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GOVERNOR BUSH APPLAUDS NATIONAL MENTORING AWARD RECIPIENTS

~ Florida mentoring leads national trends in outreach and innovation ~

TALLAHASSEE– Governor Jeb Bush today applauded the efforts of Jacksonville mentor Donald Wilford and mentee Adam Hutchinson. The pair was one of six awarded the first annual Spotlight Award by MENTOR, the National Mentoring Partnership in Washington, D.C. last week.

“I am proud Florida continues to lead the nation in mentoring gains and program innovation, and congratulate Donald and Adam on receiving this wonderful award. They are a testament to the tremendous impact a mentor can have on the life of a child or young adult,” said Governor Bush. “Thanks to the continued commitment of our statewide partners and mentors, thousands of youth like Adam now have a chance to improve their lives and strive for success.”

The Spotlight Award honors outstanding mentoring pairs that exemplify the powerful impact mentoring relationships can have on the lives of young people. The Jacksonville pair was selected from nearly 200 nominations received from across the country. Wilford and Hutchinson were matched more than two years ago through the State Attorney’s Office Jailed-Juvenile Mentor Program of Jacksonville. When they first met, Adam was incarcerated. During weekly visits, Don encouraged Adam to study for his General Education Diploma (GED), which he completed. Don has opened doors for Adam in the construction industry. Adam now works for a plumbing contractor and is in school to become a certified plumber.

“Don helped me become a man, a man that matters. Once I was a burden to the taxpayers, now I am a taxpayer. Someday I would like to be a mentor and give back,” said Hutchinson during the award ceremony.

During last week’s event, MENTOR unveiled its strategic plan for effectively recruiting mentors nationwide, titled “The National Agenda for Action: How to Close America’s Mentoring Gap.” The plan includes many of the outreach suggestions Florida has already implemented through the Florida Mentoring Partnership, including allowing state employees to take administrative leave for mentoring, incorporating youth as mentors and actively recruiting members of faith-based, community groups and corporations. These are all key points identified in MENTOR’s current plan.

“The relationship that Don Wilford and Adam Hutchinson have developed is an example of the unbelievable power of mentoring,” said Fourth Judicial Circuit State Attorney Harry Shorstein. “The Jailed-Juvenile Mentor program is a critical component of the State Attorney Office’s comprehensive effort to reduce juvenile crime. This community is a better place because of volunteers like Don Wilford who give their time to help our young people.”

The Florida Mentoring Partnership, managed by the Volunteer Florida Foundation, helps students excel in school and life by recruiting Floridians to become mentors. In keeping with the state’s pledge to America’s Promise, this partnership, which began as the Governor’s Mentoring Initiative in 1999, promotes collaboration among state agencies, municipalities, businesses, nonprofit organizations, individuals and schools. Both Governor Bush and Lt. Governor Toni Jennings lead this effort by serving as mentors to local students. According to the Partnership’s latest annual survey, 206,292 individuals are now actively engaged in formal mentoring programs statewide, making Florida one of the strongest mentoring states in the country.

The Florida Mentoring Partnership recognizes corporate support for mentoring through the Corporate Honor Roll, works with faith-based and community organizations on mentoring and training, partners with city governments across the state and reaches out to youth as mentors through the national award-winning Teen Trendsetters Reading Mentorstm Program. The program trains high-school students to mentor elementary school children.

MENTOR is leading the national movement to expand the world of quality mentoring. MENTOR believes that, with the help and guidance of an adult mentor, each child can discover how to unlock and achieve his or her potential. As the nation’s leading advocate and expert resource for mentoring, MENTOR is dedicated to delivering the research, policy recommendations and practical tools needed to help mentoring organizations effectively serve young people across the nation.

The State Attorney’s Office Jailed-Juvenile Mentor Program (JJMP) has been a cornerstone of rehabilitative efforts in the reduction of juvenile crime. The program was

created more than a decade ago to assist incarcerated youth with the skills to successfully re-enter society after release and to provide continued guidance while on probation. The program has linked hundreds of juvenile offenders prosecuted as adults with caring adults throughout the community. The mentors foster a caring relationship by visiting the juvenile at least one hour a week.

For more information on the Florida Mentoring Partnership or to become a mentor, please visit <http://www.flamentoring.org/>.

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