



News Release

For Immediate Release

Contact: Karen Seidman; karen@seidmansays.biz;
(202) 364-8134; fax (202) 364-0131

NFTE Program Makes the Difference in Suitland High School Teen's Outlook; Area Student Entrepreneur Wins Investment Capital for Her Start-Up Business in Regionwide Business Plan Competition

Washington, DC, May 23, 2006 — Eighteen-year old Tia Jones, just finishing up 10th grade at Suitland High School in Forestville, Maryland, was on the verge of giving up and dropping out of school just 10 months ago. Dealing with difficult and overwhelming problems at home, Tia was trying her best just to survive and secure workable living arrangements, let alone trying to deal with the typical school challenges that face all teens her age.

But today, the light in Tia's eyes shine brightly again, and for the first time in a long while, she has hope and is filled with purpose. No longer is Tia considering quitting school; in fact she's determined to go on to college one day and major in business management.

On Friday, May 19, Tia placed third in the Greater Washington, DC office of the National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE) 25th semi-annual "Regionwide Business Plan Competition," where she competed along side five other student finalists in hopes of receiving seed capital investment for their businesses. Tia's third place victory earned her \$1,000 to grow her start-up, "Just Tia," a company that designs and constructs one-of-a-kind purses distinguished by their use of denim, their unique antique ornaments, belted handles, and unusual shapes and sizes. Tia's handcrafts each purse herself, as well as accepts custom orders whereby buyers can choose from a variety of decorative options. She has already sold more than 60 custom purses, netting \$1,800 to help her begin her business, which means "everything in the world to her."

NFTE, a nonprofit organization that teaches entrepreneurship and business and life skills to low-income high school students, holds the regionwide competition at the end of each school semester at the culmination of its 80-hour "Mini-MBA" entrepreneurship curriculum. Throughout the year, NFTE provides school-based and after-school programs to teach youth how to start and operate their own businesses. At the end of each semester, all students are required to write a business plan. After each program holds its own "in-class" competition, those winning students go on to compete in the Regionwide Business Plan Competition, where top finalists vie for \$150 to \$1,500 in seed capital investment.

But this year competition was unusually stiff, and the 13 high-profile and respected business leaders, led by Ted Leonsis, who gathered at the AOL Headquarters last Friday to serve as judges were so impressed by Tia and her peers' business plan presentations, decided on the spot to up the ante and voted to double the cash prizes by pooling their own money for these exceptional teens.

The competition's finalists had 10 minutes to present their business plans to the panel of judges who scored them on such criteria as professionalism/passion, competitive edge, business financials, goals/vision and marketing. This year's full-slate of student winners are:

- **Aaron Sacks**, owner of You're On Deck, Montgomery Blair High School (**First Place — \$3,000**)
- **Thomas Dent**, owner of Fine Foto, Montgomery Blair High School (**Second Place — \$1,500**)
- **Tia Jones**, owner of Just Tia, Suitland High School (**Third Place — \$1,000**)

- **Ryan Andrews**, owner Tank Solutions, Montgomery Blair High School (**Runner-Up — \$300**)
- **Jorge Quinteros**, owner of JAQ's Video, Marshall Academy (**Runner-Up — \$300**)
- **Ryan Wheeler**, owner of Exquisite Creations, Northwestern High School (**Runner-Up — \$300**)

The distinguished panel of judges featured:

- **Ted Leonsis**, AOL vice chairman and AOL Audience Business president
- **Theo Adamstein**, Founder & Partner, Adamstein & Demetriou
- **Pedro Alfonso**, Chairman & CEO, Dynamics Concepts
- **Jim Bankoff**, Executive Vice President, Programming Products, AOL LLC
- **Sheila Brooks**, Founder, President & CEO, SRB Productions, Inc.
- **Raul Fernandez**, Chairman & CEO, Object Video
- **Arlen Gelbard**, Chief Banking Officer & President, eTrade
- **Dr. Charlene Drew Jarvis**, President, Southeastern University
- **Joe Kampf**, President & CEO, Anteon International Corporation
- **David Liu**, Vice President & GM, AOL.com
- **Jimmy Lynn**, Vice President, Partnerships and Strategic Development, AOL Sports
- **Tiane Mitchell Gordon**, Vice President, Diversity and Inclusion, AOL
- **Bill Regardie**, Former Publisher, *Regardies* Magazine

“This might have been our most exciting competition by far, explains Julie Silard Kantor, executive director of NFTE-Greater Washington. “We couldn’t be more thrilled — and impressed — with how well all our students performed.” Kantor too, was duly impressed by Tia and noted that it was such positive stories as these that epitomize the meaningful difference that NFTE can instill in these young people’s lives. “Tia was one of 1,630 youth in the Greater Washington region enrolled this year,” she said.

“The NFTE program has been a big inspiration for me,” states Tia. “It has enlightened me that I can do things that I never thought were possible. Before [NFTE], I really didn’t think much of school or have any kind of life. But being in the program and spending time with my teacher, Ms. Lofland, I understood by not doing things was making my life worse. And if I actually stood up and did things that I knew were right and didn’t pay attention to what others said or thought, I could change things for the better.”

Tia goes on to say that she “tells everybody all the time about the NFTE program and how it’s been so inspirational.” “It gives me something important to do,” she explains. Now instead of me just going home after school, I can work on my business. Now I have opportunities. Now I have confidence in myself and what I can achieve.”

The NFTE program receives high marks from the teachers trained and certified to teach the curriculum as well as the enthusiastic students enrolled in the program. Research also confirms that the NFTE program has a strong and positive impact on many of its graduates. A study conducted by Harvard University Graduate School of Education indicates that youth entrepreneurship programs such as NFTE are particularly effective at keeping students from low-income urban backgrounds on the academic track and can be a significant force in driving them toward high achievement and leadership. Further, a recent study conducted by Brandeis University has shown that when compared to a control group, NFTE graduates are 30 times more likely to start their own businesses, and they are 20 times more knowledgeable about entrepreneurship and basic business concepts.

Tia’s third place victory assures her participation this November’s NFTE’s National Business Plan Competition and the Student Entrepreneur of the Year Competition. Her NFTE instructor at Suitland, Mena Lofland, plans to keep a watchful eye over Tia until her graduation.

“We’re all so elated that Tia’s spirit is back,” says Lofland, who teaches 90 students during four NFTE classes each day at the Prince George’s County high school. “She excited about school, excited about her business and about the future.”

But nobody encapsulates what Tia’s NFTE experience has meant for her, as well as she can. According to the now-resolute Tia on what’s she learned: “Now I have absolutely no doubts. If I can do this, I know I can do anything!”

###

Note to Editors

Executives from the Greater Washington office of the National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE) are available to comment about NFTE, the history of the business plan competition and this year's winners and sponsors. Photos from this year's competition are also available upon request. To arrange an interview or for additional information, contact Karen Seidman, of Seidman Says Communications, at (202) 364-8134 or by email, karen@seidmansays.biz.

About NFTE

The National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship (<http://dc.nfte.com>) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, whose mission is to teach entrepreneurship to young people from low-income communities to enhance their economic productivity by improving their business, academic and life skills. Since 1994, NFTE-GW has served more than 12,000 students locally. Nationally, NFTE has enrolled some 140,000 and trained more than 3,700 Certified Entrepreneurship Teachers. Currently NFTE has active programs in 31 states and 13 countries.