

## CR – Animal Planet Backyard Habitat Special

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla., January 23, 2007 – Animal Planet brought its successful television series *Backyard Habitat* to Central Florida to create backyard habitats. The show hosts, Dave Mizejewski from the National Wildlife Federation, and nature craft specialist Molly Pesce, arrived at *Disney's Animal Kingdom*® to build a habitat at Rafiki's Planet Watch. They could not do it alone.

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Children from the Boys and Girls Club of Pine Hills were asked to roll up their sleeves and literally dig in to the project. To complete the project the children were asked how they wanted to transform an open piece of land into a habitat that had to include the four essential elements, food, water, shelter, and a place for animals to raise their young. After much debate and laughter, the plan was put into place.

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With help from the horticulture experts from *Disney's Animal Kingdom* the project began. The children became more and more excited as they saw their hard work begin to change before their eyes. Where there was once dirt a new gopher tortoise habitat was created. On the side of a hill a passion vine was planted that served as a host plant for caterpillars that will soon grow into Florida's official state butterfly, the Zebra Longwing. As the project completed Dave certified the area as an official backyard habitat on behalf of the National Wildlife Federation. But the kids wanted to do more.

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They decided that the habitat was so peaceful and beautiful that they suggested building one in a hospital for children. Arnold Palmer Hospital for Children in Orlando was chosen and the team wanted to duplicate the exact habitat. The healing power of nature will truly be put to the test as these children face life's ultimate struggle. Children from the Boys and Girls Club, Children's Miracle Network, and patients from Arnold Palmer Children's Hospital for Children joined forces with Molly and Dave to recreate the backyard habitat.

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Dave reminded everyone that the four essential elements would have to be included in this urban setting. The group was very creative about including food, water, shelter, and place for animals to raise their young. After a days hard work the habitat was certified by Dave as an official backyard habitat. Miracles truly do happen as almost immediately butterflies made their way to the garden. Not only was a habitat created but life long friendships were made and children learned to value of giving to others.

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This prime time special aired November 27, 2006. Please refer to Animal Planet listing for rebroadcast schedule.

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