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RODEO INSTITUTE FOR TEACHER EXCELLENCE TO NAME MARY JANE  
HAMILTON-TEACHER OF THE YEAR AWARD RECIPIENT

Houston, TX - The Rodeo Institute for Teacher Excellence (RITE™) will host the second RITE-Teacher of the Year Luncheon at Maggiano's Little Italy on Friday, May 19, 2006. This year's luncheon will name the second recipient(s) of the RITE- Mary Jane Hamilton Teacher of the Year. The award will honor the memory of longtime educator Mary Jane Hamilton who lost her battle with cancer in 2003. Ms. Hamilton taught at Bastian Elementary and Longfellow Elementary in the Houston Independent School District for 17 years before becoming the Executive Director for PSH Foundation. Additionally, Ms. Hamilton was a lifetime member of the Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo, past chairman of the Steer Auction Committee as well as a charter member of the Houston Cosmopolitan Club.

Honoring teachers like Mary Jane Hamilton is something RITE's Executive Director Madeline Lunde feels is often overlooked. Lunde states, "Our teachers work so hard and they deserve as much support and recognition as possible. We are delighted to be able to show our gratitude on this special occasion by honoring an extraordinary individual like Mary Jane Hamilton."

New this year, RITE will select two winning recipients for this award. Beginning at the 2005-2006 academic school year, RITE expanded the teacher mentoring program to include Corrective Reading for children up to sixth grade. It was only fitting that one award be given to a "primary" teacher and a subsequent award to a "corrective" teacher.

Selecting the most deserving of the RITE-Mary Jane Hamilton Teacher of the Year will be a difficult process according to Ms. Lunde. To make the selection process as fair and equal as possible, Kathy Vanecek has been selected to judge the nominees on their skill and talent as a Direct Instruction teacher. Ms. Vanecek, was recommended to RITE by Carolyn Schneider, one of the nation's top Direct Instruction reading consultants. As a former teacher, assistant principal and principal, "Kathy's wealth of knowledge ensures that that the teacher(s) that are selected as RITE's Teacher of the Year, are the very best at teaching children the RITE way", Ms. Lunde states. Vanecek judged the Teacher of the Year candidates by screening 15 minute video demonstrations submitted by the nominating schools.

All 35 participating RITE schools will be represented, with the nominating principals and their respective nominees in attendance, as well as special key note speaker, Bernice Washington. Ms. Washington is a nationally renowned motivation speaker/author from Dallas, Texas whose unique style and persona have dazzled audiences across the nation. Her dynamic delivery has

earned her the coveted title “Motivational Speaker Extraordinaire” and has spoken to such prestigious groups as the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation, The University of Texas, Texas Instruments, and the YWCA. Ms. Washington’s presentation at the luncheon is titled, “Empowering People for Peak Performance.”

The Rodeo Institute for Teacher Excellence (RITE) is a non-profit organization that believes at-risk children must learn to read on grade-level by third grade in order to succeed in school and later life. Research has shown that reading is the key to academic achievement and that early intervention is the single most important factor in preventing illiteracy. Children who are not able to read on grade level by third grade have a history of being the most “at-risk” for failure and dropping out of school well before graduation.

As RITE concludes its ninth year of operation, its mission continues to be to train, mentor and support early childhood education through sixth grade teachers in the methodologies of reading instruction to give them the skills they need to be highly qualified to teach at-risk students to read and succeed. The RITE program can be found in over 442 classrooms in 35 early childhood centers, elementary, and intermediate schools in the Houston and Aldine Independent School Districts. This year RITE will work with approximately 10,000 children, bringing the total number of students served to over 40,000.

For more information on the RITE – Teacher of the Year Award Luncheon or on the RITE program, please contact Madeline Lunde at 713-532-3822.

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