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## NEWS RELEASE

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

#### **“OUTSTANDING COMMUNITY PARTNER” AWARD RECOGNIZES FOUNDATION’S CIVILITY INITIATIVE**

##### **Community of Caring National Awards also Go to Local Schools, Student**

VENICE, FL (July 10, 2009) – The Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Center for Community of Caring presented its 2009 Outstanding Community Partner award to Gulf Coast Community Foundation of Venice for funding and coordinating Community of Caring programs in 18 schools in Sarasota County. The schools’ participation in the acclaimed character education program is made possible through the Foundation’s regional Because It Matters civility initiative, marking the first time that Community of Caring has partnered with a community foundation to play a role in a larger community initiative. Community of Caring also recognized Venice Middle School/Oak Park South and Sarasota Middle School with national awards, and it honored Venice Middle School/Oak Park South student Crystal Coluzzi with its outstanding

student award. The awards were given on July 9 during the Community of Caring national conference in Sarasota, Florida.

“Gulf Coast Community Foundation is honored to be recognized with a national award from a program that shares our values about civility and character education,” said Wendy Deming, chief of staff at the Foundation, as she accepted the award. “When we conceived of Because It Matters, we knew that providing a civility program in our local schools would be a vital component of the initiative. We soon recognized that a research-based program with a proven track record already existed, and we jumped at the chance to partner with Community of Caring.”

The Foundation adopted Community of Caring as the educational arm of its Because It Matters civility initiative and currently funds participation in the program for 18 Sarasota County schools. Through this partnership, more than 22,000 Sarasota County students are exposed to character education in all aspects of the school day—in the classroom, hallway, cafeteria, and on the playing field—helping them develop positive values. “Their vision for creating civil discourse in schools is a national model,” said Penny Keith, professional development director of the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Center for Community of Caring, as she presented the award.

### **More Awards**

Two Sarasota County schools that participate in Community of Caring through the Foundation’s Because It Matters initiative also were honored for their exemplary work in character education. Sarasota Middle School received the 2009 Community of Caring Outstanding School Award. The school also has been named 2009 State School of Character in Florida by the Golden Rule Foundation of the Florida Department of Education.

Venice Middle School/Oak Park South received the 2009 Building Bridges: Including More Children in a Community of Caring Award, only the second time in the history of Community of Caring that this award has been presented. The Building Bridges award recognizes the spirit of inclusivity promoted by Eunice Kennedy Shriver, founder of the Community of Caring organization.

Venice Middle School/Oak Park South student Crystal Coluzzi, meanwhile, received the 2009 Community of Caring Outstanding Student Award. While presenting the award, Community of Caring's Keith read from a nomination letter that described how Coluzzi exemplifies each of the five core values of the Community of Caring program—caring, respect, responsibility, trust, and family. “Her teachers know they can count on her,” said Keith.

#### **About Gulf Coast Community Foundation of Venice**

Gulf Coast Community Foundation of Venice builds strong communities through leadership, partnership, and endowed philanthropy. A public charity committed to improving the quality of life in the communities it serves, it is the largest community foundation in Florida with assets of approximately \$200 million. The Foundation was founded in late 1995 and has awarded nearly \$88 million in grants in the areas of arts and culture, health and human services, education, civic affairs, and the environment. For more information about the Foundation, visit [gulfcoastcf.org](http://gulfcoastcf.org).

#### **About Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Center for Community of Caring**

Community of Caring is a K-12, whole school, comprehensive character education program, founded in 1982 by Eunice Kennedy Shriver. It has been adopted by almost 1,300 schools in 46 states and Canada. It is research-based and has a proven record of accomplishment. Community of Caring creates an environment that helps students develop positive values by teaching values everywhere: in the classroom, hallway, cafeteria, and playing field.

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**Photo caption information:**

**Community\_of\_Caring\_GCCFV**

Wendy Deming (left), chief of staff, Gulf Coast Community Foundation, accepted the 2009 Community of Caring Outstanding Community Partner Award on behalf of the Foundation from Dr. Paula Smith, executive director, Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Center for Community of Caring.

**Community\_of\_Caring\_student**

Venice Middle School/Oak Park South student Crystal Coluzzi received the 2009 Community of Caring Outstanding Student Award from Dr. Paula Smith, executive director, Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Center for Community of Caring.