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Keeping Brains Fit: MindAlert Awards Recognize Three Successful Regional Programs

Chicago, IL – March 7, 2007 – Three community-based programs will be honored this week with the American Society on Aging-MetLife Foundation MindAlert Awards, recognizing innovative approaches to maintaining cognitive fitness among older adults.

“With increasing evidence suggesting that it is important at any age to keep the mind active, programs such as these are developing innovative ways to help older adults stay mentally fit,” said Sibyl Jacobson, president, MetLife Foundation. “These community-based programs are successful in reaching people in new and exciting ways, with challenging programs in such areas as songwriting, memory skill training, and cross-generational learning techniques.”

The winners will be honored this Friday during a presentation at the annual conference of the American Society on Aging (ASA) and National Council on Aging (NCOA), which is being held in Chicago. The event will also highlight new trends in brain research and will feature the announcement of 15 communities selected to initiate brain fitness programs.

Now in its seventh year, the MindAlert program, funded by MetLife Foundation, approaches mental fitness by attempting to bridge neuroscience research and community-based programs. The awardees were selected from more than two dozen entries, which were reviewed by a panel of leading researchers and practitioners.

The award-winning programs are:

- **Songwriting Works**, Port Townsend, WA, which was recognized for educational programs designed to enhance the mental fitness of cognitively-impaired older adults through creative music programs. The program was created by Judith-Kate Friedman, who wanted to give elders with dementia new forums for self-expression, experience in the arts and the opportunity to leave a musical legacy. The agency also provides workshops and training for caregivers.
- **Everyday Memory Clinic**, Gainesville, FL, which was recognized for its educational programs focused on enhancing the mental fitness of older adults. The clinic, headquartered at the Institute on Aging at the University of Florida, trained more than 400 older adults to use learned memory skills. It has resulted in increased confidence and control over memory, added use of memory strategies and improved memory test scores. Participants’ test scores recorded gains for six months or more, a significant improvement over previous models.
- **The Intergenerational School**, Cleveland, OH, which was recognized for its lifelong learning programs. Overseen by Cathy Whitehouse, the school matches older adults with

children to enhance both groups' knowledge of the learning process and to create opportunities for intergenerational sharing in the areas of literacy, computers, and math.

The programs honored reflect increasing public opinion and scientific research that suggests it is possible to improve brain fitness at any age. According to a recent poll by the ASA, with support from MetLife Foundation, nearly nine out of 10 people believe it is possible to improve mental capacity. This belief is backed by brain health experts who suggest that there are simple tasks individuals can perform to improve brain fitness, such as increased physical activity, exercises designed to stimulate mental acuity, and continued social interaction.

“In the past ten years we have seen scientists and the medical community encourage physical activity for the best possible functioning in our later years. The science now suggests that expanding your exercise routines for brain health may help protect how you think, reason and remember,” said Nancy Ceridwyn, MEd, Director of Educational Initiatives at the American Society on Aging, and coordinator of the MindAlert Program.

To learn more about the MindAlert awards, including how to start a community-based brain promotion program or receive training from the MindAlert Trainers' Bureau, visit www.asaging.org/mindalert. The site provides a wealth of material on enhancing mental acuity, resources on mental fitness, and ways community-based agencies can receive funding for brain health activities.

The American Society on Aging (ASA), based in San Francisco, California, is the largest nonprofit, non-partisan professional membership organization of 5,000 professionals in the field of aging. Founded in 1954, ASA's mission is to develop leadership, knowledge, and skills to address the challenges and opportunities of a diverse aging society. With more than 10,000 members, subscribers and stakeholders, ASA is the largest association for professionals working in the field of aging. For information, visit www.asaging.org.

MetLife Foundation was established in 1976 by MetLife to carry on its long-standing tradition of corporate contributions and community involvement. The Foundation has been involved in a variety of aging-related initiatives addressing issues of caregiving, intergenerational activities, mental fitness, health and wellness programs and civic involvement. Since 1986, the Foundation has supported research on Alzheimer's disease through its Awards for Medical Research program and has contributed more than \$10 million to efforts to find a cure. More information about the Foundation is available at www.metlife.org.

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