



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 14, 2005

CONTACT: Meghan McGuire
Debbie Robertson
(803) 734-0479

HOOTIE AND THE BLOWFISH DONATE \$60,000 TO HELP CHILDREN IN SOUTH CAROLINA
*Donation to South Carolina First Steps provides school readiness opportunities
for rising kindergartners in 34 counties statewide*

The Hootie and the Blowfish Foundation has generously pledged its support to South Carolina First Steps' Countdown to Kindergarten initiative, a statewide school transition strategy that assists deserving rising kindergartners to be better prepared for school. The Foundation pledged \$60,000 over three years toward Countdown to Kindergarten, starting in 2005. This summer, \$20,000 of those funds will assist 1,300 children in 34 South Carolina counties arrive at school in the fall better equipped and ready to succeed.

The Hootie and the Blowfish Foundation's donation will help provide eight instructional visits to each child's home by a certified teacher, quality hands-on learning materials for the child to keep, Spanish translation where needed, and funds towards a learning celebration to mark the children's achievements in the program.

"This program is all about giving our youngest learners the resources they need to succeed," said Governor Mark Sanford. "We've said all along that if you're going to make a difference in the education process you've got to make it early, and I'd particularly single out Hootie and the Blowfish for recognizing that and going above and beyond the call once again to help improve these young people's lives."

The Hootie and the Blowfish Foundation was created in 2000 to support the community that has driven its success, with particular emphasis on meaningful educational opportunities for SC's children. "Money should not deprive a child of a quality education," said Foundation director Chris Carney. "We want to do everything we can to help children who may be at-risk be better prepared to succeed and enjoy school."

Countdown to Kindergarten was created by South Carolina First Steps in 2004, with primary partners EdVenture Children's Museum, VOICES for SC's Children, the SC State Department of Education's Office of Early Childhood Education, and local partnerships across the state. In February 2005, Countdown received national recognition as an innovative school readiness strategy the National Governors' Association. Designed to leverage local resources to aid successful transitions of SC's most at-risk children into kindergarten, Countdown to Kindergarten also targets early parent involvement and increased community awareness of the importance of school readiness. Nearly 1,300 children and their families will participate in this year's Countdown program, more than twice the number of the 2004 pilot program. Over 120 certified kindergarten teachers in 34 counties are currently conducting a series of eight visits to each participating family's home to prepare the child for starting school and open the relationship with the child's family. First Steps' ability to reach such a large number of children this year is only possible through the generous donations of community-minded groups like the Hootie and the Blowfish Foundation.

###

South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness ('First Steps') is a comprehensive, results-oriented statewide education initiative to help prepare our children to reach school healthy and ready to succeed. First Steps is for children pre-first grade and their families. Public and private support are combined through county partnerships to enable individual communities to address the unmet needs of young children and their families.

1300 Sumter Street • Concord Building, Suite 100 • Columbia, South Carolina 29201
Phone: 803-734-0479 • Fax: 803-734-1431 • Web site: www.scfirststeps.org