

## **Unprecedented Attendance, Collaboration Mark Horizons National Annual Meeting**

With an overall theme celebrating 15 years of expansion and replication of the Horizons program and its effectiveness, on October 23 and 24, the Horizons National Annual Meeting brought together national and affiliate board members, executive directors representing ten states, staff, sponsors and supporters. The meetings and events, underwritten by Coca Cola Enterprises, were marked by an unprecedented level of collaboration and participation by the diverse group.

Executive directors gathered on Friday to discuss the successes of last summer's programs and to exchange ideas for facing the challenges that lie ahead as they continue to expand and reach more students. Later that evening, three Horizons teachers were presented with the 2009 Lyn McNaught Teaching Awards at the annual dinner. Meetings continued on Saturday with national board members examining and fine tuning plans to add more affiliates to the national network.

"The attendance and energy at this year's meeting were unparalleled," said Horizons National executive director Lorna Smith. "We saw an extraordinary rise in attendance and a new level of enthusiasm and support for the program as it continues its mission to improve the lives of low-income children nationwide."

With an unwavering eye toward that mission, the annual dinner featured a videotaped message from Horizons at NCCS graduate Kevin Thompson who went on to become a school record holder in diving at the University of Connecticut, an accomplished regional theatre actor, and, currently, an assistant teacher at both Green Farms Academy and at the Horizons program located at Greens Farms Academy. He plans to pursue a career in teaching and a master's degree in elementary education. "I'm so grateful for the opportunities opened for me through Horizons," he said, "and I plan to give back to my community and to new generations of children in the same way. We all have the capability to change the world through programs like Horizons."

Similarly, Shaun Anderson, diversity coordinator for the U.S. Swimming "Make a Splash" program, spoke to attendees at a Saturday lunch meeting about the significance of the swimming component to the Horizons program. Anderson, also a co-founder of the Diversity in Aquatics Program (DAP) network and a swim instructor for the Horizons at Hampton Roads, VA, program, hailed the value of Horizons' efforts to teach swimming to so many minority children for whom the drowning rate is three times as high as for their peers. He also pointed out the added value of the skill as it relates to additional career and educational opportunities. Anderson is now working to help Horizons become an official partner in the USS Make a Splash program, and was instrumental in the movement to pass a new legislative resolution designed toward encouraging swimming skills and safety for minority children.

Lyn McNaught Teaching Awards were presented through grants from the Jeniam Foundation to Marilyn Fain Fester of the Horizons at Harley School in Rochester, NY; Kelly Grose of the Horizons at Salisbury School in Salisbury, MD; and Ashley Gayle Williamson of Horizons at Colorado Academy.