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CONTACT: Herbie Thiele
(850) 222-1996

**The Best & Brightest Awards Kicks-Off Its Ninth Year of
Recognizing Outstanding Students in Leon County**
*Principles and Guidance Counselors Invited to Showcase the “Best and
Brightest” in 15 Award Categories*

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. – The Best & Brightest Awards kicked-off its 9th annual awards program today with a breakfast event for Leon County public and private school principals and guidance counselors. The committee is now officially accepting applications from the “best and brightest” of high school seniors, who will have a chance to claim \$55,000 in total scholarships across 15 categories of scholastic achievement and community service.

Leon County high school seniors are encouraged to submit their applications to their school guidance counselor to qualify before the February 6, 2014 deadline.

“We started this scholarship program to recognize students who were achieving great academic success, as well as contributing to the community as a whole,” states Ron Sachs, CEO of Sachs Media Group and one of the founders and sponsors of Best & Brightest. “It has been very rewarding to see the program grow and flourish to the degree that it has.”

Since its creation in 2006, nearly \$350,000 has been awarded to more than 1,050 students from Leon County schools. The program also awards \$100 cash scholarships to all school-based winners through Envision Credit Union. Additionally, major scholarships are awarded to three countywide winners in each of the 15 categories: \$1,500 scholarship for the first place winners, \$750 for runners-up and \$500 for honorable mentions.

“Envision Credit Union considers the Best & Brightest Awards to be one of our top priorities,” states Darryl Worrell, president and CEO of Envision Credit Union, the primary sponsor in this scholarship program. “It is an honor to sponsor and also exciting to see how the bar for excellence is raised by the students every year. We are really in awe of what these students can achieve when they set their minds to a goal.”

Leaders in their schools, from principals to guidance counselors to teachers from every public and private high school in Leon County, select one deserving student, based on his or her application, in each of the 15 categories: Art, Athletics, Business, Career/Technical, Drama & Performing Arts, English and Language Arts, Foreign Language, Journalism & Media Production, Leadership, Mathematics, Music, Public Speaking, Science & Health, Social Science and Technology. They also take into account school involvement and leadership, but a special focus is placed on community service. Recipients of a Best & Brightest Awards are always students who have gone above and beyond the minimum community service hours required by their school, and have shown that they truly understand the importance giving back to their community more than just one Saturday a month.

After faculty and staff nominate them, the school-based winners will undergo a rigorous review and interview process by a judging panel composed of community leaders on March 1, 2014. The judges will take many factors into account, including achievements in that field of study, but also interview skills, overall academic success and, especially, a demonstrated track record of community service. Through this procedure, three top students will be selected as the countywide winners, runners-up and honorable mentions in each category.

“What is really outstanding about the Best & Brightest Awards is that, while the students are achieving academically, they also get a chance to show their passions,” Laura Rogers, program director at World Class Schools of Leon County and coordinator of the Best & Brightest Awards stated. “Grades are an important aspect of life, but so is public speaking, creativity and community service. These awards stand out because they highlight the best of the best in many different areas, instead of just focusing on one.”

Middle school students also have the opportunity to be honored as the “best and brightest” of their age group through a prompted essay contest. For the fourth year running, \$500 will be awarded to the winner, \$250 to the runner-up and \$100 to the honorable mention.

For more information on the Best & Brightest Awards, visit www.thebestandbrightestawards.com.

*The 2014 **Best & Brightest Awards** program is a partnership with local Leon County area public and private high schools, World Class Schools of Leon County, and the Tallahassee Democrat, with major underwriting by Envision Credit Union. Sachs Media Group is a sponsor of the Best & Brightest Awards and helps to produce the awards program.*