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GESU SCHOOL NAMES MARK SOLOMON RECIPIENT OF FIRST-EVER GESU SPIRIT MEDAL

More than 100 guests gather to celebrate as long-time supporter and trustee is recognized for his commitment and contributions to Gesu's success as a national model for inner-city education

PHILADELPHIA (December 2006) – CMS Companies Chairman Mark Solomon, a Gladwyne private equity manager who has dedicated more than a dozen years of tireless volunteer work to Gesu School, has been honored as the first-ever recipient of the “Gesu Spirit Medal.” Gesu, a North Philadelphia independent Catholic elementary school in the Jesuit and IHM traditions, created the award to honor individuals who have shown extraordinary commitment and have made significant contributions to its success as a national model for inner-city education.

Gesu Board Chair Winston J. Churchill, a long-time friend who asked Solomon in 1993 to help raise funds to keep the school open when its parish was closing, presented the award at the Wynnewood home of Paul and Aviva Silberberg in front of 100 guests. “Mark is amazingly generous with his time, his support, and his heart,” said Churchill. “The school is thriving in no small part because of everything he’s brought to the table.”

Solomon, a University of Pennsylvania Wharton School graduate and expert fundraiser, has been instrumental in garnering support for Gesu and inspiring others to volunteer their time. He introduced the school to Christine S. Beck, who had been working to provide life-changing opportunities to children throughout her career, and encouraged her to join the school’s ecumenical Board of Trustees. Today, she serves as Gesu’s president and CEO.

“Mark truly embodies the ideals we set out when establishing the Gesu Spirit Medal – dedication to justice in inner-city education, compassion, confidence in our mission, and the unwavering commitment to support his beliefs with effective action,” said Beck. “He has been a driving force behind our accomplishments, and we are thrilled to recognize his incredible efforts over many years.”

Solomon’s approach to his volunteer work mirrors his business philosophy. All of his colleagues and clients are encouraged to take an active interest in charitable work.

“I’m interested in sending kids to school. That’s what I really care about,” he said. “Gesu is a wonderful beacon of hope for children who don’t have the kind of opportunities other families take for granted. These kids succeed against all odds because Gesu makes it happen.”

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Solomon's interest in education became personal when he became a mentor, friend and surrogate father to Daryl Shore, a Gesu student who was struggling. At the medal presentation, Shore thanked Solomon for everything he'd done.

"Mark, you've shown me it only takes one person to make a difference in someone's life," said Shore, now a college graduate and MBA candidate. "You never gave up on me. You have given me a family, a second chance, and a road map as to how I should live my life."

While his work with Gesu commands a great deal of Solomon's time and focus, he is also involved with other professional and charitable organizations. A member of the Chief Executives Organization and the World Presidents Organization, he serves on the board of directors for M Financial Holdings, Inc., Vishay Intertechnology, Inc., the American Israel Public Affairs Committee and the American Friends of Yemin Orde (as board chair).

He has been honored with numerous awards, including the United Way CEO of the Year Award, the Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia's Community Award, and the Philadelphia - Israel Chamber of Commerce Award. He has co-chaired the Allied Jewish Appeal, Operation Exodus, Operation Solomon and Operation Moses; served as National Vice Chairman for the United Jewish Appeal; served as Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer for the Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia; and served on the board of trustees of the Franklin Institute, Albert Einstein Medical Center and the Southeastern Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Red Cross.

Gesu has attracted national attention for its success, which has sprung from the philosophy that every child can learn given the right support. The school brings an entrepreneurial approach to governing and fundraising, sets high academic expectations and offers programs that include early learning, single-gender classes in grades three through five, intensive literacy and resource programs, counseling, peer mediation, mentoring and after-school programs, advanced technology instruction and several innovative cultural arts programs.

The results from these ongoing efforts are dramatic. Despite living in often difficult circumstances and in a neighborhood where the high school graduation rate is under 50%, three-quarters of Gesu's graduates attend competitive high schools, more than 95% go on to earn their high school diplomas, and a growing number pursue a higher education.

For more information on Gesu School, visit www.gesuschool.org or call 215-763-9077.

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