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**Nominations Sought For 2009 Champion of Children**

*Award recipient to be honored on February 3, 2009*

*Event Proceeds to benefit Champion of Children*

(Columbus, OH) – Nominations are being sought for the 2009 Champion of Children Award. The recipient will be honored at the 16<sup>th</sup> annual Champion of Children Award Event to be held at 6 p.m. on February 3rd, 2009 at the Southern Theatre, with a reception to follow at the Westin. Registration begins at 5:30 pm.

This year's event will look at early learning as a critical factor in the development of a child's path toward long term success. "Quality early learning prepares children for success in kindergarten, a necessary first step to raise the bar and the educational outcomes for our primary and secondary schools," said Linda Kass, Champion of Children chair. Champion of Children's after-work program will be produced in a live television panel format moderated and re-broadcasted through a partnership with WOSU Public Media.

The central Ohio community is asked to identify local individuals who have exemplified "the power of one" in improving the lives of children in central Ohio. Nominations are encouraged on behalf of individuals working in any field with an established record of outstanding service for children through leadership, attention, persistence, innovation and commitment. The nominee should have a deep and far-reaching impact and inspire a broad community response. After nominations are submitted, a committee of community and business leaders will select the winner in November.

Now in its 16th year, the annual Champion of Children Award Event raises awareness about the issues surrounding access to quality early education and celebrates the work of each year's award winner. The 2009 honoree will join a respected group of previous Champion of Children Award winners:

- Dr. Leslie Bostic, founding director of the Buckeye Ranch;
- Cecilia Cullman, co-founder of Action for Children;
- Mary Lazarus, community volunteer, child advocate and policy advisor;
- Dr. Antoinette Parisi Eaton, noted pediatrician and corporate director of Governmental Affairs for Children's Hospital;
- Mark Real, founding director of Children's Defense Fund- Ohio and president/CEO of KidsOhio.org;
- Sara Neikirk, executive director, Communities in Schools;
- Yvette McGee Brown, former lead juvenile judge, Franklin County and president of the Center for Child and Family Advocacy, Children's Hospital;
- David Schirner, vice president and camp director, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Ohio;
- Catherine Willis, a founder of Friends of Art for Community Enrichment (FACE);
- Tanny Crane, CEO and president of Crane Plastics Co. and community volunteer;

- Thekla Shackelford, founding member and chairman, I KNOW I CAN, and founding member and president, Project GRAD Columbus;
- Dr. Gene T. Harris, Superintendent, Columbus Public Schools;
- Dr. Gary Smith, Director, Center for Injury Research and Policy at Children’s Hospital;
- Bill Dolan, chief executive officer of Children’s Hunger Alliance and,
- Dr. David Andrews, Dean of the College of Education and Human Ecology at The Ohio State University.

American Electric Power will serve as Presenting Sponsor of the 2009 Champion of Children Award Event. “Champion of Children has emerged as a leading advocate for the value of high quality early education for our most important resource—our children,” said Michael G. Morris, Chairman, President, and Chief Executive Officer of American Electric Power. “We are proud to join Champion of Children as its 2009 sponsor to not only support our children, but also to salute one of our community champions who is doing great work to enhance the lives of all children in Central Ohio.”

Proceeds from the Champion of Children Event provide financial support to children, birth through age 5; from lower income working families so they can choose to attend one of 30 nationally accredited early learning centers throughout Franklin County. Champion of Children is a vital and growing initiative supported by large and small businesses, corporations, private funders, early learning professionals, public and private agencies, and community leaders.

To obtain a nomination form or for further information, contact Staci Collier at (614) 231-3790 ext. 22 or visit our website, [www.championofchildren.org](http://www.championofchildren.org)

**Nominations must be received by October 24, 2008**