

For Immediate Release

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INSPIRATIONAL 71-YEAR-OLD 'FIRST GRADER' AND HIS TEACHER HONORED WITH LITERACY AWARD

Alferd Williams Will Share Honor With His Dedicated Teacher

ST. JOSEPH, Mo., March 18, 2009 – Alferd Williams, the son of sharecroppers, had a simple dream. He wanted to learn to read.

Last year, at the age of 70, he embarked on that dream by “enrolling” in Alesia Hamilton’s first-grade class at Edison Elementary School here. This year, Alferd’s inspiring efforts and Alesia’s dedication will be recognized with an award bearing Alferd’s name -- the Alferd Williams Literacy Award. The two are being honored as part of the first anniversary of the [Toys for Tots Literacy Program](#), a year-round initiative that provides our nation’s least fortunate children with books and other educational materials.

“When we launched the Toys for Tots Literacy Program, we wanted to create an annual award to recognize individuals who were dedicated to improving literacy rates in this country,” said LtGen. Pete Osman, USMC (Ret), president and CEO of the Marine Toys for Tots Foundation. “Once we heard Alferd’s inspiring story, we felt naming the award after him would honor his commitment to learn to read and would instill a passion for reading in all.”

Appropriately, Alferd and Alesia will accept the honor at a school-wide assembly today. Joining LtGen. Osman to present the award will be Sharon Darling, founder and president of the [National Center for Family Literacy \(NCFL\)](#), and representatives from [The UPS Store](#)® and [Mail Boxes Etc.](#)® network, the exclusive sponsors of the Toys for Tots Literacy Program.

“Alferd’s story is a testament to determination and every person’s right to learn to read. When a child fails to learn this basic skill, the cycle of poverty becomes nearly impossible to break. In the final analysis, it’s a steep price we all must pay,” said Sharon Darling, who also is serving as this year’s spokesperson for the Toys for Tots Literacy Program. “The beauty of the Toys for Tots Literacy Program is that each dollar donated purchases a book for a needy boy or girl, inspiring them to learn through reading.”

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“When we worked with the Toys for Tots organization to create this year-round effort, our hope was not only to put books into the hands of our most economically disadvantaged children, but also to raise awareness of a significant issue facing our nation, an issue that has become even more critical in these economic times,” said Stuart Mathis, president of Mail Boxes Etc., Inc., which franchises *The UPS Store* and *Mail Boxes Etc.* brands. “Alferd and Alesia embody the spirit of this program in so many ways. It is an honor for us to present them with this award.”

The event will conclude with a special presentation of more than 300 new books to the Edison Elementary School library, enough for each student to have at least one new, age-appropriate book to read.

To understand the ramifications of this issue, one need only look at the sobering statistics surrounding the issue of illiteracy:

- According to the U.S. Census Bureau, more than 13 million children live in poverty. That number is greater than the combined populations of New York City and Los Angeles.
- It is estimated that the cost of illiteracy to business and taxpayers is \$20 billion per year. (United Way, "Illiteracy: A National Crisis")
- According to America's Promise Alliance, every 26 seconds, a student drops out of high school in America. That adds up to more than 1.1 million students per year.
- This high drop-out rate costs the nation over \$240 billion in lost earnings, forgone tax revenues and expenditures for social services. ("The Impact on Our Children, Families and Communities." First Book.)
- According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, 33 percent of all fourth graders nationwide still cannot read at even the basic level.
- In low-income neighborhoods, the ratio of books per child is one age-appropriate book for every 300 children. (Included in the "Handbook of Early Literacy Research", Vol. 2 edited by Susan Neuman and David Dickinson)

Additional information is available at: www.ToysforTotsLiteracy.org.

About The Marine Toys for Tots Foundation

The Marine Toys for Tots Foundation is a not-for-profit organization authorized by the U.S. Marine Corps and the Department of Defense to provide fundraising and other necessary support for the annual Marine Corps Reserve Toys for Tots Program. Now in its 62nd year, Toys for Tots provides joy and a message of hope to less fortunate children through the gift of a new toy or book during the Christmas holiday season. Our gifts offer these children hope, recognition and a positive memory they will cherish for a lifetime. Many of the gifts we provide, such as books, games and sports equipment, make a significant contribution to the educational, social and recreational development of these children. In 2008, Marines distributed gifts to 7.6 million children in over 650 communities nationwide. The Marine Toys for Tots Foundation relies on individual donations from the American public as well as support from corporate sponsors. For more information, visit www.toysfortots.org.

About the National Center for Family Literacy

The National Center for Family Literacy, founded in 1989, is the worldwide leader in family literacy. More than 1 million families have made positive educational and economic gains as a result of NCFL's work, which includes training more than 150,000 teachers and thousands of volunteers. For more information, contact 1-877-FAMLIT-1 or visit www.famlit.org.

About The UPS Store and Mail Boxes Etc.

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