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Fund for Teachers Announces Houston's Plank Fellowship Award Winner

National non-profit also names 2009 Fellows to Travel This Summer

May 5 – (Houston) Celebrating America's top teachers on National Teacher Day, Fund for Teachers' Stephanie Ascherl channeled Ed McMahon today – walking into The Woodlands Christian Academy and naming teacher Trey Thames Houston's Plank Fellowship Award winner.

Named for Fund for Teachers' Founder Raymond Plank, the Plank Fellowship Award is given annually to the teacher who made the most of their summer odyssey (which he/she designed and Fund for Teachers made possible) upon returning to the classroom.

Trey designed a fellowship last summer that partnered him with the Tel Gezer Project, a consortium of universities, seminaries and the Israeli Antiquities Department in Tel Gezer, Israel, to learn proper methods and techniques of modern archaeology to subsequently introduce a course at his school. Back in The Woodlands, Trey constructed a 50'x50'x6' simulated dig named Tel Ya'ar (Hill of the Woodlands) with remains of four homes, five skeletons, and approximately 350 artifacts that correspond to three civilizations/eras in ancient Israel. Biology, anatomy, mathematics, geology, history and Biblical studies teachers utilize the dig for lesson application and each of his high school students assume a supervisory role for three weeks, learning leadership skills. Thames plans to expand the site to 100'x100'x12', landscape it with olive trees and grape vines, and build a small, rock-lined area to serve as outdoor classroom.

"Visiting Israel and walking the same dusty roads, entering through the same ancient gateways, climbing the same hillsides as Nebuchadnezzar, Alexander the Great, Solomon, Xerxes, the apostle Paul, Jesus and countless others gave me keener insight and a deeper passion for my study and teaching of ancient history and culture," said Trey. "This, in turn, sharpened my teaching, enlivened my lessons and enriched my students."

"A wise man once observed that you cannot give away what you do not possess. Mr. Thames' passion for this project awakened an interest in the students that they would not otherwise have an opportunity to pursue," said Stephen Zeal, assistant head of school at The Woodlands Christian Academy. One of Trey's students, Alex Wymore, agreed: "With the help of Fund for Teachers, Mr. Thames created a class that benefits the whole school. It's not just an archaeology class, but also a history, science, and math class. I enjoy the fact that I can use my hands, not be in a classroom, and still have a superior learning environment."

Fund for Teachers named Corey Pickering, Millennium High School in Manhattan, its national Plank Fellowship Award winner. Additional winners from the nonprofit's partner programs include: Kathy Clunis, Boston; Erin Goodling, San Francisco; Ziomara Perez and Megan Whitney, Chicago; Cindy Coughlin and Sandra Collins, Expeditionary Learning Schools; Melody Afill and Donna McChesney, Oklahoma; Donna McSweeney and Lynn Talamini, Rural School and Community Trust; Robert Jeffers, Los Angeles; and Julie Anderson, Oakland.

Fund for Teachers also announced today its list of 2009 grant recipients. Descriptions of the new Fellows' upcoming odysseys, as well as how the Plank Fellowship Award winners implemented their 2008 fellowships, are available at www.fundforteachers.org/fellows.html.

Made possible by individual and corporate donors, Fund for Teachers has awarded more than \$12 million in grants to approximately 3,500 of America's top educators over the past nine years. Based in Houston, Fund for Teachers enriches the personal and professional growth of America's top teachers as they identify and pursue opportunities around the world that will have the greatest impact on themselves, their students and their communities. For more information on how you can make teachers' dreams a reality, visit www.fundforteachers.org.

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