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Governor Crist Recognizes Hispanic Heritage Month Contest Winners

TALLAHASSEE – Florida Governor Charlie Crist today announced the winners of the Hispanic Heritage Month Excellence in Education Award and student essay contest. The educators and students will be honored at this evening's annual celebration of Hispanic Heritage Month, "Florida: A Tapestry of Cultures," at the Governor's Mansion. Joining Governor Crist will be artist Xavier Cortada, whose paintings depicting Florida's vibrant Hispanic culture have been featured at the Capitol during Hispanic Heritage Month.

"Much of Florida's economic and cultural strength comes through our state's Hispanic community, and throughout Hispanic Heritage Month we have celebrated that strength," Governor Crist said. "I applaud all contest participants for sharing their talents, insight and experience and congratulate this year's winners."

Three outstanding Hispanic educators will be honored with the inaugural Excellence in Education Award for their contributions to education in Florida. Each will receive an award check for \$1,500, as well as a \$500 gift certificate for office supplies, made possible by event sponsors. The winners are as follows:

- Isabel Garcia, Coral Park Elementary School, Miami
- Ingrid Robledo, George Washington Carver Middle School, Miami
- Monica Sleeter, Hillsborough High School, Tampa

Three students will also be honored for their outstanding essays. Essays addressed the topic, "In what way will you impact the future of the Hispanic community in Florida and why?" Each student will receive a four-year full tuition scholarship to the Florida state college or university of their choice and a laptop computer. The winners are as follows:

- Gladys Levy, Devon Aire Elementary School, Miami
- Elisa Lemerond, Tomlin Middle School, Plant City
- Pedro Quevedo, Hialeah Senior High School, Hialeah

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All winners will receive a signed print of Cortada's painting *Conquistadores*, which is being donated to the state's permanent art collection through the sponsorship of Washington Mutual. Cortada's artwork has been featured in museums, galleries, and other cultural venues throughout the nation and across Europe, Africa and Antarctica. Most recently, Cortada's work was exhibited during the Governor's Florida Summit on Global Climate Change held in Miami, Florida, on July 12-13, 2007.

This evening's event is made possible by signature sponsor Washington Mutual, and through supporting sponsors AAA Auto Club South, Bacardi, Coca-Cola of Florida and Sallie Mae Foundation. In-kind sponsors are Apple, Florida Prepaid College Foundation, Office Depot and the City of Tallahassee.

The event is organized in cooperation with the Governor's Mansion Foundation and Volunteer Florida Foundation, a charitable nonprofit working to further social service initiatives championed by Governor Crist. For more information on Florida's Hispanic heritage, please visit www.FloridaHispanicHeritage.com.

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