



For Immediate Release
Tuesday, August 29, 2006

Press Release

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SMARTSTART ESTABLISHES JOREAN DEBNAM CHAMPION FOR CHILDREN AWARD

RALEIGH— Wake County SmartStart marks its 10-Year Anniversary with an award to honor a local child care advocate. The award is named after the late Jorean Debnam, a leader in Wake County's child care community whose tireless efforts as co-founder and director of New Bern Avenue Day Care Center made a difference in thousands of people's lives from 1968 to 2003.

“Establishing the Champion for Children Award in Ms. Debnam’s honor, not only commemorates her work to improve the lives of thousands of children and their families, but also recognizes the meaningful work of others in this vital industry,” said Pam Dowdy, executive director of Wake County SmartStart. “The award will honor a local leader who inspires enthusiasm and support for high-quality child care while mobilizing parents, colleagues and/or the community-at-large around issues affecting young children and their families.

Ms. Debnam’s vision for a child care center began in the early 1960s. It was through her work helping women on welfare obtain job training at Wake Opportunities that Ms. Debnam saw how inconsistent, informal child care affected a mother's ability to work and provide for her family. With grants from United Way of Wake County, Catholic Diocese, Christ Episcopal Church, she opened the New Bern Avenue Day Care to serve 117 children. As one of the first centers in the state to be certified by the NC Division of Social Services, half of the children enrolled in the center received child care subsidies from the county. Over the decades, Ms. Debnam worked tirelessly to solicit community donations from fraternities, sororities, churches and citizens to provide scholarships to many families who needed tuition assistance.

Despite having to balance caring for her four children and responsibilities of the center, Jorean earned a Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education from Shaw University. Ms. Debnam also supported education in the early childhood field as New Bern Avenue Day Care was the first field observation site for students at Shaw University and later a site for North Carolina State University and Peace College. Ms. Debnam lost her fight with cancer and died October 24, 2003 at the age of 64.

The first-ever Jorean Debnam Champion for Children Award will be presented at the Wake Cares for Kids dinner for early childhood educators Thursday, September 21, 2006 at the Embassy Suites in Cary. Additional details about the award are available at www.wakesmartstart.org

As a local partner of the North Carolina Partnership for Children, **Wake County SmartStart** works with national, state and local agencies, as well as other nonprofits that serve Wake County children, ages birth to 5, and their families through vital programs. Wake County SmartStart works to improve the quality, accessibility and affordability of child care settings, provide preventive health services and support families in a variety of ways. The organization also promotes, supports, and advocates for the needs of young children living in Wake County. To obtain more information on Wake County SmartStart’s allocation of state funds and its activities with local partner agencies, visit www.wakesmartstart.org.

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