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PROJECT BREAKTHROUGH TO BRING DISCUSSIONS OF RACE AND EQUALITY IN JACKSONVILLE TO THE FOREFRONT Two-year initiative will focus on dialogue to action

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. Feb. 22, 2008— The Jacksonville Human Rights Commission (JHRC), OneJax and The Community Foundation of Jacksonville have partnered to launch an effort to engage the community in creating sustainable change by discussing and taking action to eliminate racial and ethnic inequities in Jacksonville with *Project Breakthrough: A Community Effort to Change the Story of Race*.

“Jacksonville has a history of studying racial issues that affect the social climate of the city. As a result of these studies, the city has a large list of recommendations to improve racial equity which we have compiled to be used to drive the city to action,” said Charlene Taylor Hill, executive director of JHRC. “We realize this is an ambitious goal, but we believe we can become a city known for racial equity by creating a dynamic initiative and organizing collaborative partnerships focused on dialogue to action.”

“The time to develop and actually implement an action plan that will promote positive change in the area of race relations in our city is long overdue,” said Bobbie O’Connor, executive director of OneJax. “Project Breakthrough provides us with a real opportunity to make this happen. This is a totally different approach to anything that has been done before and I’m very optimistic about the potential it provides to truly change the story of race in our community.”

Project Breakthrough consists of two primary components. The first component includes *Jacksonville Days in Dialogue* to be held periodically throughout the year, along with ongoing Study Circles – both offered by JHRC. The second piece is a seminar--*Racial Equity in Society: Dismantling Structural Racism*--which will be convened by OneJax in November 2008.

“The Community Foundation is committed to the *Project Breakthrough* initiative and is delighted to be working with two accomplished organizations that can effect real change for our community in the area of race relations,” said Nina Waters, President of The Community Foundation in Jacksonville. “Both OneJax and the Jacksonville Human Rights Commission have the respect of the community and the credibility needed to gather support from area leaders and citizens.”

Project Breakthrough will address race relations by changing individual attitudes, influencing public policy and advocating against institutional inequalities among racial and ethnic groups that appear in education, housing, health care, the justice system, employment, civic engagement and media. The goals of *Project Breakthrough* are: to enhance the culture of Jacksonville and create an environment where racial harmony, unity and equality can thrive; engage 1,000 community participants within the first year; launch and sustain a media campaign designed to foster positive attitudes about the importance and benefits of racial harmony, unity and equality; develop action teams; and provide direction and monitoring in order to sustain initial momentum to facilitate lasting change.

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Through a multi-dimensional, two-year initiative, *Project Breakthrough* partners will provide a wide variety of outreach opportunities and events to bring together as many Jacksonville residents as possible. The initiative will officially kick off with a series of nine Study Circles beginning Monday, Feb. 25. Three additional series will take place throughout the year.

Led by two facilitators and hosted by the JHRC, Study Circles provide the opportunity for eight to 14 individuals of different racial and ethnic backgrounds to meet two hours a week for five weeks to engage in open and honest discussion on racism and race/ethnic relations. Through this exchange, participants may learn from diverse experiences, achieve a greater understanding and appreciation of differing cultures and establish a basis for working together on other community issues. (*A complete schedule of this Study Circles series is attached.*)

The JHRC was recently selected by the Study Circles Resource Center as one of eight organizations to take part in *Communities Creating Racial Equity*, a national initiative aimed at helping communities create and sustain public engagement and change on racial equity issues.

With funding provided by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the C.S. Mott Foundation, the Study Circles Resource Center will provide the JHRC with in-depth technical assistance and stipends for travel to the learning exchanges. The JHRC will also have a chance to apply for a small grant to help implement its ideas to achieve racial equity.

In November, OneJax will convene community leaders for a three and one-half day program, *Racial Equity in Society: Dismantling Structural Racism*. During this seminar, the group will work to understand the language of structural racism and how the elements of structural racism are manifested at the individual, group and institutional levels.

The seminar has been developed and will be facilitated by The Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change, an international nonprofit organization dedicated to fostering enlightened leadership and open-minded dialogue since 1950. The Community Foundation, with funding from The Ford Foundation, is underwriting the costs associated with the seminar.

The JHRC is dedicated to eliminating prejudice and the practice of discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, marital status or familial status. The JHRC was established to ensure that all individuals have an opportunity to fully participate in the privileges of complete membership in the community. To learn more, visit www.coj.net, key word "JHRC."

OneJax is an interfaith organization that promotes respect and understanding among people of different religions, races, cultures and beliefs. Through education, community building and advocacy initiatives, OneJax works to overcome bias, bigotry, and racism. It is the intention of OneJax to serve as an ethical center among all people to assure that everyone in Northeast Florida is treated with respect and dignity. To learn more, visit www.onejax.org.

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The Community Foundation in Jacksonville was founded in 1964. The first community foundation to be established in Florida, its mission is to stimulate philanthropy to build a better community. The foundation manages more than 350 individual philanthropic funds and net assets in excess of \$150 million. The total amount of grants awarded by the foundation in 2007 exceeded \$23 million.

To learn more about *Project Breakthrough* visit OneJax at www.onejax.org or call (904) 354-1JAX (1529) or call the JHRC at (904) 630-4911.

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