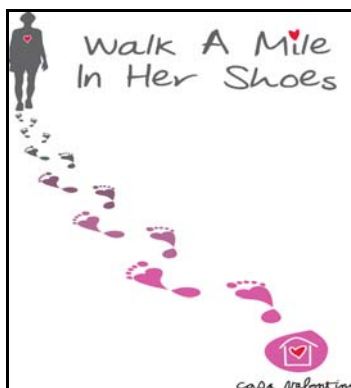




FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Casa Valentina Hosts First Annual Visionary And Volunteer Appreciation Breakfast
And Launches Walk A Mile In Her Shoes Campaign**



MIAMI (February 28, 2008) – Casa Valentina, a non-profit organization that provides affordable housing and support services to young women in Miami-Dade County who have aged out of foster care, hosted their First Annual Visionary and Volunteer Appreciation Breakfast on February 28, 2008. The purpose of the event was to recognize Visionaries (\$1,000+ donors) and volunteers, including community, funding and program partners, for their commitment and service in 2007.

The event was also the backdrop for the launch of Casa Valentina's *Walk A Mile In Her Shoes* campaign. The awareness and fundraising campaign aims to shed light on the hardships and challenges young women face when they turn 18 and age out of foster care, educate the community about Casa Valentina and create a groundswell of support for improving the services available to young people emerging from foster care.

"Every day we learn something new about the critical issues our residents face," said Chelsea Wilkerson, executive director of Casa Valentina. "This knowledge and understanding helps us create effective programs and services and it inspires us to continue working toward creating long-lasting change. The *Walk A Mile In Her Shoes* campaign is our opportunity to share this inspiration with the greater community so that we can all work together to transform the way foster children are served in Miami and beyond."

Nearly 90 people gathered at the breakfast, hosted at the Country Club of Coral Gables and sponsored by the Office of Commissioner Sally A. Heyman, the Office of Commissioner Katy Sorenson, Jill Nexon Berman, Berman Rennert Vogel 7 Mandler, P.A., and Robert and Geronic Macauley. The program included an update from Casa Valentina staff and Board members on how Casa Valentina has grown since its inception in 2004. In addition, Casa Valentina's program director, Sharon M. Katz, LCSW, gave a thought-provoking presentation that brought to the forefront the traumatic effects that childhood abuse and neglect and the instability of foster care have on young women's lives.

"Once you learn about these young women's life experiences and realize the consequences of the maltreatment they have experienced, you gain huge insight into their lives now as young women emerging from the dependency system, striving for independence and struggling to find the right path to follow into adulthood," said Mrs. Wilkerson. "You begin to truly understand what it is like to walk in their shoes."

Also at the breakfast, Casa Valentina Board member Susan Lampen presented a special award to St. Philip's Episcopal Church for their volunteer efforts at Casa Valentina in 2007, including job coaching, holiday parties, landscaping projects and community service opportunities. Joyce Meyers, a Casa Valentina Board member who was instrumental in bringing the church and Casa Valentina together, and John Dickason, a representative from the church, both accepted the honor. At the podium, Mr. Dickason surprised everyone by presenting a \$5,000 grant to Casa Valentina for their tutoring and education program.

"St. Philip's Episcopal Church's involvement has been a huge asset to our program," said Susan Lampen. "Individually, each of their projects has had a positive impact on our program and our residents, and collectively, their ongoing participation exemplifies the good work that can be accomplished through community partnerships."

"This event was an important opportunity to bring old and new friends together again to share our successes," said Casa Valentina Board Chair Sharon Langer. "Even more important, it gave us a chance to remind everyone just what is at stake and how important their support is toward helping us achieve our mission of helping these girls."

Casa Valentina was formed in 2004 by a group of concerned women who acknowledged the immense challenges faced by young women who age out of foster care without the life experience, financial stability and support they need to survive on their own. Facing numerous transitional challenges, these young women are vulnerable to prostitution, incarceration, pregnancy, domestic violence, sexual abuse and homelessness. Casa Valentina opened its doors to residents in October 2006, and to date, the organization has helped fifteen young women on their journey towards independence.

Casa Valentina's mission is to provide young women in Miami-Dade County who age out of foster care at age 18 with safe, affordable housing and the support services they need to become successful, independent adults. Visit Casa Valentina online at www.casavalentina.org.

#