

Volunteer Florida FOUNDATION

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GOVERNOR'S CELEBRATION OF READING SCHEDULED FOR MARCH 18 IN SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

-- For the fifth year, former President George H.W. Bush and Mrs. Barbara Bush will join the governor in Naples to raise funds for family literacy programs throughout Florida --

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. – For the fifth consecutive year, Governor Jeb Bush will host the Celebration of Reading in Naples to benefit the Governor's Family Literacy Initiative, managed by nonprofit Volunteer Florida Foundation. The fundraiser is scheduled at The Registry Resort & Club on Friday, March 18, 2005, and will once again feature the governor's parents, former President George H.W. Bush and Mrs. Barbara Bush, as well as three national best-selling authors to be announced in the coming weeks.

The Celebration of Reading benefits Florida families through a variety of programs that improve literacy skills for both parents and their children. Participants from literacy programs funded by the Governor's Family Literacy Initiative also will participate in the event to demonstrate how the programs have impacted their lives.

Individual tickets to the Celebration of Reading are available for \$250 per person, which includes the Celebration Dinner immediately following the reading program, which begins at 6 p.m. Sponsorships are also available and include preferred seating and other privileges.

Florida's Celebration of Reading began in 2001 and has funded 115 family literacy programs throughout the state with more than \$4.6 million, helping more than 9,000 Floridians learn to read. "There's no doubt that the Celebration of Reading is a magical evening for everyone who attends," said Liza McFadden, president of the Volunteer Florida Foundation, which oversees the initiative. "That celebration continues throughout the year, since the funds that are raised help our state's adults and children learn to read. It is truly making a difference in our communities and our families."

McFadden said that Gov. Bush has three goals for strengthening families that are served by the Governor's Family Literacy Initiative: child well-being, parental involvement in education and economic self-sufficiency. "Family literacy programs help children and their parents gain the most basic skill needed for success," she said. "The ability to read opens up an entirely new world for these families. The results have been astounding."

The Volunteer Florida Foundation provides funding, training and technical assistance for literacy providers. The foundation's goal is to help programs eventually become self-supporting and remain effective. In 2003, the foundation instituted an online reporting system for participants to provide them with the management tools they need to be effective. The foundation also has instituted a three-phase funding plan that bestows mini-grants to help startup programs establish an effective operating base in the critical first year, with graduation to full funding and sustainability funding available after that important base has been established. A portion of funds raised each year is put into an endowment to ensure perpetuity of the Governor's Family Literacy Initiative.

The governor and his family have been visible advocates of literacy nationwide. The Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy is one of the partners of the Florida program. "The Barbara Bush Foundation is one of the partners who has been with us from the beginning, helping to make a true difference in the lives of more than 9,000 Floridians," McFadden said. Other founding partners include the South Florida Annenberg Foundation, Verizon Communications, Washington Mutual, Carnival Cruise Lines, Comcast Cable, Cooper & Hayes, the Cruise Industry Charitable Foundation and Walt Disney World Company.

Organizations in Southwest Florida receiving the 2004 grants include the Redlands Christian Migrant Association and the Fun Time Child Development Center. Previous grant recipients in the region include the Collier County Education Foundation, Collier County Housing Authority, Shadowlawn Elementary School, Bonita Springs Literacy Council, African Caribbean American Center, and The Immokalee Foundation.

For more information, visit www.VolunteerFloridaFoundation.org. To volunteer as a literacy tutor, contact the Volunteer Florida Foundation at (850) 410-0696. For tickets or sponsorship information, contact Tina Matte, event coordinator, at (239) 275-5758.