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**LOCAL DELEGATES SELECTED FOR PREVENT
BLINDNESS AMERICA'S FOURTH ANNUAL
EYES ON CAPITOL HILL NATIONAL EVENT**

Residents of Grand Junction and Nevada, Iowa Chosen to Participate

CHICAGO (Feb. XX, 2009) – Prevent Blindness America and Prevent Blindness Iowa are pleased to announce that three local applicants have been selected as delegates for the fourth annual “Eyes on Capitol Hill” campaign to be held in Washington, DC. Kate and Lisa Beyerink, and Gina J. Rooney will join more than 70 other participants from across the country to meet with congressional and senate members and their staff to discuss vision care issues. The event will be held March 2-4, 2009.

Through a nationwide search for applicants, adults and children whose lives have been impacted by either eye disease or eye injuries were selected. The goal of the program is to demonstrate to our nation's leaders the importance of vision care funding initiatives. Specifically, Eyes on Capitol Hill advocates will ask congressional and senate members to increase funding for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Vision Health Initiative and to join the Congressional Vision Caucus (CVC). The CVC is a bicameral and bipartisan coalition of more than 100 Congressional Members focused on vision research, prevention/public health programs, and access to treatment and rehabilitation.

“We are thrilled to be able to have members of our own community represent our state in this important event,” said Jeanne Burmeister, executive director of Prevent Blindness Iowa. “We want our policymakers to see firsthand how the decisions they make about vision care funding and programs impact their own constituents.”

The Iowa delegates include Kate Beyerink, age 13, and her mother, Lisa Beyerink. Kate Beyerink was diagnosed in 2004 with juvenile glaucoma in both eyes with some slight baseline amblyopia in her right eye. Through surgeries and treatment therapies, some of her vision has been saved. However, she has lost most of the vision in her right eye, and has lost almost all of her peripheral vision in the left eye, but still has some central vision. Kate and Lisa Beyerink have participated in Eyes on Capitol Hill events in the past and were able to meet Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-IA), Sen. Tom Harkin (D-IA) and Congressman Tom Latham (R-IA).

“We would like to continue to share Kate's story with our government leaders as well as the public so they realize that glaucoma can also occur in children, not just adults,” said

Lisa Beyerink. “We are asking our representatives to continue to support and fund programs that help to save sight for everyone in our community.”

Also participating in the Eyes on Capitol Hill event from Iowa is Gina J. Rooney from Nevada. Rooney has battled retinoblastoma herself and before she gave birth to her son, Jack, she was informed that he carried the gene for retinoblastoma. She was also informed that he had a 90 percent chance of developing tumors in his eyes. What Rooney did not expect was that the tumors would be present at birth. Jack endured 9 rounds of chemotherapy during his first six months of age. Although at age 16 months, Jack is doing extremely well, his mother wants to go to Washington to tell her representatives about her experience and ask for them to support vision programs.

“I was lucky and not everyone is as lucky as I have been. And, my son is lucky, too,” said Rooney. “We need more funding and federal regulations for eye screenings and tests for people of all ages, races and income levels.”

“As our healthcare system faces the effects of the broader economic downturn, it is critical that we make sure our representatives are aware of the impact that vision loss can have,” added Hugh R. Parry, president and CEO of Prevent Blindness America. “We want to stress the need for public access to preventive services and vision health programs.”

For more information on Eyes on Capitol Hill or on how you can contact your state representative to ask for their support on vision-related issues, contact Prevent Blindness Iowa at (515) 244-4341 or visit preventblindnessiowa.org, or contact Prevent Blindness America at (800) 331-2020 or visit preventblindness.org.

About Prevent Blindness America

Founded in 1908, Prevent Blindness America is the nation's leading volunteer eye health and safety organization dedicated to fighting blindness and saving sight. Focused on promoting a continuum of vision care, Prevent Blindness America touches the lives of millions of people each year through public and professional education, advocacy, certified vision screening and training, community and patient service programs and research. These services are made possible through the generous support of the American public. Together with a network of affiliates, divisions and chapters, it's committed to eliminating preventable blindness in America. For more information, or to make a contribution to the sight-saving fund, call (800) 331-2020 or visit us on the Web at preventblindness.org.

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