



## NEWS RELEASE

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### Local High-School Student(s) to be Honored

**RICHMOND, Va. (January 3, 2005)** - Winners of the 12<sup>th</sup> annual *First Freedom Student Competition* will be recognized for their top entries on Friday, January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2005, in Colonial Williamsburg's Bruton Parish Church at 7:00 p.m. (Refer to attachment for list of student winners.)

"We could not be more pleased to present this year's student winners," said Tommy Baer, Council president. "We were flooded with a record number of entries this year, all of them displaying both talent and insight. It is inspiring to see America's youth consider and interpret the meaning and expression of religious freedom today."

The top student orator, Dale Swartz, will perform at the event and winning artwork will be on display for public viewing. The Honorable Belle S. Wheelan, Virginia Secretary of Education, will offer remarks and present student awards, and a Thomas Jefferson reenactor also will address the gathering. Led by fife and drum corps following the Bruton program, attendees will stroll the historic district to the East Lounge of the Williamsburg Inn for a dessert reception. The program and reception are free and open to the public.

Through essay, oratory and poster entries, nearly 1,300 students participated in the 2004/2005 *First Freedom Student Competition*, addressing the topic, "Religious Freedom: My Right - My Responsibility." Hosted annually by the Richmond-based Council for America's First Freedom, the *First Freedom Student Competition* offers Virginia's public, private and home-schooled high-school students the opportunity to compete for \$1,000 first-place awards and \$500 second-place awards. A *Citation for Excellence* is awarded to other exceptional entries. In support of the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL), the annual contest promotes historical thinking and increased awareness of current events, while giving students the opportunity to grow in persuasive writing and speaking skills or in their artistic expression.

Student awards are presented in conjunction with National Religious Freedom Day, which is January 16<sup>th</sup> of each year.

For more information on the student competition, contact Sandra M. Poulsen, competition director, at (804) 643-1786 or at [spoulsen@firstfreedom.org](mailto:spoulsen@firstfreedom.org).

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**About the Council for America's First Freedom**

The Council for America's First Freedom (CAFF) is a non-denominational, non-political, non-profit 501 (c)(3) organization based in Richmond, Va. Established in 1984, CAFF's mission is to champion religious freedom worldwide through education and to strengthen appreciation for America's protection of this fundamental human right. To enable CAFF to expand its educational outreach, CAFF sponsors the following annual initiatives: Presidential Proclamation of National Religious Freedom Day (January 16); First Freedom Awards; and the First Freedom Student Competition. Currently, CAFF is developing the First Freedom Center, a world-class facility that will offer a dynamic visitor experience with state-of-the-art, interactive exhibits exploring the development of religious freedom in America, and today's related national and international issues. The Center will be the first of its kind anywhere in the world. For more information, please visit [www.firstfreedom.org](http://www.firstfreedom.org).

**About National Religious Freedom Day**

Proclaimed by the President of the United States on January 16 each year, National Religious Freedom Day commemorates the Virginia General Assembly's adoption of Thomas Jefferson's landmark Statute for Religious Freedom on January 16, 1786. This vital document became the basis for the separation of church and state, and led to freedom of religion for all Americans as protected in the religion clause in the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment.

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