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ENERGETIC AND INFLUENTIAL MEMBERS OF "THE BRAIN TRUST" DRAW ATTENTION AND FUNDS TO BRAIN DISEASE RESEARCH

LOS ANGELES (March 10, 2009) – Singer, actor, musician and philanthropist Pauletta Washington thought she had too many other responsibilities in 1998 to join a new group supporting brain tumor research at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center. "The Brain Trust" was being formed to raise funds and awareness for the work of neurosurgeon Keith Black, M.D., but Washington, wife of actor Denzel Washington, passed up several opportunities to find out what the group and the research were all about.

"I know that if you're spread too thin, you get nothing done, but then I came to an event and was just blown away. I spoke with Dr. Black one on one, took a tour of the facility, and got excited and jumped in," said Washington. "I could see that he and his research teams were getting results right away."

Black joined the faculty at Cedars-Sinai in 1997 and opened the medical center's Maxine Dunitz Neurosurgical Institute, which is devoted to finding new treatments, preventive measures and cures for brain tumors and other disorders affecting the central nervous system. Washington was acutely aware of the need for effective interventions because her mother had recently died after suffering a stroke.

After a period of second-guessing and wondering whether the loss of her mother could somehow have been prevented, Washington became determined to help find answers for others who would face life-threatening brain injuries or illnesses. She is now one of six members – all of whom happen to be African-American women – of the Brain Trust. The group has raised \$10.9 million for research.

The neurosurgical research teams, which also receive about \$2 million annually in National Institutes of Health grants, published 66 articles in scientific journals last year. Three dozen full-time researchers are now involved in studies on subjects ranging from brain tumors and neurodegenerative disorders to diagnostic and surgical imaging technology. An experimental vaccine that fights recurring malignant brain tumors – first used in patient treatment in 1998, the year the Brain Trust was organized – has been found to extend patient survival and is now being fine-tuned.

The women of the Brain Trust represent a variety of professions, from business and the entertainment industry to medicine and law. Washington said that while their schedules are tight, they are able to accomplish a lot in a short period of time.

"It's a unique group. We can get more done in 15 minutes than you would imagine because we know each other so well and everyone is self-sufficient. It's an efficient effort and everybody works together beautifully," she said. "We have a diverse group of women with just unbelievable resources. It is so much fun to be involved in bringing everyone together to put on a function that raises funds and awareness."

(more)

Pauletta Washington and another member of the group, Keisha Nash-Whitaker, have also enlisted the involvement of their husbands, Academy Award-winning actors Denzel Washington and Forest Whitaker, both of whom have become contributors and outspoken supporters.

Among their fund-raising ventures, the Brain Trust has organized a fair for children and families on a Warner Bros. Studios lot, arranged book signings, and presented concerts. When the Johnnie L. Cochran Jr. Brain Tumor Center opened at Cedars-Sinai in 2007 – a project that received \$5 million in funds raised by the Brain Trust – the group produced a gala celebration attended by contributors and numerous notable personalities, including music producer Rickey Minor, Grammy Award-winning singer Nancy Wilson and talk-show host Larry King.

“Despite having demanding careers and schedules, the members of the Brain Trust pool their incredible talent and donate their precious time for the benefit of our research. Every step we take toward finding new treatments and cures for devastating diseases of the brain are due in large part to their commitment and support,” said neurosurgeon Keith L. Black, M.D., chairman of Cedars-Sinai’s Department of Neurosurgery and director of the Johnnie L. Cochran, Jr. Brain Tumor Center and the Maxine Dunitz Neurosurgical Institute. He also holds the Ruth and Lawrence Harvey Chair in Neurosciences.

Washington said she and other Brain Trust members enjoy having a front-row seat when it comes to witnessing medical history in the making.

“Part of our job is creating awareness, and one of the most exciting aspects of our work is getting information ‘hot off the press’ and filtering it into the community in seminars, luncheons and other events,” she said. “We may have some tougher fund-raising days ahead of us because of the economic situation, but we’re hopeful. Dr. Black is doing phenomenal work and he and his teams are incredible. When we see them working tirelessly, it makes our job easier. It keeps us optimistic and encouraged.”

Black is available to provide additional information on research studies, and each of the women of the Brain Trust is available to discuss her views.

The members are (alphabetically):

Carol Bennett, M.D. – Chief of Urology at the Greater Los Angeles Veterans’ Hospital Healthcare System, sits on many boards, actively involved in schools, mother of two, wife of Keith Black, M.D. Bennett has earned a distinguished reputation through her work with the VA, as a surgeon and as a professor of urology at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Dale Cochran – Entrepreneur and philanthropist, community activist, world traveler, widow of world-renowned attorney and civil rights leader Johnnie L. Cochran, Jr. She works to keep her late husband’s legacy alive in the community with youth programs designed to encourage young people to stay in school and lead active, healthy lives. She led the effort to bring to reality The Johnnie L. Cochran, Jr. Brain Tumor Center at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center.

Gloria Mitchell – Owner of a medical center in south central Los Angeles, philanthropist, community supporter, political activist, mother of five, grandmother of four. She and her husband, Dr. Accie Mitchell, continue to be involved in the community, working to bring hope and renewal to children and their families

in the impoverished and underserved areas of Los Angeles. Her keen business sense has kept projects on target and on budget.

Angelia Sanders – Vice president of the Recording Academy (The Grammys), mother of two young children, sits on several boards, active in children's schools. She has climbed the ladder in the record industry, having worked at Motown, BMG, and RCA record labels, and has helped to build the careers of Grammy Award winners Stevie Wonder, Lionel Richie and Will Smith, to name a few. Her contacts in the world of entertainment have enriched the work of the Brain Trust immeasurably.

Pauletta Washington – Singer, actor, classically trained pianist, philanthropist, and mother of four children, actively involved in children's schools, wife of Academy Award-winning actor Denzel Washington. The couple lends their names and time to the Pauletta and Denzel Washington Family Gifted Scholars Award in Neuroscience, given annually by the Department of Neurosurgery to support two aspiring scientists.

Keisha Nash-Whitaker – Model, philanthropist, active mother of four, and wife of Academy Award-winning actor Forest Whitaker. Keisha has worked diligently to enlist the support of high-level figures in the entertainment industry in the creation of projects such as The Johnnie L. Cochran, Jr. Brain Tumor Center. One such supporter is Forest, whose grandmother was treated by Black after being diagnosed with a brain tumor several years ago.

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