

Coral Gables

Sesame Street star delights at No Dogs Allowed luncheon



Pictured (l-r) are Larry Stein; Dorothy Thomson with granddaughter; Barbara Stein; Sonia Manzano; Christopher Kraus from Baptist Hospital with wife, Joanne, and sons.
BY ELOISE E. RODRIGUEZ

Just two hours before the world premiere of the musical version of her top-selling children's book *No Dogs Allowed* at the Actors' Playhouse at the Miracle Theatre, Sonia Manzano — better known as "Maria" on *Sesame Street* — delighted young playgoers and their parents during a pre-show VIP luncheon at the Colonnade Hotel in Coral Gables.

A group of 50 children and parents met the *Sesame Street* icon in an informal setting where Manzano, with her husband and daughter at her side, took questions from kids and their parents.

With 35 years on the show, joining the cast in the third season as the first Puerto Rican character on a national television series, Manzano has influenced literally millions of children. Many of those children are parents today and several had heartwarming stories of how Maria's onscreen character encouraged them in their lives.

Following the luncheon, the world premiere of *No Dogs Allowed, The Musical* was enthusiastically received on the main stage of the Miracle Theatre. Actors' Playhouse, no newcomer to pre-Broadway premieres, hosted the 2003 pre-Broadway tryout of *Little Shop of Horrors* and 2005's Neil Sedaka musical anthology *Breakin' Up Is Hard To Do*. Playhouse execs hope the show will open doors to other celeb-penned children's shows.

"We have a tremendously active children's theater schedule and are constantly searching for new and innovative ways to connect with kids and their parents," said Actors' Playhouse Children's Theater director Earl Maulding, who assisted with the adaptation.



Sonia Manzano signs copies of her book, *No Dogs Allowed*, during the pre-premiere luncheon at the Colonnade Hotel in Coral Gables.