



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Sold-Out Performance of *The Vagina Monologues* Raises More Than \$165K
for Casa Valentina Housing Effort for Girls Who Age Out of Foster Care
Funds Will Help Establish a First-Of-Its-Kind Transitional Residential
Program for Former Foster Girls in Miami-Dade County**

MIAMI (January 19, 2006) – It was standing-room only at the Gusman Center for the Performing Arts at the November 21, 2005 benefit performance of *The Vagina Monologues* to raise funds for Casa Valentina, a new project to provide safe, affordable housing and support services for girls in Miami-Dade County who age out of the foster care system at age 18. The sold-out performance was attended by more than 1,600 members of the community and raised more than \$165,000 for the housing effort.

"*The Vagina Monologues* was a phenomenal success," said Sharon Langer, Chair of the Casa Valentina Executive Committee. "The passion and commitment from the cast, crew and everyone involved in the production, and the generosity of our sponsors, donors and the audience that supported us that night is the reason we are opening our first Casa Valentina residential facility in June."

Casa Valentina was formed in 2004 to address the immense challenges faced by girls in foster care who are cut off from – or age out of – state funded housing, support and supervision when they turn 18. Facing life alone on the streets of Miami, young women, in particular, are at risk of experiencing prostitution, incarceration, violence, sexual abuse, and in many cases, homelessness. In fact, research shows that housing is the greatest need and biggest obstacle for youth struggling to transition from foster care to independent living. Thirty percent of homeless women were once foster children. At least 90 girls age out of foster care in Miami-Dade County each year lacking the life experience, financial stability and support needed to survive on their own.

Eve Ensler, artistic director of the V-Day movement to stop violence against women and girls and award-winning playwright of *The Vagina Monologues*, gave Casa Valentina the rights to produce the play in Miami for the cause. She also performed an original and stirring monologue called "I Am An Emotional Creature" at the show.

Joining Ensler on stage was an incredible local cast of notable South Floridians, including Patricia Ireland, former president of the National Organization for Women; model Hunter Reno, Haitian-American activist Marleine Bastien; Tracy Wilson Mourning, broadcast journalist and founder of Honey Shine Mentoring Program; Commissioners Sally Heyman and Katy Sorenson; The Honorable Dorothy Bendross-Mindingall; Senator Nan Rich; and the Miami Bombshells.

Funds raised from *The Vagina Monologues* benefit are helping to establish a first-of-its-kind transitional residential program in Miami-Dade County, which will provide former foster girls, ages 18-23, with safe and affordable housing as they transition from foster care to independent living. The first Casa Valentina Home is set to open in the fall of 2006.

"Our goal at Casa Valentina is to create an environment where young women can live safely and learn the life skills they need to make it in the world on their own," said Langer. "These girls' futures are at stake, and we are going to do everything we can to make sure they get what they need to survive and flourish."

Casa Valentina's mission is to provide girls in Miami-Dade County who age out of the foster care system with safe, affordable housing and the support services they need to become successful, independent adults. To learn more about Casa Valentina, visit www.casavalentina.org.

#