hours of operation.

“The Arboretum is proud to support the hard work of MANNA FoodBank and their efforts to help relieve so many in our community who are in need of food assistance,” continued Briggs. “We hope that our *Nature Connects* exhibit and ArborEvenings event series will provide a special place of comfort, joy and nutrition during these times.”

For more information on *Nature Connects* and ArborEvenings, please visit ncarboretum.org.

Exhibit support for Nature Connects is provided in part by The North Carolina Arboretum Society, Asheville Citizen-Times, B.B. Barns Garden, Gift and Landscape Company, Camilla Calnan Photography, The Laurel of Asheville, Mosaic Community Lifestyle Realty, Romantic.Asheville.com Travel Guide, Smoky Mountain Living Magazine and Henco North Creative Imaging.

About The North Carolina Arboretum

Each year more than 500,000 visitors experience the Arboretum’s gardens, trails, exhibits and plant shows, educational programs and lectures. The Arboretum’s ability to meet its mission and enrich the visitor experience is made possible by a community of supporting resources – from members, donors, volunteers and staff to state and local funds, special events, tribute gifts, grants and community partners.

The central mission of The North Carolina Arboretum, an affiliate institution of the 17-campus University of North Carolina System, is to cultivate connections among people, plants and places. A standard daytime parking fee of \$16 per personal vehicle is required for non-Arboretum members. Special events and after-hours activities may require additional fees. For more information, please call (828) 665-2492 or visit www.ncarboretum.org.

About MANNA FoodBank

MANNA FoodBank is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization serving Western North Carolina since 1983. As an accredited member of Feeding America, the nation’s largest domestic hunger relief organization, the mission of MANNA FoodBank is to involve, educate, and unite people in the work of ending hunger in Western North Carolina. MANNA serves over 200 community-based non-profit food assistance partner agencies in 16 Western North Carolina counties and distributed 19.8 million pounds of food in 2018/2019. MANNA FoodBank is a nonpartisan organization committed to sharing facts and information about issues related to hunger in Western North Carolina and how they affect those we serve. For more information, visit MANNAFoodbank.org, or call 828-299-FOOD.

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