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2011 Mattie J. T. Stepanek Caregiving Scholarships Awarded

AMERICUS, GA – Now in its 7th year, the Rosallynn Carter Institute for Caregiving (RCI) created the Mattie J. T. Stepanek Caregiving Scholarship in memory of the renowned poet and peacemaker. In 2003, Mattie and his friend former first lady Rosallynn Carter co-chaired an expert panel on intergenerational caregiving for the RCI. At that meeting, Mattie stated, “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 often viewed as expendable resources in systems of care. Laura Granberry, Director of National Initiatives for the RCI, explains, “Many caregivers are overlooked, ill-prepared and may ultimately burn-out. The purpose of the Mattie J. T. Stepanek Caregiving Scholarship is to provide financial assistance to caregivers of all ages and backgrounds 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”. Four \$2,500 scholarships are awarded annually.

Upon reviewing this year’s applicants, chair of the scholarship selection committee Jeni Stepanek commented, “My son, Mattie, recognized that ‘Hope is real, peace is possible, and life is worthy!’ Caregivers are essential to the truth of this message. How wonderful to see so many people who are seeking to further their education and training as caregivers, so that they can best support those in need of hope and peace as they face challenges in life. The 2011 recipients of the RCI’s Mattie J.T. Stepanek Scholarship are an amazing group of people who represent diverse aspects of caregiving. They are each highly deserving of this honor, and it is exciting to see how this program is growing each year”. 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 2011 Mattie Stepanek Caregiving Scholarship winners are:

Andrea Bortnik, Los Angeles, CA – Of Argentinean, Chinese and American heritage, Andrea is diverse, multicultural, and trilingual. She defines herself as someone who invests her whole being in making a positive difference in every life she touches. A nutrition caregiver at the VA, she is a graduate student in the combined UCLA and VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System program. Slated to take the Registered Dietitian exam in August 2012, Andrea plans to serve as an inpatient nutrition caregiver at the VA

so that she can gain practical experience on how to treat the most complex health conditions among the largely geriatric veteran population she hopes to care for.

Jamie Dobbins, Columbia, MD – Volunteering with children with various disabilities as a teenager, Jamie first met Mattie and Jeni Stepanek while working for Project Assist, a research project out of the University of Maryland that provided both childcare and respite care for families. Learning from Mattie that peace is possible when everyone has their basic needs met, Jamie, who is now a teacher for young children with autism, believes that teachers need to fully understand a child’s disability in order to know how to provide a safe environment that supports their learning and growth. Jamie plans to continue her education by obtaining a Master’s degree in Special Education.

Elise Lark, Olivebridge, NY – Self described as an artist, poet, dreamer, and mother of a daughter in social work school, Elise is an oncology social worker at Benedictine Hospital’s *Oncology Support Program* in Kingston, NY and a PhD student at Antioch University’s *Leadership and Change Program*. Her learning goals and recent research project, *Dreaming Out Loud: Initiating Plans for a Community-based Home for the Dying* are in service to her long-term goal of opening such a home in her own community. Utilizing the Comfort Care Home Model, Elise believes that such a home is a symbol of community goodwill and the possibility of a good death for everyone through the collective efforts of a caring community.

Amber Thornton, Troy, NY – Currently pursuing a six year doctorate degree in physical therapy, last year Amber volunteered with the Shriner’s Hospital’s aquatic physical therapy program. Partnered with a child with cerebral palsy, she eventually was able to work one-on-one with him. Amber received an amazing sense of fulfillment due to this experience, and quickly decided that her purpose in life would be to grant children with disabilities the ability to live fulfilling, satisfying lives through the gift of physical therapy. In addition to school and work, her community service and volunteer activities are her most prized accomplishments.

The Mattie J. T. 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 22 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, in honor of former First Lady Rosalynn Carter, an alumna of GSW. 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