



**BOSTON'S MIT GIVES PASADENA NONPROFIT A GARDEN-ON-WHEELS
*FEMA Trailer from Katrina transformed into a mobile garden, tours U.S.A.***

Pasadena, CA (May 19, 2009) -- On June 11th, nonprofit artist organization *Side Street Projects* will embark on a 6,500 mile cross-country road trip from Pasadena, CA to Boston, MA and back to retrieve *The Armadillo* — an actual FEMA trailer deployed after Hurricane Katrina that students and faculty from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) transformed into a mobile, sustainable community garden and composting station as part of the *MIT FEMA Trailer Project*, founded and directed by MIT Visual Arts Program instructor and artist Jae Rhim Lee.

"This is truly a honor to be recognized by MIT," says artist Jon Lapointe, *Side Street Projects'* Executive Director. "The Armadillo is a model for how art and science can intersect to benefit communities. The Armadillo blurs the line between public art and public service, and we are thrilled to collaborate with MIT on this project."

The Armadillo will join *Side Street Projects'* existing fleet of mobile classrooms and workspaces which includes: 2 school buses that serve as mobile woodworking classrooms for kids, 2 restored vintage trailer offices, and a mobile solar energy array that powers the whole operation.

In fall 2005, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) purchased approximately 145,000 travel trailers and mobile homes to house Gulf Coast residents displaced by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. However, since their deployment, the FEMA trailers have been tied to a host of issues. Four years after the tragedy, there are over 90,000 idle FEMA trailers wasting away in rented parking lots across the country, costing taxpayers millions of dollars annually.

"The FEMA trailers symbolize many of the environmental, social, economic, and administrative challenges associated with temporary disaster housing," says Jae Rhim Lee. "The MIT FEMA Trailer Project combines both research, sculpture, and public intervention as part of a critical artistic practice. The Project's goal was to explore the history and issues surrounding the trailers and transform a surplus trailer into a positive symbol of environmental good that would make a difference in a community."

FEMA trailers have raised health concerns due to formaldehyde off-gassing. There have been documented increases in mental health problems among trailer park residents. Issues of homelessness and displacement still persist.

Over 18 months, *The Armadillo* was born, complete with a composting system and elaborate vertical planting walls. The final challenge was to donate *The Armadillo* to a community organization, prompting the nationwide search and ultimate award to *Side Street Projects*.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - Contact: Jon Lapointe, (626) 798-7774, jon@sidestreet.org

The official transfer ceremony from MIT's hands into *Side Street Projects'* will take place at the *Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway Conservancy* in Boston on June 18th. The Armadillo will also visit Baltimore, Washington, D.C., New Orleans, and Houston, providing public presentations and community workshops at cultural institutions and parks in each city. While in New Orleans, the Armadillo will visit areas that have yet to fully recover from Katrina, including a trailer park where people are still living in FEMA Trailers.

"*The Armadillo* will allow us to deliver a program that explores issues of art and science, horticulture, food production, environmental justice, and sustainability. The possibilities are limitless," says Lapointe. "We are so excited to share this 21st century mobile community garden with the people of Pasadena and folks across the U.S.A., especially those whose lives were adversely affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita."

Lapointe, along with his artist wife Emily Hopkins (*Side Street Projects'* Program Director) will fetch the trailer and blog the entire trip in real-time until *The Armadillo* is happily delivered to its new home in Pasadena. Beginning in July 2009, on-site *Armadillo* field-trips and community workshops will be offered where kids can create their own vertical planter out of two-liter bottles and recycled materials. The community will be encouraged to actively participate in the "gardening," as well.

The MIT FEMA Trailer Project was funded in part by grants and assistance from the Dean of the MIT School of Architecture and Planning, the Council for the Arts at MIT, MIT Public Service Center, MIT Visual Arts Program, The Pasadena Community Foundation, Whole Foods Market Arroyo, SunGro Horticulture, Flip Video, Dr. Stephen Kanter, and Bari Ziperstein.

Travel Itinerary:

June 18: Boston, MA at *The Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway Conservancy* (hand-off)
June 20: Baltimore, MD at Herring Run Berry Festival
June 22: Baltimore, MD at *Patterson Park Community Gardens*
June 23: Washington, D.C. at *The National Mall*
June 28-30: New Orleans, LA (several locations, visit <http://www.sidestreet.org/armadillo>)
July 2: Houston, TX at *Discovery Green* (in partnership with *DiverseWorks*)
July 8: Pasadena, CA at *Side Street Projects* (homecoming)

Founded in 1992, *Side Street Projects* is a completely-mobile, artist-run nonprofit organization based in Pasadena, CA. They teach artists of all ages how to roll up their sleeves and do things themselves with education programs that encourage self-reliance and creative problem solving. They are the only sustainable and mobile community art center in the USA. For more information, visit <http://www.sidestreet.org> and <http://www.sidestreet.org/armadillo>.

The mission of MIT is to advance knowledge and educate students in science, technology, and other areas of scholarship that will best serve the nation and the world in the 21st century. For more information about the MIT FEMA Trailer Project, please visit <http://fematrailer.mit.edu>.

Alternative Press Contacts:

Jae Rhim Lee, Visiting Lecturer, MIT Visual Arts Program
jrlee@MIT.EDU, (617) 324-3855 (office)

Ute Meta Bauer, Director & Asso. Professor, MIT Visual Arts Program, Dept. of Architecture
umb@mit.edu, (617) 253-5229 (office)

Emily Hopkins, Programs Director, *Side Street Projects*
emily@sidestreet.org, (626) 798-7774

END