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## **County Highlights Contributions of Volunteer Foster Grandparents and Grandmothers Rearing Children**

*Board Recognizes Dedication and Sense of Giving From Seniors to Younger Generations*

SAN JOSE, CALIF.— According to the 2000 Census, nearly two and a half million grandparents in the United States are heads of household with the primary care giving responsibility for more than four and a half million children under the age of 18. Today the County of Santa Clara Board of Supervisors recognized the dedication of grandparents committed to provide a nurturing environment to rear their grandchildren, when their own offspring are not willing or capable to assume the responsibility.

“One out of every three children is in the care of their grandparents,” said Supervisor Pete McHugh, Chair of the County of Santa Clara Board of Supervisors. “The fact that grandparents have stepped in to fill this void is heartwarming. Child rearing is never an easy task; it is a labor of love.”

Alcohol, drug usage, child abuse, neglect, incarceration, unemployment, abandonment, death of parents or teenage pregnancy are the most prevalent causes that result in grandparents from diverse races and socioeconomic backgrounds being left with the task of bringing up their grandchildren. Most grandparents in Santa Clara County with parenting responsibility for their grandchildren are women; and one of every two of the grandmothers has income below the poverty level.

“As a grandmother myself, I cannot tell you how wonderful it is to embrace grand parenting,” said Supervisor Blanca Alvarado. “However, what these grandmothers are doing is remarkable. By taking on the responsibility full time, they willingly make major sacrifices for the sake of their grandchildren.”

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“What many grandparents, primarily grandmothers are doing in our county is exceptional,” said Supervisor Liz Kniss. “Grand parents are truly a compass role model. They provide a sense of direction, structure and a great deal of compassion in their grandchildren lives.”

For their sacrifices in the interest of love and family, the Building Families Organization will recognize 100 grandmothers at their 4<sup>th</sup> annual Golden Grandmothers Luncheon, on Thursday, May 8, 2008, at the Airport Holiday Inn in San José.

“Grandmothers who step in as primary caregivers provide children with a safe and nurturing environment when those children have nowhere else to go,” said Supervisor Ken Yeager, Chair of the Board’s Children, Seniors and Families Committee. “Their commitment often keeps siblings together and provides them with the family they need to thrive.”

The Board of Supervisors also commended with a resolution Volunteer Foster Grandparents in Santa Clara County for their tireless dedication to children. The program began with sixteen individuals in 1972, serving children at three institutions. Seventy individuals now work at 22 institutions and schools.

“It is very fitting that we acknowledge thirty-six years of service and contributions of Volunteer Foster Grandparents, during the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of International Volunteer Week,” said Supervisor Don Gage, Vice Chair of the Children, Seniors and Families Committee. “These volunteers make a tremendous difference. They continue to give so much to our community in terms of their initiative and love for others. Their giving capacity is remarkable and should be publicly recognized.”

### **On Volunteer Foster Grandparents:**

Volunteer Foster Grandparents must be at least sixty years of age and meet certain health and income requirements. They also must have a desire to help children who have physical, mental, emotional, or social disabilities. They interact with foster grandchildren as they would interact with their own grandchildren. This includes include playing with them, talking to them, doing simple craft activities, and lending support and assistance in their school assignments. They dedicate an average of 20 hours a week to tutor children with low literacy rates, mentor troubled teenagers and mothers and care for premature infants and children with disabilities and severe illnesses. Their involvement helps address self esteem issues, develop relationships and essential life skills.