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## Golden Apple Celebrates 25 Years of Inspiring and Honoring Excellence in Teaching

CHICAGO (March 23, 2010) – Twenty five years ago, a philanthropic Chicago couple was inspired to honor area teachers in the grand tradition of the Academy Awards; thus was born the Golden Apple Awards for Excellence in Teaching.

Mike and Pat Koldyke's vision evolved into Golden Apple, a nationally renowned nonprofit organization dedicated to recognizing and developing excellence in teaching. And despite celebrating its silver anniversary amid trying economic times for both nonprofits and the education community it serves, Golden Apple endures as a leader in advancing the teaching profession in Illinois.

"The fact that Golden Apple enters its 25<sup>th</sup> season strong on so many fronts is a testament to the devotion of those who interact with it," said Golden Apple President and CEO Dominic Belmonte. "Award winners and finalists, teaching and undergraduate Scholars, board directors, teachers participating in our workshops, members of the education and funding communities, business leaders, governors and Illinois state legislators have all banded together over the years to claim that what Golden Apple stands for must be sustained, must continue. And so we have."

The organization is kicking off its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration with a new look, embodied in a redesigned website (<http://www.goldenapple.org>) and a commemorative logo. The festivities will culminate on Friday, October 15, when the 2010 Golden Apple Award winners will be honored with a black-tie event at WTTW Channel 11 studios.

Nominations for the 25<sup>th</sup> annual Golden Apple awards are currently being reviewed by a team of experienced educators and former Golden Apple winners. This year, 542 high school teachers were nominated and 229 nominated educators completed the application process. In March, that list will be narrowed to 30 finalists, and in May, Golden Apple will announce the 10 winners during surprise classroom visits to each.

"Recognized as a respected leader in teacher quality issues and the creator of transformative programs to improve teacher resilience, and hailed for our mission in favor of deserving children acquiring access to superior teachers, Golden Apple has survived and thrived," Belmonte said. "We who have Golden Apple as part of our heritage should be justifiably proud and our celebration in October will reflect that pride."

## Storied History, Singular Mission

What began as an idea in 1985 quickly became reality when the Koldykes secured the interest and partnership of Chicago public television station WTTW and Northwestern University. In 1986, the first Golden Apple Awards ceremony broadcast showcased the exceptional work of 10 Chicago-area teachers.

In the decades that followed, Golden Apple has grown into an institution that continues to recognize gifted teachers, and also prepares and strengthens teachers who make a critical difference in the lives of all children, with a special emphasis on those teaching children from disadvantaged schools.

Today Golden Apple offers innovative, integrated solutions, including the Golden Apple Scholars of Illinois program, which provides financial assistance and advanced teacher preparation to promising, passionate young people, and a wealth of professional development programs, in addition to continuing to honor excellence in teaching through the Golden Apple Awards.

Over the past two and a half decades, the organization has grown and expanded, but always stayed true to its mission:

Because all children deserve excellent teachers, Golden Apple advances the teaching profession by:

- Recognizing excellent teachers
- Leveraging their thinking and efforts to improve education
- Recruiting and preparing prospective teachers with a special emphasis on schools of need
- Providing teachers access to innovative resources

The impact of the organization can be seen in schools throughout the state of Illinois, but particularly in the Chicago Public Schools system, where the majority of Golden Apple Scholars begin their teaching assignments. And considering that 93 percent of Golden Apple Scholars remain in the schools of need to which they were assigned beyond their five-year commitment, the impact of those teachers – and the organization that so thoroughly prepared them – is deep and long-lasting.

“This will be a pivotal year in our history where we celebrate our success by continuing to strengthen our core mission — forwarding our Golden Apple Scholars program towards further expansion throughout Illinois, searching for our 25<sup>th</sup> collection of superior teachers to recognize, and increasing our professional development work with Chicago Public Schools,” explained Belmonte, himself a Golden Apple Award-winning teacher.

## About Golden Apple

Celebrating its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Golden Apple began with founders Mike and Pat Koldyke and a shared inspiration — to offer outstanding schoolteachers a level of recognition and engagement

in the larger work of education reform. Golden Apple's successful track record of integrated, innovative programs and resources enhance the quality, resiliency, and creativity of classroom teachers and improve teaching and learning throughout Illinois. Qualified, passionate educators — including Golden Apple Award-winners and finalists — lead a small staff of dedicated employees with functional and program expertise. A connected and committed board of directors oversees Golden Apple's strategic direction. Together with a larger community of expert educators, this nonprofit organization works to ensure that all Illinois children have the excellent teachers they deserve.

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For more information contact:

Eileen Rochford

Ph: 312-953-3305

Email: [eileenr@theharbingergroup.com](mailto:eileenr@theharbingergroup.com)