



CONTACTS:
Mike McGill, O) (703) 535-3819
C) (443) 995-9144
mikem@americaspromise.org

Sue Lomenzo, (703) 535-3864
suel@americaspromise.org

America's Promise Alliance Names Mercer County One of *100 Best Communities for Young People*

Winners Recognized for Efforts to Help Young People Succeed

September 26, 2005: America's Promise – The Alliance for Youth today announced that Mercer County, WV is a winner of a first-ever national competition to identify *100 Best Communities for Young People*. The winning communities – ranging from small towns to urban neighborhoods across America – are being celebrated for their commitment to provide healthy, safe and caring environments for young people.

Mercer County is receiving the *100 Best* honor, in part, because of the community's collaborative programs that benefit children and youth. Over the past nine years, a small community coalition, *Creating Opportunities For Youth (COFY)*, has reached out to area young people through various grant-based programs to sway them away from the pressures of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. The county has gathered resources and has representatives from a variety of sectors including, but not limited to, youth, parents, schools, law enforcement, faith-based organizations, and businesses.

A complete list of winners can be found at www.americaspromise.org. Members of America's Promise Alliance — including United Way of America, the U.S. Conference of Mayors, Junior Achievement and the YMCA and many others — took leading roles in the *100 Best* competition. *100 Best Communities for Young People* was launched in partnership with Capital One Financial Corporation.

America's Promise Founding Chairman General Colin Powell launched the competition in May and Community Connections, the Mercer County Family Resource Network, applied for a place on the prestigious list. Mercer County and the other winners were chosen by a distinguished selection panel of civic, business and nonprofit leaders, including United Way of America President Brian Gallagher, U.S. Chamber of Commerce President Tom Donohue, former U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala, baseball great Cal Ripken Jr. and former Denver mayor Wellington Webb.

The selection panel evaluated *100 Best* entries that required detailed information about each community's efforts to fulfill five essential promises critical to the well-being of young people: caring adults who are actively involved in their lives; safe places in which to learn and grow; a healthy start toward adulthood; an effective education that builds marketable skills; and opportunities to help others.

"We have had an amazing response from hundreds of communities, large and small, from Alaska to Florida," said Marguerite W. Sallee, President and CEO of America's Promise – The Alliance for Youth. "Our purpose for launching this competition is to appeal to America's competitive spirit to encourage communities to become great places to grow up. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, we have seen some inspiring examples of what can happen when communities across the country pull together to help people in times of urgent need. In the *100 Best* communities, we have witnessed that same spirit at work in making the well-being of their children an urgent priority. Their outstanding efforts – to measure how well their children and youth are doing, to put more resources in place, and to form cross-sector partnerships – provide shining examples of what it means to keep America's Promise for our young people."

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"We are thrilled at this honor and want to express our deepest thanks to the many prevention partners throughout our area," says Greg Puckett, Program Director of CCI's Mercer County Drug Free Community Support Program. "No one organization, association, or affiliation can take full credit on this. Our vision is to help youth be healthy, productive, responsible, caring and integrated members of the community. Keeping them drug free, and on a path to success takes a great deal of effort from everyone."

"It is wonderful for our community to get this type of positive national recognition," says Shannon Atwell, Executive Director of Community Connections, Inc. "Too often, we are ranked at the top for negative things – this award highlights our dedication to the youth of Mercer County. We know the issues we have to overcome, and our collaborative works very hard to make it happen."

"Hopefully, this recognition will promote even more community and economic development," adds Atwell. "We want everyone to know that this is a good place to live."

Josh Helmondollar, a Senior at Montcalm High School, stated that, "I've worked with the local anti-drug coalition for a number of years now in one program or another, and I've seen first hand the types of stuff that they offer to the community. We are really lucky to live in an area where adults truly care about how we, as youth, grow up and succeed.

To honor the 100 Best communities selected, the America's Promise Alliance will hold a special event November 2nd in Washington, D.C. This celebration will be dedicated to the children affected by Hurricane Katrina, highlighting outstanding community initiatives across the country that are providing displaced children with the services and support that they need to thrive no matter where they are. All proceeds from this event will go toward helping the children impacted by Katrina.

The Alliance will also sponsor a yearlong celebration including a special day in each of the winning communities and a series of regional forums across the country that will enable communities to share their success stories and learn effective strategies from one another that will further enrich the lives of their young people.

"The applications revealed communities that care about their kids and are working together to make their futures better. We saw leaders and people genuinely engaged and full of pride in their towns. Together, they have strengthened my faith in our great country."

For more details about the 100 Best competition and the winners, please visit www.americaspromise.org.

About America's Promise

America's Promise is a broad-based alliance whose members work together to ensure the well-being of children and youth. Alliance partners focus attention and resources to help every child receive the Five Promises essential to success: caring adults who are actively involved in their lives; safe places in which to learn and grow; a healthy start toward adulthood; an effective education that builds marketable skills; and opportunities to help others.

Founded by retired General Colin L. Powell, following the Presidents' Summit for America's Future in 1997, the America's Promise Alliance includes nonprofit, corporate and community groups as well as individuals across the nation. Alma J. Powell currently serves as chair.

America's Promise grew out of the Presidents' Summit for America's Future in 1997, where Presidents Bush, Carter, Clinton and Ford, with Nancy Reagan representing President Reagan, challenged the country to make children and youth a national priority. President George W. Bush affirmed his commitment in 2001.