



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Planet Word Installs Chat Benches to Invite Strangers into Conversation

Benches join a growing local and national movement to combat loneliness one conversation at a time

Washington, D.C. — Planet Word, the nation’s only museum of words and language, has installed two chat benches inviting visitors to sit down and start a conversation.

The benches, made possible through a gift from CubeSmart in honor of their outgoing board member Deborah Ratner Salzberg, are open to the public and join a broader effort across Washington and the country to use designated spaces to reduce isolation and encourage human connection.

The chat bench concept originated in the United Kingdom as a grassroots response to loneliness and has since spread to communities across the United States. D.C. has become a particular hub of this kind of work: Friendship Bench DC, a program run by HelpAge USA, pairs trained older adult volunteers with community members seeking conversation and support at sites across the city. For Planet Word, its own chat benches are a natural and literal extension of its mission to renew and inspire a love of words and language.

“Words connect us to one another,” said Ann Friedman, CEO and Founder of Planet Word. “These benches are a small invitation with a big idea behind it: that a conversation between strangers can change your day, or even your life.”

The benches honor Deborah Ratner Salzberg, a Planet Word board member and prominent Washington, D.C. real estate leader who served on CubeSmart's board for more than a decade before stepping down earlier this year. Salzberg began her career as a trial attorney at the U.S. Department of Justice before spending over 30 years at Forest City Realty Trust where she oversaw major developments such as The Yards in the Capitol Riverfront district and the redevelopment of Ballston Quarter in Arlington. She later co-founded Uplands Real Estate Partners.

"Deborah has been a steadfast supporter of Planet Word since the beginning," said Friedman. "Honoring her with something so in the spirit of what we do here, an open invitation to talk, felt exactly right."

CubeSmart, one of the largest self-storage real estate investment trusts in the United States, made the gift in recognition of Salzberg's long service to the company.

Planet Word is located at 925 13th Street NW in Washington, D.C. Admission is free. To arrange for coverage, contact press@planetwordmuseum.org.

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Planet Word is the only museum in the country dedicated to renewing and inspiring a love of words and language. Located in the historic Franklin School on the corner of 13th and K Streets in downtown D.C., Planet Word opened in 2020 as a new kind of interactive and self-guided museum. Using the museum's state-of-the-art technology, visitors determine their experience through their own words and choices. Planet Word is a bold and imaginative response to the life-long importance of literacy and to the challenge of growing a love of language. As a private, non-governmental museum, Planet Word is free for visitors and supported primarily by the generosity of donors.