



DATE: January 15, 2009

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**50,000 VOTES, 350 GUESTS, 85 ORGANIZATIONS,
44 NOMINEES AND 10 WINNERS**
Winners announced for the fourth annual WEDU Be More Awards™

Tampa, FL – The day was filled with great stories, unscripted moments and nail-biting anticipation as WEDU, west central Florida’s primary PBS television station, recognized more than 85 nonprofit organizations in the area who applied for honors and recognition in the fourth annual **WEDU Be More Awards™**, held Thursday, January 15, 2009 at the A La Carte Event Pavilion in Tampa.

Hosted by WEDU, the WEDU Be More Awards™ luncheon is one of the station’s premier events and paid tribute to outstanding achievements made by nonprofit organizations – both large and small for 2008. Event master of ceremonies Jack Harris, one of the most well-known media personalities in Tampa Bay, was joined by Santiago Corrado from the City of Tampa who presented the Mayor’s proclamation recognizing January 15th as WEDU Be More Awards™ Day; this is the fourth annual Be More Awards Day proclamation made by the City. These special guests, along with 350 others from throughout the west central Florida area, applauded heroic and valiant efforts made every day by the nonprofit community, and the outstanding achievements of the winners in the following nine award categories.

Be More...Involved: The first award was named for and presented to Mason Dixon: **The Mason Dixon Be More Involved – Award for Volunteerism.** Mason’s good works in the community, including his varied personal philanthropic efforts and charitable foundation – the Mason Dixon Christmas Wish Fund, prompted WEDU to name this award for him – showcasing his spirit of volunteerism and goodwill. As the recipient of the first annual *Be More Involved Award*, Mason will announce winner of the *Mason Dixon Be More Involved – Award for Volunteerism* at the 2010 ceremony. The award will be driven by an online poll on wedu.org with the winner being chosen by a tally of popular votes cast by the general public in the WEDU viewing area. The poll will include a listing of all community volunteers – and each of their compelling stories – that are nominated by nonprofit organizations.

Learn more about Mason and his good works during a half-hour primetime episode of *Up Close with Cathy Unruh*, an exclusive WEDU production, airing Thursday, January 22 at 8:30 p.m.

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Be More...Informed: A marketing award for the organization that demonstrated creative, original marketing through broadcasting, print material and/or community awareness campaigns. **2008 WINNER: Meals on Wheels of Tampa.** Nominees included: Agape Flights, Inc (Venice); Forty Carrots Family Center (Sarasota); Homeless Coalition of Hillsborough County; Meals on Wheels of Tampa and Mote Marine Laboratory & Aquarium (Sarasota).

Be More...Entertaining: This award honors the organization who hosted a wide variety of special events or one particularly original special event or fundraiser for community benefit. **2008 WINNER: Family Service Centers, Inc.** Nominees included: Abilities Foundation (Pinellas); Big Brothers Big Sisters of Tampa Bay; Family Service Centers, Inc. (Pinellas); Jewish Family and Children's Service (Sarasota) and St. Petersburg Free Clinic, Inc.

Be More...Brilliant: An award for the organization that displayed the most imaginative, creative, and innovative use of original ideas to achieve organizational goals. **2008 WINNER: Girls Incorporated of Sarasota County.** Nominees included: Big Brothers Big Sisters of Tampa Bay Community Haven for Adults & Children with Disabilities, Inc.; Girls Incorporated of Sarasota County; The Children's Home, Inc. and Wheels of Success, Inc.

Be More...Knowledgeable: An award which recognized the educational outreach tools an organization has employed to educate the community through guidance, knowledge, emotional or physical support, and/or a mentorship program. **2008 WINNER: Sunrise of Pasco County, Inc.;** Nominees included: Family Network on Disabilities of Manatee/Sarasota, Inc.; Lawyers for Literacy, Inc. (Pinellas); Operation PAR (Pinellas); Stageworks, Inc. (Hillsborough) and Sunrise of Pasco County, Inc.

The Community Foundation of Tampa Bay Community Spirit Award recognized outstanding achievement by a nonprofit organization within their service area. **2008 WINNER: The Children's Home (Hillsborough).** Nominees included: Big Brothers Big Sisters of Tampa Bay; CASA (Community Action Stops Abuse, Inc. - Pinellas); Meals on Wheels of Tampa; Ophelia Project & Boys Initiative of Tampa Bay; Southeastern Guide Dogs (Manatee) and The Children's Home.

