



## NEWS RELEASE

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### WILLIAMSBURG TEACHER TO BE HONORED FOR TEACHING EXCELLENCE

RICHMOND, Va. (January 3, 2005) - Linda Eccleston, an economics, geography, modern history and U.S. government teacher at Walsingham Academy, is being honored with the 2004/2005 *First Freedom Teaching Excellence Award*. The Honorable Belle S. Wheelan, Virginia Secretary of Education, will be extending the recognition at a January 7, 2005, awards event hosted in Colonial Williamsburg, at Bruton Parish Church at 7:00 p.m.

Sponsored by the Richmond-based Council for America's First Freedom, the *First Freedom Teaching Excellence Award* is given in acknowledgement of educators who excel in their efforts to encourage student study and contemplation regarding the history and current issues of religious freedom.

"The teacher who inspires his or her students to study, then to reflect upon our freedoms, prepares a generation that will respect and uphold the freedoms that make our nation so unique," commented Tommy P. Baer, Council president. "For nearly 40 years, Ms. Eccleston has consistently motivated her students to follow the issues and join in the process."

The award is presented as a part of the annual First Freedom Student Competition, which invites Virginia's ninth through 12<sup>th</sup> grade public, private and home-schooled students to address themes of religious liberty. This year, nearly 1,300 students addressed the topic, "Religious Freedom: My Right - My Responsibility," through essay, oratory and poster entries.

In addition to Eccleston's recognition at the January event, student winners will receive their awards, (list of winners attached) and a Thomas Jefferson reenactor will further address rights and responsibilities of religious freedom. Led by five

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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.

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

For more information on the *First Freedom Teaching Excellence Award* and the *First Freedom 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. 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. In addition, CAFF sponsors the following annual initiatives: Presidential Proclamation of National Religious Freedom Day (January 16); First Freedom Awards; and the First Freedom Student Competition. 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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