

Contact:

Laura Bauer Granberry
Director of National Initiatives
229-931-2034
lbgran@gsw.edu

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

2010 Mattie Stepanek Caregiving Scholarships Awarded

AMERICUS - Begun by the Rosallynn Carter Institute for Caregiving (RCI) in 2005, the Mattie Stepanek Caregiving Scholarship was created in memory of renowned poet and peacemaker Mattie J. T. Stepanek. Friend to both President Jimmy Carter and former first lady Rosallynn, Mattie believed “if all generations of people freely and abundantly give care to others and to our world, we will have an eternal source of love and hope that fulfills the needs of all ages...for all future”.

RCI recognizes that caregivers are unfortunately often viewed as expendable resources in systems of care. As a result, many caregivers are overlooked, ill-prepared and may ultimately burn-out. Since RCI promotes the view that family, professional, and paraprofessional caregivers are the most valuable asset in any system of care; the purpose of the Mattie Stepanek Caregiving Scholarship is to provide financial assistance to those who are seeking training or education in specific skills, procedures and strategies that lead to more effective care, while also protecting their own health and well-being.

Receiving many compelling scholarship applications from all over the country, the selection process proved quite difficult. Mattie’s mother, Jeni, who serves as chair of the selection committee, states, “It is always an honor to be able to support this effort, and to see how this award is rippling out and touching lives in such a powerful way.” Other members of the scholarship selection committee are Nancy Hunt, President of the We Are Family Foundation and Kelly Ellison, Director of Development, Arts Council of Metropolitan Kansas City.

The 2010 Mattie Stepanek Caregiving Scholarship winners are:

Reitha A. Cabaniss, Jasper, AL – Reitha’s work history began as a registered nurse over 20 years ago and has evolved into that of a nurse educator. She has now been admitted into a unique doctoral program at the University of Alabama that prepares graduate students to become instructional leaders by combining instruction from the College of Education and the College of Nursing. Mother of three; Reitha and her husband have struggled to provide care for 17 year old Eric, who is severely autistic. Attempting to work through the tangled system of special education and deficient community services, her hope lies in the dream of using their lessons learned to help other parents and families. Reitha believes that education is the means to unlock opportunities and influence change.

Mary A. Giesen, Suamico, WI –Mary A. Giesen, Suamico, WI - A recent high school graduate, Mary is pursuing a career in nursing and will begin her postsecondary education at Marian University this month. Dealing with her own medical condition since age four, Mary has learned much from her many skilled medical providers and caregivers and has a desire to help others in return. Mary works teaching swimming lessons to children, is involved in church and youth group, volunteers with many non-profit groups including Habitat for Humanity, and has participated in mission trips across the U. S. and in Mexico. She enjoys spending her free time with either of her two great-grandmothers, both of whom have multiple health issues. Mary has the opportunity and privilege of learning from these women as they share and reminisce. In addition to providing needed emotional support, she assists with direct care and a variety of chores. Mary is committed to recognizing the importance and contributions of each and every person - young, old, rich, poor, healthy or ill - and hopes to make a difference in the lives of those she encounters.

Priscilla A. Pompee, BA, BCaBA, Miami, FL - Priscilla is an Associate Behavior Analyst developing and implementing academic and behavior programs for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Miami, Florida. Previously she has worked as a behavior feeding therapist at the Kennedy Krieger Institute where she specialized in treating a diverse population of children with feeding disorders. Priscilla believes teamwork, patience, and perseverance is essential and necessary for helping each child reach their full potential. Finding inspiration in Mattie Stepanek's poem "Hope", she sees the children that she works with as her hope and feels rewarded for being theirs. Priscilla plans to pursue a Masters in Applied Behavior Analysis and Autism at Sage Graduate School. She is certain that the additional knowledge and experience she gains from furthering her education will lead to more effective treatment and benefit those she works with.

Tonya D. Scott, Indianapolis, IN – A single working mother, Tonya learned first-hand about the need for education for caregivers when thrust into the role of providing care for her father with lung cancer and her mother with Alzheimer's disease. Providing their care until their deaths, Tonya was able to step outside of her personal view of caregiving and recognize that in order to advocate for better care, family and professional caregivers must support one another in their roles. As a family member closest to the patient, she realized the importance of capturing, documenting and sharing what is going on with an ill family member in the home with the professionals working with them. A frequent mentor; Tonya is also a hospice volunteer with the Visiting Nurse Association and volunteer with The Salvation Army at a their Shelter for Women and children. In addition to completing her BS in Business Management for Healthcare Administration, Tonya wants to expand her knowledge by becoming a Qualified Dementia Care Specialist.

The Mattie Stepanek Caregiving Scholarship is sponsored by Johnson & Johnson, RCI's partner since 2001. This partnership builds on the significant work accomplished by the RCI over the past 21 years as well as on the credo of Johnson & Johnson to be "responsible to the communities in which we live and work," and to "encourage...better

health and education.”

The Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregiving was established in 1987 on the campus of Georgia Southwestern State University (GSW) in Americus, Georgia. The RCI was formed in honor of former First Lady Rosalynn Carter, an alumna of GSW, to enhance her long-standing commitments to human development and mental health. The RCI works to establish local, state and national partnerships committed to building quality long-term, home and community- based services.

REPORTERS/EDITORS:

For more information on the Rosalynn Carter Institute (RCI) or its programs, call (229) 928-1234 or go online: www.RosalynnCarter.org

###