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## **MAJOR EXHIBITION CELEBRATES BENJAMIN FRANKLIN'S 300<sup>th</sup> BIRTHDAY** *Interactive, International Exhibition Makes Its World Debut in Philadelphia*

**PHILADELPHIA – December 15, 2005** – In his time, Benjamin Franklin was this country's greatest scientist, inventor, entrepreneur, diplomat, philanthropist and humanitarian – in addition to being one of the most-quoted and affable humorists. Three centuries later, the achievements and legacy of this self-taught polymath are more relevant than ever.

### **International Salute to a "Global Individual"**

The Benjamin Franklin Tercentenary presents an international traveling exhibition, *Benjamin Franklin: In Search of a Better World*. The exhibition has been organized to commemorate the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Franklin's birth, and will travel around the United States and to France, as befits a man who was considered a resident of the world by all who encountered him, even though most Americans - and certainly Philadelphians - are quick to claim him as a beloved native son. The exhibition will make its world premiere from December 15, 2005, through April 30, 2006, at the **National Constitution Center** in Philadelphia, Franklin's adopted home town.

After debuting in Philadelphia, the exhibition will make the following stops:

- **St. Louis**, Missouri Historical Society, June 8-September 4, 2006
- **Houston**, The Houston Museum of Natural Science, October 11, 2006-January 21, 2007
- **Denver**, Denver Museum of Nature & Science, March 2-May 28, 2007
- **Atlanta**, Atlanta History Center, July 4-October 14, 2007
- **Paris**, Musée Carnavalet, December 4, 2007-March 9, 2008; and Musée des Arts et Métiers, December 4, 2007-March 30, 2008

The Benjamin Franklin Tercentenary is a non-profit organization founded in 2000 by five Philadelphia institutions with ties to Franklin. Members include the **American Philosophical Society**, the **Franklin Institute**, the **Library Company of Philadelphia**, the **Philadelphia Museum of Art** and the **University of Pennsylvania**. In addition, an Act of Congress in 2002 created the Benjamin Franklin Tercentenary Commission, a panel of fifteen outstanding Americans chosen to study and recommend programs to celebrate Franklin's 300<sup>th</sup> birthday. The Tercentenary is supported by a lead grant of \$4 million from The Pew Charitable Trusts.

"We are proud to support Benjamin Franklin's birthday season," said Rebecca Rimel, president and CEO of The Pew Charitable Trusts. "The Trusts' grant is our gift to the nation to celebrate Benjamin Franklin in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and we hope all citizens take this opportunity to truly reflect on his impact and strive to model his civic leadership."

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### **Accomplishments that defy classification**

Franklin's myriad of accomplishments and innovations – the prosaic as well as the profound – practically defy classification, and remain ubiquitous and relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. His achievements have made him a figure of near legendary status; indeed it is difficult to pinpoint a modern-day individual whose canon of contributions approaches the breadth of Franklin's. To bring the man behind the myth to life, the exhibition is designed to immerse visitors in Franklin's world, expose them to his ingenious problem-solving methods and leave them inspired by his example. Anticipated highlights are a 25-foot ship environment that visitors can climb aboard to recreate Franklin's method of charting the Gulf Stream; a simple yet whimsical animation of a young Ben swimming with a kite to save energy; and five of America's key founding documents, all originally signed by Franklin.

### **More than 250 original Franklin artifacts**

Chief Curator and Tercentenary Associate Director Dr. Page Talbott and exhibition designers Staples and Charles Ltd., of Virginia, pair more than 250 original Franklin artifacts with 40 interactive opportunities, including special effects, hands-on activities and family-centered fun, all inspired by Franklin's charming blend of curiosity, wit and wisdom. This unprecedented collection of artifacts will be gathered from institutions and private lenders (including many Franklin descendants) from around the United States and Europe. This unique synthesis creates an immersive environment in which visitors can experience some of the progressive thinker's qualities—his investigative approach to his environment, his self-reflection and his penchant for collaboration—in the presence of objects from Franklin's material world.

### **Lifelong Desire to Understand and Improve the World**

The exhibition's title, *Benjamin Franklin: In Search of a Better World*, expresses Franklin's lifelong desire to understand and improve the world around him. Throughout his 84 years, he used his ingenuity for the benefit of others, applying his observations and theories to devise practical inventions such as bifocals, swim fins and the lightning rod. He also founded the nation's first hospital, secured the French support that made American independence possible, and played a significant role in brokering the "Great Compromise", creating a legislature of two houses.

The 8,000-square-foot exhibition is divided into six sections:

- *Character Matters, 1706-1723*: Young Franklin in Boston
- *B. Franklin Printer, 1723-1748*: Franklin's entrepreneurial and prosperous career as a printer, as well as family life at his Market Street home
- *Civic Visions, 1731-1751*: Franklin's collaborative approach to community action, including his role in founding many of Philadelphia's key philanthropic, educational and civic institutions
- *The Search for Useful Knowledge, 1747-1785*: Franklin's many inventions, including his seminal work on the properties of electricity and his concern with practical applications for his scientific discoveries
- *The World Stage, 1744-1787*: Franklin's political career in colonial Pennsylvania, his years as a colonial agent in London, his diplomacy in France and his role as America's elder statesman
- *Seeing Franklin, 1787-Today*: Franklin's own assessment of his life, portraits of Franklin since his death to the present and a chance to "See Yourself in Franklin."

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### **The First Founding Father to Turn 300**

“Americans are naturally connected to Franklin, the first founding father to turn 300. We’ve seen that in all of our planning for the 300<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration,” said Dr. Rosalind Remer, executive director of the Benjamin Franklin Tercentenary. “We can now build on that interest and introduce people to aspects of Franklin they may not have considered.”

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The Benjamin Franklin Tercentenary, a non-profit organization supported by a lead grant of \$4 million from **The Pew Charitable Trusts**, was established to mark the 300-year anniversary of Benjamin Franklin’s birth (1706-2006) with a celebration dedicated to educating the public about his enduring legacy and inspiring renewed appreciation of the values he embodied. The Benjamin Franklin Tercentenary was founded in 2000 by a consortium of five Philadelphia cultural institutions: the **American Philosophical Society**, **The Franklin Institute**, **The Library Company of Philadelphia**, the **Philadelphia Museum of Art** and the **University of Pennsylvania**. In addition, an Act of Congress in 2002 created the Benjamin Franklin Tercentenary Commission, a panel of fifteen outstanding Americans chosen to study and recommend programs to celebrate Franklin's 300th birthday. The Benjamin Franklin Tercentenary can be found online at [www.benfranklin300.org](http://www.benfranklin300.org).