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Department of Children and Families

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## Alachua County Named One of the Nation's *100 Best Communities for Young People* By America's Promise Alliance and ING

*Competition Recognizes Communities Taking Action to Create Brighter Futures for Young People*

**Alachua County, Fla.**—The efforts of Alachua County civic and community leaders were honored today when America's Promise Alliance (the Alliance), the nation's largest partnership organization dedicated to youth and children, announced Alachua County had been named a winner of the Alliance's *100 Best Communities for Young People (100 Best)* competition. Its 2010 recognition marks the first win for Alachua County in the competition.

"Through its innovative and far-reaching programs, Alachua County is taking bold and effective steps to help their young people graduate and lead healthy, productive lives," said Marguerite W. Kondracke, America's Promise Alliance president and CEO. "Alachua County serves as an example to inspire and educate other communities across the nation to tackle the challenges facing their city and children, and to implement initiatives that give them the essential resources they need to succeed in life."

Ester Tibbs, Department of Children and Families Circuit Administrator and board member of the Alachua County Children's Alliance said, "We are thrilled to have our team efforts for children recognized. While we have work ahead of us, this marks a milestone as public and private agencies have found new ways to cooperate and collaborate to better meet the needs Alachua County's children. It's only a beginning."

Brent Christensen and Eric Godet from the Gainesville Area Chamber of Commerce, along with Alachua County Children's Alliance member, Becky O'Brien were in Washington to accept the award during the national announcement of the awards. A local celebration will take place November 7, 2010 to recognize all the agencies contributing to the winning application.

Alachua County is brimming with innovative and collaborative efforts to benefit children and the Alachua County Children's Alliance won the award for the county by capturing data and information on a huge variety of efforts: the Chamber of Commerce' focus on boosting graduation rates; the Department of Children and Families teaming up with the Partnership for Strong Families, other social service organizations and the Alachua County Library District to reach out to vulnerable families with assistance; the vote for new taxes to support ongoing arts education in the public schools, a continuation of school health programs and expansion of parks. Despite a sagging local economy, civic organizations, the

County Commission, faith based organizations, voters, public agencies, private non-profits, Casey Family Programs, law enforcement agencies, and the City of Gainesville have managed to usher in new ways to collaborate and cooperate for kids.

Just a few of the examples of progress for children and families: one-third fewer child victims of maltreatment are living in foster care; Alachua County boasts the state's only Neighborhood Resource Center housed with a store-front public library; City of Gainesville recreational programs are reaching more children in after-school using a cadre of volunteers; the school system is recognized with outstanding student success on SAT's; and there are concerted community efforts to address domestic violence, childhood obesity, and improve access to health care through the Alachua County CHOICES funded UF Mobile Health Clinic. Both City and County governments are actively involved in new ways to look at crime prevention, school, health, and social service issues to improve outcomes for children.

Freshman UF Women's Basketball player, Jatterra Bonds contributed to the winning application by describing her experience in the City of Gainesville recreation program writing, "I have learned a lot of life lessons from being at the Northeast Community Center. I learned patience, social interaction, how to take criticism, discipline, and many other valuable lessons. I have changed as a person, because now I'm more mature and know how to handle the different situations of life."

Authorized by the Alachua County Commission, The Alachua County Children's Alliance is a non-partisan group that meets monthly to promote better outcomes for children. Members include representatives from the County and City agencies, many area social service agencies, the school and library systems, Gainesville Police Department, the Sheriff's Office, the Health Department, civic leaders and volunteers.

Alachua County and the other winners spanning 37 states were recognized at a ceremony in front of the Washington Monument on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. In addition to the *100 Best* distinction, Alachua County will receive two road signs identifying the city as one of *100 Best*, as well as a trophy to be presented to local officials later this year.

"*100 Best* is an essential building block of an inspiring national movement that gives everyone a chance to ensure every young person graduates," said Founder and Alliance Chair Alma Powell. "These winning communities refuse to let the challenges they face be the determining factor in the lives of their children and youth. Instead, they are helping to build an infrastructure of assertive, successful and dynamic young people that are the future of this country."

First held in 2005, The *100 Best* designation recognizes those communities that make youth a priority. The entire 2010 list of *100 Best Communities for Young People* can be found at [www.americaspromise.org/100Best](http://www.americaspromise.org/100Best).

**About America's Promise Alliance:** Founded by General and Mrs. Colin Powell, it is the nation's largest partnership organization dedicated to improving the lives of children and youth. Efforts are grounded in the Five Promises—caring adults; safe places; a healthy start; an effective education; and opportunities to help others. For more information about America's Promise Alliance, visit [www.americaspromise.org](http://www.americaspromise.org).

**About ING and the ING Foundation -** Through charitable giving and employee volunteerism, the foundation focuses on programs in the areas of financial literacy, children's education, diversity, and environmental sustainability. For more information, visit [www.ing-usafoundation.com](http://www.ing-usafoundation.com).

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Ester Tibbs, Circuit Administrator for the Department of Children and Families is the local spokeswoman for this project of the Alachua County Children's Alliance and will be available Tuesday afternoon for an interview. Additionally, Jattera Bonds, UF freshman on the Women's Basketball Team is available Tuesday afternoon for an interview. Ms. Bonds contributed to the winning application with her testimonial about the positive impact City recreation programs had on her life.

Ms. Tibbs can be reached at 352-955-5010. Her assistant is Tina Donaldson.

Jattera Bonds can be reached through Kathy Cafazzo, Associate Communications Director, University of Florida 352-375-4683, ext. 6133. Jattera will be available after 2:00 on Tuesday.

**VISUALS: email :** Colleen Wilber, America's Promise Alliance, [colleenw@americaspromise.org](mailto:colleenw@americaspromise.org) to request high resolution photos of the event

- Celebrity, dignitaries on stage in the shadow of the Washington Monument revealing the *100 Best*
- Super-sized ceremonial U.S. map with giant pushpins denoting the *100 Best* locations
- Hundreds of onlookers, including students cheering on the “winning” communities
- Broadcast quality B-roll will be available on Tuesday, September 21, 2010 at 2:30 – 2:45 p.m. EST at the following link/coordinates:
  - Galaxy 19
  - Transponder 10 (C Band Analog)
  - Downlink: 3900 Horizontal
  - Orbital Slot: 97 deg WL