



A project of the Adoption Coalition of Texas and CASAs across Central Texas

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CONTACT: Michele Golden/Golden & Co.
michele@goldenandco.com
281-759-2404 work
713-252-6464 cell

Unique Photography Exhibit Debuts Featuring Children In Foster Care Awaiting Adoption – Reflects Large Adoption Success Rate from Previous Year

The Heart Gallery of Central Texas Photo Exhibit Premiere and Gala to be held September 21st

(Austin, Texas – September 4, 2006) - Due to the overwhelming national interest and its success in 2005, The 2006 Heart Gallery of Central Texas photography exhibit will unveil for the second year with its Premiere Gala on September 21, 2006 in Austin at SPAZIO by Lytle Pressley. The special guest speaker at this year's unveiling will be Joseph Bartlett, who had been in the foster care system for 13 years until his adoption last month, just two days before his 18th birthday. He is an avid supporter of the Adoption Coalition of Texas and has a special story to tell with a positive outlook on his future.

Both a traveling portrait exhibit and innovative approach to community outreach, The Heart Gallery of Central Texas is a unique opportunity for individuals to learn more about children in the foster care system and the adoption process. The exhibit is made possible by over 40 Central Texas documentary and portrait photographers who volunteered their time and talents again this summer to capture the characteristics and individual personalities of more than 140 children (in 95 portraits) waiting for adoption, in hopes that their work will inspire people to open their hearts and consider adoption. At any given moment, there are 500 children waiting for adoption in the Central Texas foster care system, all removed from their natural family due to abuse or neglect.

The photo exhibit and gala will be held on Thursday, September 21, 2006 at SPAZIO by Lytle Pressley, 1214 W. 6th Street, Austin, Texas at 6:30 p.m. Tickets are \$25 per person and proceeds benefit The Heart Gallery of Central Texas. The exhibit will be on display at SPAZIO from September 22 – October 5, and travel around Central Texas for the next eight months. This is a project of the Adoption Coalition, in partnership with six CASA organizations across Central Texas. The Adoption Coalition of Texas is a nonprofit organization created in 2003 to focus on finding forever families for children languishing in the foster care system.

In reviewing the accomplishments of the 2005 event, "the number of adoptions generated from the 2005 exhibit reflects a success rate and is a story to tell," stated Dr. Tracy Eilers, Chair for the Heart Gallery of Central Texas and the Executive Director for the Adoption Coalition of Texas, who produces the event each year. Eilers noted that "43% of the

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children featured last year are adopted, which is tremendous. We wanted to continue this project in 2006 to tell the story of these amazing children awaiting adoption. Our goal is to keep the gallery moving until all of the kids are adopted. Last year, The Heart Gallery of Central Texas had a national impact on adoption awareness generating thousands of phone calls and emails to the Adoption Coalition of Texas from all over the country.

"Seeing these children in photographs as they laugh and play is a powerful experience. We want to inspire people to learn more about adoption from foster care. Our whole purpose is to humanize these children, show their personalities, and give a glimpse into their souls," explains Eilers. The Heart Gallery is opening doors for these kids by educating the community and inspiring people to ask questions, get involved and give these children the families they deserve.

The exhibit would not be possible without the committed photographers, and among the first Austin photographers to join the project and help start The Heart Gallery of Central Texas were Joe Cremona and Mariza Brussolo, a husband/wife team. They had previously adopted a young daughter, who is now five years old, from outside the foster care system. Their interest and involvement with the Heart Gallery has educated them on the children awaiting adoption in foster care and now they have decided to grow their family further and adopt a daughter from the Central Texas foster care system. "We love telling everyone how they can adopt and give a child a forever family", said Brussolo.

"Photographing the children for the Heart Gallery is one of the most fulfilling things I've ever done. I participated last year and this year, and I am planning on participating every single year! I LOVE the Heart Gallery," expressed Brussolo. "Understanding the life changing effect that a photograph can have on these children makes this project so special and rewarding," commented Brussolo, "because of the images that other photographers and I have created, there are children who are finding their forever families. It just amazes me."

There are an estimated 523,000 children in foster care in the United States, and more than 150,000 of them are waiting to be adopted. In Central Texas alone, there is a daily average of 3,500 children in foster care with 500 waiting for adoption. Since 1987, the number of children in foster care has nearly doubled, and the average time a child remains in foster care has lengthened to nearly three years. Each year, approximately 20,000 children in foster care will age out of the system without ever being placed with a permanent family according to the *U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families Administration on Children; Interim Estimates for FY 2003.*

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About the Adoption Coalition of Texas: The Adoption Coalition of Texas (ACT) is a public/private partnership of five nonprofit agencies and Child Protective Services working together to find forever families for older children, sibling groups, and children with special needs, often referred to as forgotten children. The Adoption Coalition of Texas partner agencies include: The Arrow Project, Child Placement Center, Lutheran Social Services of the South, Marywood Children Family Services, Pathways Youth and Family Services, and Child Protective Services. These children are living in foster care, many for extended periods, and are waiting for a permanent family – a life of stability and love. If you would like more information on the Adoption Coalition of Texas, The Heart Gallery of Central Texas, or to find out ways to help, visit www.adoptioncoalitiontx.org, www.heartgallerytexas.com, or call Dr. Tracy Eilers at 512-301-2825.