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Despite Economy, Restaurants Throughout Maryland Continue to Give Back to Their Local Communities

Restaurant Association of Maryland Announces State Winners to Compete for National Philanthropy Award

(Columbia, MD) The Restaurant Association of Maryland today announced the 3 local restaurants in Maryland that are competing for the national Restaurant Neighbor Award, a program by the National Restaurant Association that recognizes restaurants that exemplify the industry's philanthropic spirit. The Maryland winners are: Café 611 in Frederick; The Rose Group, operators of 14 Applebee's statewide; and Judi DiGioia of Morton's The Steakhouse Baltimore.

"Restaurants have a presence on every Main Street in America and they interact with their customers on a daily basis; their businesses are an essential component of what makes towns and cities actual communities for those that call them home," said Restaurant Association of Maryland President & CEO Paul Hartgen. "It is a great honor to recognize the efforts of those individuals and businesses in our local restaurant industry that do so much to serve the communities in which they operate."

"Philanthropy is a natural extension of the restaurant and hospitality industry, and our Restaurant Neighbor Award recognizes extraordinary efforts of community service in our remarkable industry," said National Restaurant Association President and CEO Dawn Sweeney. "Part of the National Restaurant Association's vision is to enhance the quality of life for all we serve, and through this awards program we see that this is being realized by restaurants across the U.S. We are proud to recognize these extraordinary efforts."

Karen and Randy Jones opened **Café 611** in Frederick in 2007 with no prior restaurant experience, but that didn't stop them from becoming an important part of their community. Café 611 was former nightclub with reputation with its neighbors. By opening up their doors to community groups and charitable fundraisers they quickly changed the neighborhood's perception of the establishment. This year the restaurant donated \$1300 to assist 300 American Red Cross volunteers in Frederick County to be trained and ready to provide relief to victims of disaster in addition to providing a free sit-down Thanksgiving dinner for over 150 members of the local community.

The 14 Maryland Applebee's owned and operated by **the Rose Group** have a longstanding commitment to the communities which they serve. The company allows each of their 64 stores in the mid-Atlantic region to raise money in their own way to make it personal to their individual establishment. You name it and their stores do it when it comes to supporting their local communities! In 2008, the Rose Group spent over \$135,000 in these Maryland restaurants on local promotions supporting the community. The Rose Group encourages their associates to be engaged as well and in 2008, the Maryland locations alone participated in nearly 700 events throughout the year in support of their local communities. The Rose Group recently spearheaded a company wide project with Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation (ALSF) that began in 2005. Since its inception, the Rose Group has raised over \$1.3 million for the foundation between their company and corporate partners. In 2007, they specifically earmarked a grant directly to Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore for \$170,000 from donations made across the company footprint to ALSF.

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Judi DiGioia, Sales and Marketing Manager for Morton's the Steakhouse in Baltimore, consistently and actively participates in community and charitable work on behalf of the organization. Ms. DiGioia has been nominated for the National Restaurant Association's "Cornerstone Humanitarian" Award as a part of the Restaurant Neighbor Awards for all she does for her local community. The projects that Ms. DiGioia chooses to participate in are across the board in size and scope and so are the individuals she recruits to get involved in the community; everyone from staff members, corporate partners to members of the restaurant community who might otherwise be competitors. She has worked with organizations and efforts such as Feeding Local Firefighters, Cure Autism Now, Baltimore Orioles "Boys of Summer" event, Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, Make-A-Wish of the Mid-Atlantic, and the Maryland Women's Heritage Center among others. Over the years Ms. DiGioia has helped to raise hundreds of thousands of dollars and touched countless lives.

The National Restaurant Association and founding partner American Express developed the Restaurant Neighbor Award to raise awareness about the restaurant industry's contributions in local communities across the country and to inspire other restaurant operators and owners to make even greater contributions in their communities.

The Restaurant Neighbor Award honors charitable contributions in four categories (small business, mid-size business, large business/national chain, and Cornerstone Humanitarian). Each participating state restaurant association selects winners in their respective states that will compete with winners from other states for the national award.

The four national winners will each receive a \$5,000 award to continue their community programs and be presented the awards this September in Washington, D.C. Both national and state winners will be recognized on the National Restaurant Association Web site.

For more information on the award program, visit the National Restaurant Association's Web site, www.restaurant.org/community.

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The Restaurant Association of Maryland (RAM) has remained relevant to restaurateurs for over 80 years by maintaining core principles born out of the first national financial crisis. In 1927 a small group of Baltimore area restaurateurs met to deal with the challenges facing the economy and the foodservice industry. Today, RAM is a 2,000 member strong statewide trade association operated for the purpose of promoting, protecting and improving the foodservice industry in the State of Maryland. Since the very beginning, the Association has been run by restaurateurs and suppliers working not only for the benefit of dues paying members, but also for the restaurant industry as a whole. For more information about the restaurant industry in Maryland please visit our website at www.marylandrestaurants.com.

Founded in 1919, the National Restaurant Association is the leading business association for the restaurant industry, which is comprised of 945,000 restaurant and foodservice outlets and a work force of 13 million employees. Together with the National Restaurant Association Educational Foundation, the Association works to lead America's restaurant industry into a new era of prosperity, prominence, and participation, enhancing the quality of life for all we serve. For more information, visit our Web site at www.restaurant.org.