



United Way
of Northeast Florida

ATTN: News Director/ Assignment Editor ****** Media Release ******

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Contact:

Elizabeth Ash, Communications Manager (904) 390-3226

Janet Owens, Vice President of Marketing and Communications (904) 390-3245

Connie Hodges, President and CEO (904) 390-3218

Dropout Prevention Initiative Takes Top Honors ***United Way Achievers for Life Voted National Model***

JACKSONVILLE, FL - On May 12, United Way of Northeast Florida received top honors at the national United Way of America Staff Leaders Conference in Detroit, Michigan, for its dropout prevention initiative, *Achievers For Life (AFL)*. During the opening session, the Jacksonville-based affiliate was recognized for its innovative strategy that targets 6th grade middle school students. Based on the initiative's proven, measurable results and ability to be replicated by other communities, *Achievers For Life* was one of only three programs nationwide selected to be a finalist out of hundreds of entries submitted from United Ways across the country.

United Way of Northeast Florida responded to a United Way national call to showcase the best work that is happening in the field in the areas of education, income, health, and other related topics that United Ways are addressing. Entitled *Knowledge Café "Best Practices That Advance the Common Good" Award*, this recognition is presented to strategies that reflect innovation and promising practices. *Knowledge Café* is a central repository of more than 1200 best practices and innovative strategies gathered from across the United Way system.

In receiving the award, Connie Hodges, United Way of Northeast Florida President, said, "We accept this honor with heartfelt appreciation to our community partners in this work and especially the students, families, and school communities. Together, we're helping students stay on track to graduate."

The *Achievers For Life* initiative addresses the most powerful predictors for dropout risk at the critical transition point of grade school to middle school. As identified by Dr. Robert

Balfanz, a leading researcher with Johns Hopkins University, predictors include 80% or less school attendance, failure of sixth grade math or English, out-of-school suspension, and poor final behavior grade.

First-year accomplishments of *Achievers For Life* shared with United Way professionals included significant gains in GPAs and promotion rates and increased parental engagement with school and their students. The AFL initiative was piloted at Ft. Caroline and Arlington Middle Schools in the 2007-08 school year and expanded to Matthew Gilbert and Northwestern Middle Schools in its second year, 2008-09.

United Way of America CEO Brian Gallagher stated, "You are a model of exceptional system citizenship for your focus on students at risk of dropping out. We greatly appreciate your willingness to share your work in boosting high school graduation rates." Ed Pratt-Dannals, Duval County School Superintendent, remarked, "We co-identified the problem and worked together to come up with a solution. United Way has helped fund and monitor this initiative and has led this whole effort to achieve great results."

In addition, United Way of Northeast Florida distinguished itself in the area of effective communications and engagement programs supporting the United Way movement's national brand, LIVE UNITED. With a competition, entitled Best of LIVE UNITED, local United Ways submitted more than 130 entries in six categories. United Way of Northeast Florida was a finalist in two categories: Action Hero, for its Day of Action Mentor Recruitment Drive, and Media Hound, for the media relations strategy for Day of Action. United Way of Northeast Florida edged out Greater Twin Cities United Way in Minneapolis to earn the Best of LIVE UNITED Action Hero Award. The Day of Action in Northeast Florida generated more than 1,200 prospective mentor volunteers for school-based mentoring programs in Duval, Clay, and Nassau Counties for the 2008 school year.

About United Way

United Way is a global network in 47 countries and territories, including nearly 1,300 local organizations in the U.S. that advance the common good, creating opportunities for a better life for all by focusing on the three key building blocks of education, income and health. The United Way movement creates long-lasting community change by addressing the underlying causes of problems that prevent progress in these areas. LIVE UNITED is a call to action for everyone to

become part of the change. For more information about United Way, please visit:
LIVEUNITED.org

About United Way of Northeast Florida

United Way of Northeast Florida works to create real, long-lasting change in Northeast Florida by focusing on the building blocks for a good life. In partnership with volunteers, community organizations, and leaders, United Way is creating opportunities to improve life for people in Baker, Clay, Duval, Nassau and northern St. Johns counties. In addition, United Way leads United Way 2-1-1, a 24/7 information referral hotline; Life: Act 2, a pro-active response to an exploding senior population; and Full Service Schools, a community approach to removing barriers to academic success. For more information, call 904-390-3200 or visit www.liveunitednortheastflorida.org.

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