LT. GOVERNOR TONI JENNINGS LAUNCHES VOLUNTEER PROGRAM TO ASSIST WITH WILMA RECOVERY

~Florida Hurricane Relief Fund to assist nine hardest hit counties through Neighbors to the Rescue~

FT. LAUDERDALE - Lt. Governor Toni Jennings today launched Neighbors to the Rescue, a program of the Florida Hurricane Relief Fund that puts neighbors in touch with neighbors to provide relief to families whose lives were disrupted by Hurricane Wilma. The program is connecting volunteers, tapping into community resources and creating virtual warehouses of donated goods and services for those recovering from the storm that devastated areas of South Florida a month ago. Led by Volunteer Broward, Broward County is the first of the nine hardest hit counties to implement the program.

“Neighbors to the Rescue is another way volunteers are coming together to help fellow Floridians impacted by Hurricane Wilma make a full recovery,” said Lt. Governor Jennings. “By creating a network of assistance in the hardest hit areas, Florida’s volunteers are able to best support their neighbors rebuild their lives quickly.”

Building on the successful model launched in Jacksonville this year for Katrina evacuees, Neighbors to the Rescue creates a network of community volunteers that adopt neighbors in need. The program also meets the needs of Floridians recovering from Hurricane Wilma by creating a virtual warehouse of available materials, goods, services, transportation and housing. The volunteer effort will be led by community leaders in Broward, Collier, Hendry, Lee, Martin, Miami-Dade, Monroe, Palm Beach and St. Lucie counties. The leaders will help funded, volunteer organizations build the virtual warehouse, facilitate adoptions of neighbors in need and strengthen the network of assistance. Neighbors needing assistance will be identified by the Department of Community Affairs and Area Councils on Aging.

The Florida Hurricane Relief Fund, established by Governor Jeb Bush during the 2004 hurricane season, is leading the project. The Fund will provide $10,000 to participating volunteer organizations for initial two-month start-up costs and grant additional funds to sustain the program through May 2006. The Fund anticipates contributing close to $500,000 in grants to designated volunteer organizations over the duration of the project. Each local volunteer organization will submit a detailed plan of operation and requested budget to the Fund by December 1.

Neighbors wishing to help neighbors can offer to adopt a neighbor in need by emailing participating volunteer organizations. A complete list of participating groups will be posted on www.FLAHurricaneFund.org <http://www.FLAHurricaneFund.org>
as the alliances are built over the next two weeks. To register in Broward County, neighbors can email Volunteer Broward at neighbors@volunteerbroward.org or visit www.VolunteerBroward.org.

Joining Lt. Governor Jennings for today’s announcement at the Northwest Focal Point Senior Center in Margate was Broward County Mayor Ben Graber, Area Agency on Aging Director Edith Lederberg, Florida Hurricane Relief Fund CEO Steve Uhlfelder, philanthropist Linda King and Volunteer Broward Vice Chair Donald Mariutto.

To date, the Fund has received more than $1.6 million in pledges to help with Wilma recovery. Pledges include $1 million from Home Depot, $100,000 from Altria, $100,000 from Shell, $75,000 from Washington Mutual, $50,000 from the Harold Simmons Foundation, $25,000 from BP, $21,000 from Wood Brothers/JTG Racing and McKee Foods (Little Debbie), $15,000 from Bush Brothers & Company, and $10,000 from Pearson Education. Additionally, Sprint will include a message in its monthly statement asking customers to donate to the Fund.

Managed by the Volunteer Florida Foundation, for 2004 the Fund assisted 270 organizations, raised more than $20 million in tax-deductible contributions from corporations and individuals, and received $1 million in-kind from Goodwill Industries of Florida to aid communities with the 2004 hurricane recovery. The Fund is administered with less than three percent overhead and all donations are tax-deductible. For more information or to donate, please visit www.flahurricanefund.org.