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**PAULETTA AND DENZEL WASHINGTON SCHOLARSHIPS AWARDED
MAY 20 TO THREE YOUNG NEUROSCIENTISTS**

Sixth annual presentation takes place at the Johnnie L. Cochran Jr. Middle School in Los Angeles

LOS ANGELES (May 18, 2009) – The sixth annual Pauletta and Denzel Washington Family Gifted Scholars in Neuroscience Awards will be presented Wednesday, May 20, 2009, at the Johnnie L. Cochran Jr. Middle School in Los Angeles, beginning at 10:30 a.m.

Reflecting a growing national interest in the program and the high quality of applicants, three young neuroscientists will receive scholarships this year. The awards are given by the Department of Neurosurgery at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center and the recipients work during the summer months with world-renowned physicians, neurosurgeons and scientists. The program provides \$2,500 in monthly support for graduate-level researchers and \$2,000 a month for undergraduates.

“We established the scholarship program in 2004 to give promising young scientists an opportunity to develop their talents and acquire first-hand experience in facilities and laboratories on the front lines of patient care and research. We also want to help focus the attention of students in high schools and colleges across the country on the excitement and rewards that come from pursuing scientific endeavors that may benefit humanity for generations to come,” said Keith L. Black, M.D., chairman of Cedars-Sinai Medical Center’s Department of Neurosurgery.

“One of the things that we find exciting is the fact that the recipients from the previous five years are continuing to work in science and they’re making great strides,” said Pauletta Washington. “As word gets out about the Washington Scholars program, we’re picking up momentum. There is a lot of interest among young scientists on college campuses, and the young people attending the awards ceremonies are always very excited. It’s amazing. It’s wonderful.”

Believers in the strength of family, the empowerment of education, and the promise of new treatments and cures coming from research, Pauletta and Denzel Washington enthusiastically offered their name and involvement in the scholarship program. Receiving a higher education was a given in their household: one of their four children is a graduate of Morehouse College, one is attending Yale University, and two are preparing to enter college this fall.

Several of the earlier scholarship recipients will make brief remarks at this year’s awards ceremony, and Dr. Black will be joined in the program by Scott Schmerelson, principal of the Johnnie L. Cochran Jr. Middle School; Dale Mason, philanthropist, entrepreneur, and widow of the late Johnnie L. Cochran, Jr.; Marguerite LaMotte, District 1 Board Member, LAUSD Board of Education; Arthur J. Ochoa, senior vice president for Community Relations at Cedars-Sinai, Pauletta and Denzel Washington; and others.

(more)

Marcus J. Gates of Stone Mountain, Ga., is this year's graduate-level recipient. He has transitioned to his first year at Meharry Medical College from Fisk University in Nashville, Tenn., as part of a joint program requiring students to maintain at least a 3.5 grade point average while taking a rigorous course load. Gates earned a 3.99 average and was inducted into the Beta Kappa Chi National Scientific Honor Society.

Appreciative of the care he received after being seriously injured in a car crash during his junior year of high school, Gates decided to become a surgeon. He has acquired research experience at Vanderbilt University and, according to professors who offered their recommendations, he clearly has the interest, intelligence and ability to excel in science and medicine.

"Marcus Gates is without any question in my mind in the top 1 percent of students, if not the best student I have taught so far ..." wrote one professor who has taught at Meharry for 13 years. Among other accomplishments, Gates received the highest biochemistry board score ever obtained by a first-year student at the medical college.

Harold (Wes) Phillips of New Haven, Conn., one of the undergraduate recipients, is a junior at Yale University working toward a degree in molecular biophysics and biochemistry. He participated in two summer programs at Duke University that introduced him to the rigors of medical training and research.

At Duke, Phillips, the son of a single mother, met and worked with a research scientist who became one of his significant role models and mentors. As a result, Phillips hopes to enter an M.D./Ph.D. program that will enable him to become a successful physician-scientist. He said he also hopes "to serve as a strong role model for other disadvantaged youths striving to overcome their challenges."

The Yale professor who taught Phillips' introductory course to organic chemistry said he was "extremely impressed with his intelligence, dedication and sincerity" and described Phillips as "courageous and fearless with the expression of his own ideas."

Marisa P. Riley, the other undergraduate recipient, has been involved in research projects since she was in high school. At the University of Pennsylvania, where she is a junior, she has gained research experience at the Center for the Treatment and Study of Anxiety and the Brain Behavior Laboratory.

As a result of her growing interest in biology classes and the research studies she has participated in, the Havertown, Pa., resident has shifted her focus from psychology and graduate school to the neurosciences and medical school.

Riley's application to the Washington Gifted Scholars program was accompanied by glowing recommendations that praised not only her intellect but her work ethic, determination, ingenuity and courage. "She is a hard-working, dedicated, mature and well-rounded student," said one research scientist, "But perhaps most importantly, she is a caring, thoughtful individual who will surely make a positive contribution to the program."

As part of the scholarship program, recipients are expected to prepare a scientific abstract or paper to submit to a national neuroscience, cancer or neurosurgery organization.

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