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

Residents of Cary, Leicester and Apex, N.C. Chosen to Participate

CHICAGO (Feb. 24, 2009) – Prevent Blindness America and Prevent Blindness North Carolina (PBNC) are pleased to announce that several local applicants have been selected as delegates for the fourth annual “Eyes on Capitol Hill” campaign to be held in Washington, DC. Robin and Stephanie Shannon, Judith Cox, and Anne and Lane Williams 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). Currently, North Carolina’s own Rep. David Price (D-NC) is co-chair of the CVC, 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 Jennifer Talbot, executive director of Prevent Blindness North Carolina. “We want our policymakers to see firsthand how the decisions they make about vision care funding and programs impact their own constituents.”

North Carolina delegates include Robin and Stephanie Shannon of Cary, N.C., who have been tireless crusaders about the dangers of fireworks. Michael Shannon was tragically killed at the age of 3 by a firework that struck him in the head. The firework was legal at the time. Michael’s mother, Robin, and sister, Stephanie, will go to Washington to tell their story.

“I want to go to Washington to tell our representatives that every year in the United States, nearly 10,000 people end up in the emergency room for treatment of fireworks-related injuries,” said Robin Shannon. “We carry on Michael’s legacy by speaking out about the dangers of fireworks, hoping that the public and our policymakers will take heed of our safety message. If we can save even one

family from the heartache that we have experienced, it will be a great tribute to Michael's memory.”

Also participating in the Eyes on Capitol Hill event from North Carolina is Judith Cox from Leicester. After noticing that she was having trouble seeing, Cox was eventually diagnosed with secondary cataracts, having a cataract on the front of her eye lens as well as on the back.

“As a public school educator for 34 years and as a vision screening trainer with PBNC for the past nine years, telling others of the importance of annual vision screenings has become my mission in this stage of my life,” said Cox. “And as someone personally effected with vision loss, I want our government representatives to know the incredible impact that access to vision care can have on both adults and children.”

Of the 130 million Americans aged 40 and older, more than 30 million suffer from leading causes of vision loss such as cataract, diabetic retinopathy, age-related macular degeneration and glaucoma, according to the newly revised edition of Prevent Blindness America’s “Vision Problems in the U.S.” study. In fact, in North Carolina alone, 624,510 residents have already been diagnosed with cataracts, close to 125,000 with diabetic retinopathy, more than 56,000 with AMD and close to 70,000 with glaucoma.

Lastly, Lane Williams, age 10, and her mother, Anne Williams, of Apex, N.C. will head to Washington to tell of their experience with eye disease. A vision screening by PBNC at Lane’s preschool when she was 4 years old detected Lane had a vision problem. She was later diagnosed with a rare condition known as pseudotumor cerebri. Treatments and surgeries saved her from certain blindness to full vision in the most affected eye, and protected the other eye from further damage as well. Lane and Anne Williams have participated in Eyes on Capitol Hill in previous years and have become strong advocates for the important early vision screening and eye exams for all children.

“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 North Carolina (800) 543-7839 or visit pbnc.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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