



Press release

27.05.2018

The First COAF SMART Center in Lori, Armenia A Leading Model for Rural Advancement, Creativity and Innovation

YEREVAN— More than 1,000 guests from around the world attended the opening of the first COAF SMART Center on May 27 in the Lori region of Armenia. The COAF SMART initiative intends to establish additional cutting-edge education hubs, known as COAF SMART Centers, throughout Armenia.

The flagship COAF SMART Center, located in the Debet village, will offer 150,000 Lori residents with innovative programs in blockchain technology, robotics, agriculture, child development, media literacy, arts, science, and health education. The \$5 million investment aims to develop local resources and advance surrounding rural areas.

The COAF SMART concept is based on four pillars: innovation and creativity; languages and communication; entrepreneurship and economic development; active citizenship and personal development.

“To inspire young Armenians, you’ll need to encourage them to shoot for the stars. That’s what my friend Tony Shafrazian said... And we all got together and created this stunning center which inspires people visually and through its cutting-edge programs” COAF Founder Garo Armen said in his welcoming speech at COAF SMART Center opening ceremony.

“My dear young people, keep dreaming and go after your ambitions for these will become a basis for our future,” stated Armenian Deputy Prime Minister Tigran Avinyan in his welcoming speech.

Several COAF SMART partners were featured during the official opening. In collaboration with SAP, a Next-Gen Lab located at the COAF SMART Center will bring the latest blockchain technology to students, providing them with access to SAP’s instructional resources in virtual reality design and iOS application development. Other key partnerships include Arloopa, a leader in augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) founded in Armenia and operating globally.

COAF is also collaborating with PicsArt, with over 100 million monthly users worldwide, to edit and share photos in fun and creative ways. A new partnership has also been forged with Instigate Robotics and Instigate Training Center, aimed at bringing diverse technology and educational knowhow.

Children of Armenia Fund (COAF)
Tel: 212-994-8234
E-mail: info@coafkids.org
Web: www.coafkids.org/



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Creative Educational Technologies (CET), the official representative of LEGO in Armenia, will also conduct workshops with children. FreeEnergy, a producer of clean energy and solar power will support COAF SMART.

COAF's media partner for the opening was Factor Information Center.

In addition, Syrian-American children's artwork were exhibited on loan from the Cafesjian Center for the Arts, one of the key sponsors of the opening day celebrations, will collaborate with COAF on art classes. The COAF SMART Campus also features a 12-room Guest House for guests, experts and tourists. The facility's rugs have been donated by Megerian Carpets.

The flagship COAF SMART Center in the Lori region was designed by Beirut-based architect **Paul Kaloustian** and took 22 months to build from the ground up at a cost of \$5 million. The building was constructed by Kanaka Building Enterprise.

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The Children of Armenia Fund (COAF) is a non-profit, non-governmental organization that employs community-led approaches aimed at improving the quality of life in rural Armenia, with a particular focus on children and youth. COAF's target development areas are education, healthcare, social and economic development. COAF launched its programs in 2004, starting in one village and expanding to 44 villages in Armavir, Aragatsotn, Lori, Gegharkunik, Shirak and Tavush regions, impacting over 67,000 people.

Since 2015 COAF has developed and started implementing a new vision – SMART Initiative. SMART is designed to advance a generation across the rural world through education that will benefit individuals, societies and the environment. SMART will become an exemplary model of development and will be replicated in other regions and communities throughout Armenia.

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