



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**HUNDREDS GATHERED TO CELEBRATE THE GRAND OPENING OF CASA VALENTINA'S
FIRST HOME FOR YOUNG WOMEN AGING OUT OF FOSTER CARE**

MIAMI (March 1, 2007) – Hundreds of Casa Valentina supporters, including dignitaries, donors, sponsors, volunteers, families, children and even a few dogs, attended Casa Valentina's Grand Opening on February 24, 2007. The Saturday afternoon backyard barbeque, held at Casa Valentina's Coconut Grove property, celebrated the launch of their affordable housing and support services program for young women who age out of foster care.

"We've been working towards this for a long time," said Sharon Langer, Board Chair for Casa Valentina. "Casa Valentina has truly been an effort of the whole community, and we were happy to finally bring together and thank everyone who has helped us achieve this amazing goal."

At the event, guests commemorated the Grand Opening with an official ribbon-cutting ceremony, a proclamation from Commissioner Carlos Gimenez declaring the day "Casa Valentina Day" and a powerful keynote speech from Tracy Mourning, a long-time supporter of Casa Valentina and founder of the Honey Shine Mentoring Program for at-risk girls.

The presentation also included the unveiling of original artwork as a tribute to Casa Valentina's major donors. Created by artist Karim Ghidinelli, the piece is an image of a large scale thumb print on an aluminum plate completed with a coat of fire red paint and varnish. Ghidinelli created the lines of the thumb print by etching the names of Casa Valentina's property sponsors and Founding Visionaries in white. The piece will be permanently on display at the Coconut Grove building.

"The artwork symbolizes the important impact our donors have had and the imprint we hope Casa Valentina will leave in this community," said Langer.

Throughout the afternoon, guests enjoyed music by DJ 311, a live performance by musician Deblois and a backyard barbeque courtesy of Dogma Grill, Hot Cookies and Cookies by Design. Guests mingled in the backyard garden of the property and enjoyed tours of the apartments from the young women who live there.

At least 200 people attended the celebration, including Tracy Mourning, Commissioner Katy Sorenson, Commissioner Sally A. Heyman, Senator Nan Rich, Commissioner Maria Anderson, Commissioner Marc Sarnoff and his wife Teresa, Judge Cindy Lederman, Judge Lester Langer, Judge Jeri Beth Cohen, Imran Ali, Children's Advocate for Miami-Dade County, Sonia Jacobson, executive director of Suited for Success, Virginia Emmons, executive director of Educate Tomorrow, and Mary Cagle, CEO of CHARLEE Homes for Children.

"It was important for us to share this special milestone with friends who mean so much to us," said Marcia Reisman, Board Secretary for Casa Valentina. "It was a beautiful day and a perfect way to celebrate Casa Valentina."

Casa Valentina is an innovative residential program that addresses the unique gender-specific needs of young women who age out of foster care at age 18 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's mission is to provide them with safe, affordable housing and the support services they need to become successful, independent adults. Visit Casa Valentina online at www.casavalentina.org.

For more information about Casa Valentina and to learn about how to contribute or get involved, visit www.casavalentina.org.

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