



Dream. Believe. Achieve.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:
Ashley Nelson Saunders
(703) 684-5437
asaunders@ngyf.org

***National Guard Youth Foundation's Sixth Annual ChalleNGe Champions Gala
Highlights Nation's Critical Dropout Epidemic***

Celebration Honored 100,000 Graduates of the Foundation's National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program and its 90 Percent Success Rate of Getting Young Men and Women Who Have Dropped Out of School Back on Track

ALEXANDRIA, VA, (March 3, 2011) - Tuesday evening, the National Guard Youth Foundation (NGYF) and its supporters held its Sixth Annual ChalleNGe Champions Gala in Washington, D.C., to honor the National Guard and the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program. This year is a major milestone for the Program, which is celebrating the graduation of over 100,000 cadets. In addition to a celebrity-filled guest list, featured speakers at the Gala included Honorary Board Co-Chair of the National Guard Youth Foundation U.S. Senator Mary Landrieu, Chief of the National Guard Bureau General Craig R. McKinley, President of the National Guard Youth Foundation board of directors Gail Dady, and Cadet Representative of the 100,000 graduates of the Youth ChalleNGe Program Tori Walston. The National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program is a unique voluntary program that gives students who drop out of school a second chance to earn their high school diploma or general equivalency degree.

“While there are many good programs that help *prevent* kids from dropping out of school, there are few, if any, that help them once they’ve dropped out,” **said U.S. Senator Mary Landrieu.** “The National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program offers a future of promise to those who have the will and desire to

pursue it. The Program is a ‘hand up,’ not a ‘hand out,’ that provides youths with the tools, support and knowledge they need to start believing in themselves again. We’ve lost so many to this national epidemic and the Youth ChalleNGe Program is putting a stop to that trend.”

“Because of the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program, every one of our cadets has earned something they never thought they would have — a future,” **said General Craig R. McKinley, chief, National Guard Bureau.** “Perhaps most important, they will not be counted among the 33 million young men and women without a high school degree in this country. The Gala was a great opportunity to celebrate the Youth ChalleNGe Program and its fundamental role in creating better lives and communities.”

“The ChalleNGe Champions Gala is always a special night — one that gives the National Guard Youth Foundation the opportunity to raise awareness of the dropout problem, and the tremendous impact the National Guard is having through the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program,” **Gail Dady, president of the National Guard Youth Foundation Board of Directors.** “In addition to the human cost, the failure to educate 1/3 of our kids is an economic crisis and it is a national security crisis. Youth ChalleNGe gives these young men and women, like our 100,000th cadet graduate representative, Tori Walston, a second chance. It is transforming lives and making a difference.”

In addition to Tori Walston’s presentation about her personal struggles and experiences with the program, the night also featured a [video created by the winner of NGYF’s YouTube Video ChalleNGe](#) — the Wisconsin ChalleNGe Academy of Fort McCoy. NGYF designed the contest to engage cadets to creatively share their personal experiences and discuss how the ChalleNGe Program has changed their lives. As winners, the cadets from Wisconsin were invited to be special guests at the Gala.

NASCAR driver Dale Earnhardt Jr. and national celebrity spokespeople participated in the event to present awards, host a special auction and provide music and entertainment throughout the evening. Joining Mr. Earnhardt at the Gala were Rick Hendrick of Hendrick Motorsports, National Guard Indy Car driver J.R. Hildenbrand and John Barnes of Panther Racing, Grammy-winning country music star Gretchen Wilson, “American Idol” winner Kris Allen, WWE superstar Kofi Kingston, singer and actor Tyler Hilton, gospel music singer Kenny Bishop, singer and spokesperson for the Air National Guard Laura Bryna, actress and member of NGYF’s honorary board Karri Turner, and winner of NBC’s “The Apprentice II” and member of NGYF’s honorary board Kelly Perdew.

The National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program is a 17-month voluntary program with a 5.5-month residential phase and 12-month mentoring phase. There are 33 program sites in 27 states and Puerto Rico. Since its inception in 1993, more than 100,000 students have graduated from the Program. In 2009, 91 percent of graduates earned their high school diploma, general equivalency degree or returned to high school.

About the National Guard Youth Foundation

The National Guard Youth Foundation is a non-profit 501(c) (3) whose mission is to support the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program in its efforts to raise awareness of the growing high school dropout crisis in the nation and its impact on the economy and national security. The National Guard Youth Foundation provides the ChalleNGe Program with scholarships, training and workforce transition assistance to graduates, while also increasing the visibility of the program and advocating for program goals and funding. In cooperation with the ChalleNGe Program, the National Guard Youth Foundation assists youths who drop out of secondary school to improve their life skills, education and employability, creating the next generation of skilled workforce in America. For more information about the National Guard Youth Foundation, please visit www.ngyf.org.

###