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Metro Richmond group, resident win Governor's Award

Awards mark beginning of Volunteer Week in Virginia

Richmond, Va. – Governor Timothy M. Kaine has announced recipients of the 2009 Governor's Volunteerism and Community Service Awards. These awards highlight the efforts of outstanding citizens of the Commonwealth who seek to enhance the lives of others in their communities. The awards are presented to groups, individuals and families whose efforts exemplify extraordinary volunteer service.

"I offer sincere congratulations to the volunteers who made a difference in the lives of others this year," said Governor Kaine. "When we serve our community as volunteers, our unique skills, perspectives and experience make us a stronger Commonwealth."

A Metro Richmond group and resident are recipients of the 2009 Governor's Volunteerism and Community Service Award.

- **Volunteer Emergency Families for Children, Midlothian: *Nonprofit Group Award.***

For Virginia's abused, neglected, runaway, homeless, and at-risk children, Volunteer Emergency Families for Children (VEFC) gives them something they desperately need – hope. Since 1979, VEFC has maintained approximately 150 volunteer families across the state who open their homes and hearts to children ranging from newborns to teens. The families provide short-term shelter care and mentoring, making themselves available 365 days a year, day and night, with placements averaging five days. Often arriving frightened and confused, the children can feel a sense of normalcy as these families provide a safe haven, nourishing meals and unconditional love.

VEFC coordinators work within the community to recruit host families and other council volunteers to spread the word by speaking to community organizations and at special events. These volunteers reach out to help with special projects such as fundraising and volunteer appreciation. Each local coordinator maintains close relationships with community agencies to stay in touch with the needs in localities. VEFC has also had its fair share of challenges over the years -- from a thinly stretched staff to the loss of critical grant funds.. Despite these struggles, VEFC's board, staff, volunteers, donors and supporters continue to passionately believe in their mission of service to children and persevere with patience and fortitude.

- **Ashley Louise Gregory, Mechanicsville: *Youth Volunteer Award.***

At 15, Gregory founded Ashley's Angels, a free dance camp for children with disabilities. As the founder of Ashley's Angels, she was responsible for the organization, registration and instruction of the dance camp enriching the lives of children in need. The oldest of three

siblings, Gregory was able to manage a busy schedule and participate as a member of a dance company, all while maintaining her scholastic achievements, social life and volunteer efforts.

She also successfully carried her idea into her dance studio, inspiring her instructor to develop a dance program as well. The professionally run dance program, Miracles in Motion, is today operated by a host of volunteers and educators who have been touched by her dream. For the past two years, Gregory has also walked for the Down Syndrome Association in its annual Down Syndrome Buddy Walk, raising hundreds of dollars for the team and performing at the event. In addition to her work with students with disabilities, Gregory volunteers annually with the Anthem Lemon Aid Program where she has raised hundreds of dollars for the Children's Miracle Network.

Governor Kaine has proclaimed April 19 - 25 as Volunteer Week in Virginia. As a prelude to the recognition week, these individuals and organizations were presented their awards during a special awards ceremony April 15 in Richmond. The Governor's Advisory Board on National and Community Service, Virginia Corps and the Virginia Department of Social Services' Office on Volunteerism and Community Service hosted the ceremony.

At least 1.7 million Virginians volunteer their time and talents annually. Virginians average nearly 243 million volunteer hours, equaling more than \$4 billion dollars worth of service to the state. For more information about the awards and Volunteer Week in Virginia, visit www.vaservice.org.

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