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HIGHLIGHTS:

Two highly motivated young neuroscientists will receive the Pauletta and Denzel Washington Family Gifted Scholars Program in Neuroscience awards during a May 19 ceremony in New York City. Star Jones Reynolds, lawyer, former prosecutor and host of ABC-TV's "The View," will host the program.

STAR JONES REYNOLDS TO HOST PRESENTATION OF PAULETTA AND DENZEL WASHINGTON FAMILY SCHOLARSHIPS

LOS ANGELES (May 4, 2005) – A first-year medical student at the University of Pennsylvania and a senior at the University of California, Los Angeles, will be named this year's recipients of the Pauletta and Denzel Washington Family Gifted Scholars Program in Neuroscience during a ceremony held in New York City and hosted by Star Jones Reynolds, lawyer, former prosecutor and host of ABC-TV's "The View."

The awards ceremony will begin at 1:30 p.m. Thursday, May 19 at the High School of Graphic Communication Arts and Technical Education in New York City.

Pauletta and Denzel Washington will present the awards after a presentation by Keith L. Black, M.D., director of Cedars-Sinai Medical Center's Division of Neurosurgery and director of the Comprehensive Brain Tumor Program.

The scholarships were initiated last year by the Division of Neurosurgery to support scholars who have demonstrated the desire, initiative and aptitude to make significant contributions in the sciences at a time when many students are opting for careers that promise more immediate economic rewards. Recipients have the opportunity to work under the direction of highly respected physicians and scientists and are expected to prepare an abstract or scientific paper for submission to a national neuroscience, cancer or neurosurgery organization.

"Denzel and I are very family oriented and very education oriented. We believe nothing is more valuable than knowledge. These awards are all about saving lives by supporting scholars who have tremendous potential to shape the future," said Pauletta Washington, who has been a strong supporter of Cedars-Sinai's brain tumor research.

"One of the things our organization believes in very passionately is the mentoring process," said Black. "We see a need to get more talented, bright students into the field of neuroscience because we think there are extraordinary opportunities for increasing our understanding of the human brain and in developing treatments for disorders that affect the human brain.

"The Washington Family scholarships are one avenue by which we can mentor young neuroscientists at both the undergraduate and graduate levels so that they can develop successfully into good, strong academic

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scientists,” Black said. “Our field of applicants this year was as impressive as last year’s, and our selection committee did not have an easy task narrowing the list. But the two recipients, Kimberly Idoko and Ksenia Prosolovich, have exhibited great interest and talent in the neurosciences.”

Idoko, a graduate of Yale University with a degree in molecular, cellular and developmental biology, is in her first year at the University of Pennsylvania, working toward degrees in medicine and business administration. One of her first experiences with health care came as a child, when she was the accidental victim of a gunshot. “Though being alone at night in the cold, dark loneliness of a pediatric care facility was absolutely terrifying to me, it marked the beginning of my aspiration to become a physician,” she said.

At Yale, she studied the immunologic route of infection of cytomegalovirus infection in the brain, writing a senior thesis that received highest awards. She also shadowed a spine neurosurgeon and now envisions “becoming one of the few African-American female neurosurgeons in America.” She has received numerous scholarships and research fellowships, including one at Johns Hopkins University, and has earned many awards for academic achievement.

During the summer fellowships at Cedars-Sinai, the graduate-level researcher receives \$2,500 in monthly support from the Washington Family Scholars program. The undergraduate receives \$2,000 per month.

Ksenia Prosolovich, the undergraduate recipient who was a runner-up last year, has been involved with Cedars-Sinai since she became a volunteer at age 16. With a growing interest in neuroscience, she later volunteered in the neurosurgical facilities and in a research laboratory at UCLA.

In a letter of recommendation to the Washington Scholars selection committee, Marie-Francoise Chesselet, M.D., Ph.D., said, “Ksenia has been working in my laboratory in the Department of Neurology at UCLA since June 2002. When she approached me to volunteer in the lab, I had little enthusiasm because she had absolutely no laboratory or neuroscience experience. Our laboratory usually employs highly trained undergraduates who have already taken several neuroscience classes. However, her determination struck me, and I decided to give her a chance.”

Although the work Prosolovich was given was boring and tedious, she took it on enthusiastically, Chesselet noted.

“That Ksenia accepted to do this work and did it with utmost reliability and dedication gives a measure of her motivation. She came to lab meetings, asked questions, read and did such a great job that the post-doctoral fellow who supervised her suggested that she be hired as a student researcher to continue this work,” said Chesselet. In fact, Prosolovich’s immediate mentors in the lab also supported the decision to put her in charge of two experiments designed to discover new treatments for Parkinson’s disease.

Prosolovich plans to earn both an M.D. and Ph.D. in her pursuit of a career in neurosurgery,

“Although the Pauletta and Denzel Washington Family Gifted Scholars Program in Neuroscience is available to students across the country, Cedars-Sinai Medical Center is probably more familiar to those on the West Coast. The New York City awards presentation may bring the scholarships to the attention of even more young neuroscientists looking for an opportunity to put their skills and knowledge to the test,” said Black.

“We’re also very excited to have Star Jones Reynolds participating this year as host,” he added. “She is recognized internationally for her positive influence on education and other social issues, her charitable contributions, and her advocacy, particularly for women and girls who are the subjects of violence and victimization.”

Among many honors, Jones Reynolds was recognized in 2002 by the East Harlem School at Exodus House for her work in improving the educational opportunities for low-income children in the East Harlem community.

One of only four hospitals in California whose nurses have been honored with the prestigious Magnet designation, Cedars-Sinai Medical Center is one of the largest nonprofit academic medical centers in the Western United States. For 17 consecutive years, it has been named Los Angeles' most preferred hospital for all health needs in an independent survey of area residents. Cedars-Sinai is internationally renowned for its diagnostic and treatment capabilities and its broad spectrum of programs and services, as well as breakthroughs in biomedical research and superlative medical education. It ranks among the top 10 non-university hospitals in the nation for its research activities and was recently fully accredited by the Association for the Accreditation of Human Research Protection Programs, Inc. (AAHRPP). Additional information is available at www.cedars-sinai.edu.

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