

The Echo Foundation

“A Decade Inspired By Elie Wiesel”

Sponsored by The Leon Levine Foundation: Sandra and Leon Levine

NEWS RELEASE

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Students to travel *In The Footsteps of Elie Wiesel* Leadership Initiative Teaching Compassion & Responsibility Through Culture

Charlotte, N.C., July, 2007 – Student Ambassadors of The Echo Foundation yearlong program “In The Footsteps of Elie Wiesel” will depart July 18 for 12 days in Europe to study the formative environments of Nobel Peace Laureate Elie Wiesel. This educational leadership and travel program is a component of *Voices Against Indifference*, an annual comprehensive education initiative designed to promote justice, personal responsibility and action for the betterment of humankind.

The 2007 *Voices Against Indifference* initiative entitled, *A Decade Inspired by Elie Wiesel*, reached an inspirational crescendo on March 27 – 28, 2007, when students engaged in dialogue with Nobel Laureate for Peace Elie Wiesel. In an intimate conversation, the Student Ambassadors explored their most urgent concerns, asked their pressing questions, and rekindled their commitment to justice as Elie Wiesel responded with warmth and compassion to each student. Now, as they prepare to experience the terrains and environments that helped to shape this great humanitarian, Student Ambassadors study the Holocaust, read memoirs, delve into essays and attend lectures to broaden their knowledge base and expand their world view.

To accomplish this, twelve American high school students will trace the path of Professor Wiesel from his birthplace in Sighet, Romania, to the death camps of Auschwitz in Poland where much of his family perished, to Versailles, France where he was given refuge as an orphan after the war. Additionally, students will visit Berlin, Germany where the example of reparation and relationship healing with the Jewish people has resulted in an extraordinary model of understanding and friendship in modern times.

For example, to better understand the upheaval and confusion victims suffered even after their rescue, students will research and locate the four different orphanages where Wiesel was housed after liberation. Other activities designed to illustrate the importance of respect and preservation of heritage will include exploration of the old Jewish quarter in each city, visits to historic synagogues and churches, and discussions with government officials.

The group will also visit Berlin to experience the Holocaust memorial and museum. They will study the model of reparation and relationship healing with the Jewish people that stands today as an extraordinary example of understanding, cooperation and friendship. During the entire journey, students will chronicle their experiences in journal entries, articles, and essays.

Throughout the project, they have been studying the Holocaust and Professor Wiesel's life through independent research and reading, as well as lectures from university faculty. They are responsible for initiating and communicating projects and messages to benefit humanity.

In addition, a documentary film crew will travel with the group to capture the transformation of the Footsteps students as they experience these profound moments in history. Using footage from the students' discussions with Wiesel from March, as well as student interviews and travel experiences, the filmmakers will allow viewers to witness the maturation of our local teenagers as they discover a world beyond their own. At the same time, the film serves as yet another vehicle for Elie Wiesel's moral imperative *against indifference*.

The 12 high school students were chosen to follow "In the Footsteps of Elie Wiesel" by a panel of judges from 56 applicants, representing 15 schools across the Charlotte region. The winners are comprised of eight females and four males, representing six schools. They are Preston Gray and Blake Templeton, both sophomores at Butler High School; Gabriela Reed, a freshman at East Mecklenburg High School; Casey Horgan, a junior and Catherine Auerbach, a sophomore at Myers Park High School; Adara Blake, Scott Fisher II and Margaret Love, sophomores, and Evelyn Denham, a junior at North Mecklenburg High School; Natasha Frosina, a junior, and Kristine Sowers, a sophomore at Providence Day School; and Harold Robins, a junior at Providence High School.

About Elie Wiesel

Elie Wiesel was born in 1928 in Sighet, Transylvania, now part of Romania. At age 15, he and his family were deported by the Nazis to Auschwitz. His mother and younger sister perished, his two older sisters survived. Wiesel and his father were later transported to Buchenwald, where his father died shortly before the camp was liberated in April 1945.

After the war, Wiesel studied in Paris and later became a journalist. During an interview with the distinguished French writer, Francois Mauriac, he was persuaded to write about his experiences in the death camps. The result was his internationally acclaimed memoir, "La Nuit" or "Night," which has since been translated into more than thirty languages. The most recent translation, by his wife, Marion, is based on the French edition, first published in 1958. The new translation was selected by Oprah Winfrey for her television book club in January 2006. The publisher is Hill & Wang.

In 1978, President Jimmy Carter appointed Wiesel as Chairman of the President's Commission on the Holocaust. In 1980, he became the Founding Chairman of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council. He is also the Founding President of the Paris-based Universal Academy of Cultures and the Chairman of The Elie Wiesel Foundation for Humanity, an organization he and his wife created to fight indifference, intolerance and injustice. He has received more than 100 honorary degrees from institutions of higher learning.

A devoted supporter of Israel, Wiesel has also defended the cause of Soviet Jews, Nicaragua's Miskito Indians, Argentina's Desaparecidos, Cambodian refugees, the Kurds, victims of famine and genocide in Africa, victims of apartheid in South Africa, and victims of war in the former Yugoslavia. For more than 10 years, Elie and his wife Marion have been especially devoted to the cause of Ethiopian-born Israeli youth through the Foundation's Beit Tzipora Centers for Study and Enrichment.

Teaching has always been central to Wiesel's work. Since 1976, he has been the Andrew W. Mellon Professor in the Humanities at Boston University, where he is a member of the faculty in the Department of Religion as well as the Department of Philosophy. Previously, he served as Distinguished Professor of Judaic Studies at the City University of New York (1972-76) and the first Henry Luce Visiting Scholar in Humanities and Social Thought at Yale University (1982-83).

He is the author of more than 40 books of fiction and non-fiction, including "A Beggar in Jerusalem" (Prix Médicis winner), "The Testament" (Prix Livre Inter winner), "The Fifth Son" (winner of the Grand Prize in Literature from the City of Paris), and two volumes of his memoirs. For his literary and human rights activities, he has received numerous awards including the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the U.S. Congressional Gold Medal and the Medal of Liberty Award, and the rank of Grand-Croix in the French Legion of Honor. In 1986, Elie Wiesel won the Nobel Prize for Peace, and soon after, Marion and Elie Wiesel established The Elie Wiesel Foundation for Humanity. An American citizen since 1963, Elie Wiesel lives in New York with his wife and son.

About The Echo Foundation

The Echo Foundation was founded in 1997 to carry on the message Nobel Peace Prize winner Elie Wiesel brought to Charlotte that year – a call to action for human dignity, justice and moral courage. The Echo Foundation creates programs and brings speakers to Charlotte that illustrate how one person can make a difference for humanity through its *Voices Against Indifference Initiative*. Last year, as part of the ECHO RETURNS: Young Heroes of Hope project, five former Echo students were honored as recipients of the inaugural "Young Heroes of Hope Award" for their global humanitarian work. The Young Heroes participated in a series of dialogues and forums with students and leaders of the Charlotte community. Previous Echo speakers also include internationally renowned Nobel Laureates in physics and medicine, Doctors without Borders founder Bernard Kouchner, Harvard Afro-American Studies Department Chairman Henry Louis Gates Jr., Columbia Earth Institute Director Jeffrey

Sachs, Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka, human rights advocate Kerry Kennedy Cuomo, and Chinese dissident Harry Wu.

For additional information about The Echo Foundation and upcoming programs, visit www.EchoFoundation.org or call 704.347.3844.