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Governor Crist Marks Conclusion of Black History Month at Mansion Event

~ Receives original James Gibson painting on behalf of State of Florida ~

~ Honors outstanding African-American educators and essay-contest winners~

TALLAHASSEE – Governor Charlie Crist this evening will host a group of more than 200 community leaders, educators and students at the Governor's Mansion to mark the conclusion of Black History Month. He will also honor Points of Light winners, educators, essay-contest winners, and James Gibson, one of the original Florida Highwaymen artists, who will present an original painting to the State of Florida.

"During February, we have honored men and women who opened doors to scientific, artistic, economic and social success for future generations," Governor Crist said. "The achievements of African-Americans are woven into every part of our state's history, and we are honored to celebrate this heritage during Black History Month and throughout the year."

Gibson will present his painting *Boca Ciega Bay* to the State of Florida at the celebration. The painting is inspired by Boca Ciega Bay near St. Petersburg, Governor Crist's hometown. Gibson is one of eight original Highwaymen artists who, beginning in the 1950s, sold Florida landscape art on the sides of highways in the Fort Pierce area. The art has become highly collectible, propelling the Highwaymen to the position of one of Florida's most treasured cultural assets. Several Highwaymen paintings currently hang in the Governor's Mansion.

The Governor will honor three outstanding African-American educators with the inaugural Excellence in Education Award for their contributions to education in Florida. These individuals were nominated for the award by students and peers, and each will receive an award check for \$1,500, along with a \$500 gift card from Office Depot.

Excellence in Education award winners are:

- **David B. Dickerson** – U.B. Kinsey/Palm View Elementary School of the Arts in West Palm Beach, 4th and 5th grade, Reading, Writing, Science, Social Studies.
- **Dr. Antoinette Wilcox** – Union Academy Magnet School in Bartow, 6th through 8th grades, Business & Economics.
- **Joe Nathaniel** – Sebastian River High School in Sebastian, 9th through 12th grades, Preparation for Post School Adult Living & Criminology.

Three students will also be honored as winners of an essay contest about the importance of African-American inventors and scientists. Each student will receive a four-year college scholarship from Florida Prepaid and a Dell computer.

Student essay contest winners are:

- **Aaron Watson III** – Canopy Oaks Elementary in Tallahassee, 5th grade.
- **Jasmine Jordan** – Progress Village Middle Magnet School in Tampa, 8th grade.
- **Joery E. Francois** – North Miami Senior High School in North Miami Beach, 11th grade.

The Governor will also recognize this month's **Point of Light winners, honoring Black History Month:**

- **Eddie Felton** of Fort Myers – A retired Naval officer, Eddie Felton is the founder of The Fathers Supporting Education Program at Lee Middle School. Since 2002, The members of the group are fathers dedicated to becoming the best fathers possible. Upon retiring from the Navy, Eddie focused on identifying and solving problems in his own community. Following discussions with members of his community, he concluded that many of the problems that plague our youth stem from a disconnect between fathers and their children. He started an all-male mentoring program called Straight Talk. The program has helped 200 children and earned the attention of Lt. Governor Jeff Kottkamp. Felton went on to train facilitators for a Nurturing Fathers program.
- **Pastor Moses Criswell** of Jacksonville – Pastor Criswell has led various campaigns and programs to improve the quality of life in inner-city Jacksonville. He created the Community Development Corporation and worked with the police department to drive drug dealers out of the neighborhood. Pastor Criswell also opened the doors to his fellowship hall to allow young people to have a safe place to come after school. The youth could get help with their homework and be exposed to positive influences. As founder of the “Be the Loaf Campaign for Children,” he encourages members of the community to combat crime, prevent hunger and to educate the children of inner-city Jacksonville. Pastor Criswell continually encourages members of the community to join him in his movement to build a strong and safe community for the youth in his neighborhood.
- **Warrick Dunn** of Tampa – A professional football player for the Atlanta Falcons, Warrick Dunn established the Warrick Dunn Foundation to provide opportunities for economically-disadvantaged single parents and their children who have demonstrated a commitment to achieve financial independence and stability. Homes for the Holidays is a program of the Warrick Dunn Foundation created to honor his mother's dream of owning a home. A single mother of six, she worked countless hours as a Baton Rouge police officer and was killed in the line of duty before realizing her dream of home ownership. The Homes for the Holidays program assists single parents by providing down payment assistance and furnishings for each home. To date, the foundation has assisted 74 single parents and 192 children.
- **Sunny Booker** of Marathon – Sunny is the founder and president of the Monroe Youth Challenge Program. The program was created to combat the rise in violence, substance abuse, suspension rates and teen depression among Monroe County youth. The program addresses the underlying causes of these behaviors through motivational workshops, leadership classes and mentorship. Sunny works with parents, educators and community members to positively affect the lives of students in Monroe County. She leads by example and serves as a role model to students and members of her community. Today the program serves more than 8,000 students across the state.

The program has received awards from the Juvenile Justice System, the D.A.R.E. Officers Association and many Florida schools.

The event is supported by Signature Sponsors Washington Mutual, Prudential Financial and EdSouth. Supporting sponsors are Coca-Cola, Scholastic and Tropicana. In-kind/Friend sponsors are Dell, Office Depot, Florida Prepaid, Florida Department of State and Points of Light Sponsor Royal Caribbean and Celebrity Cruises. Florida Education Commissioner Eric Smith, Secretary of State Kurt Browning and several other agency heads will also attend the reception.

The Black History Month Celebration was developed by the Governor's Volunteer Florida Foundation, the Executive Office of the Governor and the Governor's Mansion Foundation.

For more information on Black History Month, please visit www.FloridaBlackHistory.com.

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