In addition there were three other awards celebrating community support, overall appeal, and outstanding achievement:

Be More...Humble: A people's choice award was decided by an online poll driven by votes from the general public in the WEDU 16 county viewing area. This prestigious award exhibits the connection and relationship the organization has with the community and the people the organization serves. At the close of the 30-day voting window, the WEDU Be More Awards™ People's Choice Poll received more than 50,000 "unique user" votes. The top five organizations receiving the most votes and nominees for the People's Choice Award were: American Red Cross Manatee County Chapter; Big Cat Rescue; Early Learning Coalition of Pasco and Hernando Counties, Inc.; Tampa Bay Computer Society and Tampa Area Marine Parents Association (T.A.M.P.A). **2008 WINNER: Big Cat Rescue (Hillsborough).** This is the third consecutive year that Big Cat Rescue has captured the People's Choice Award.

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Be More...Encouraged: An award that is decided entirely by the WEDU Be More Awards™ panel of independent judges without any specific criteria but based on the organization's overall appeal and likeability. **2008 WINNER (dual award honorees): Little Red Wagon Foundation in partnership with Lazydays Partners Foundation (Hillsborough)**. Nominees included: Early Learning Coalition of Pasco and Hernando Counties, Inc.; Little Red Wagon Foundation, Inc. & Lazydays Partners Foundation, Inc. (Hillsborough); Operation Helping Hand, Inc. (OpHH) (Hillsborough); Stageworks, Inc. (Hillsborough) and Sunrise of Pasco County, Inc.

Finally, ***Be More...Unstoppable*** the most coveted award of the program. One nonprofit group was named **WEDU Be More Awards™ Nonprofit Organization of the Year 2008** – selected by a panel of judges from all submitted applications. The award criteria consists of overall excellence demonstrated in the selected category; fulfillment of the four commitments to the community, including service to the organizations' constituency, level of community impact, financial viability and embodiment of overall community goodwill. **2008 WINNER: Meals on Wheels of Tampa**. Nominees for Nonprofit Organization of the Year included: Big Brothers Big Sisters of Tampa Bay (Hillsborough); Forty Carrots Family Center (Sarasota); Girls, Inc. of Sarasota County; Meals on Wheels of Tampa and Sunrise of Pasco County, Inc. In addition to other benefits, the recipient of this honor received a \$1,000 community investment grant from WEDU.

While all organizations that applied for a WEDU Be More Award™ are extremely dedicated and tireless in their commitment to their community, the award-winning efforts demonstrated by the winners will be recognized, along with excerpts from the ceremony, on the WEDU Be More Awards™ *Be More Inspired* one-hour, primetime television special premiering on WEDU Thursday, February 19th at 9:00 pm and hosted by Jack Harris.

A nationally-recognized, award-winning program, The WEDU Be More Awards™ generates awareness for nonprofit organizations and celebrates the spirit of goodwill throughout the community. The WEDU Be More Awards™ have received national attention through a prestigious "Academy Awards® like" approach in honoring charities. In addition, PBS, based in Washington, D.C., took notice of this innovative program after its inaugural year and contracted with WEDU to assist in the distribution of the "Be More Awards" program nationally. The first PBS station to host the event outside of Florida was KAET based in Phoenix; their second annual "KAET Be More Awards" will be held in May of this year.

WEDU partners with many cultural and educational institutions in west central Florida to bring the arts, education and culture to its television audiences and members, and enrich and inspire the community it serves.

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For more information about the WEDU Be More Awards™, programming, TV schedules, channel guides, special events, outreach efforts and community partnerships visit www.wedu.org or call 800.354.9338. WEDU, a 501(c)(3) organization, is west central Florida's primary PBS station reaching 16 counties including the Tampa, St. Petersburg, Pasco, Polk and Sarasota areas through multiple media platforms including on-air broadcasting and online experiences that broaden horizons, transport and transform and open gateways to new ideas and new worlds. WEDU, recently received its fourth consecutive four-star rating by Charity Navigator, an honor only achieved by 6% of charities nationwide, is financially supported by its local community, and provides the highest quality education, information, and entertainment programming, special events and outreach activities.

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About PBS

PBS is a private, non-profit media enterprise that serves the nation's 355 public non-commercial television stations, reaching nearly 90 million people each week through on-air and online content. Bringing diverse viewpoints to television and the Internet, PBS provides high-quality documentary and dramatic entertainment and consistently dominates the most prestigious award competitions. PBS is the leading provider of educational materials for K-12 teachers and offers a broad array of other educational services. PBS' premier kids' TV programming and Web site, PBS KIDS Online (pbskids.org), continue to be parents' and teachers' most trusted learning environments for children. More information about PBS is available at pbs.org, one of the leading dot-org Web sites on the Internet.