



Contact: Peggy Weil, Advocacy Coordinator - 828-575-3787 (cell)

## PRESS RELEASE –

October 27, 2010

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### MISS NORTH CAROLINA INTERNATIONAL PROMOTES ASHEVILLE AIDS AWARENESS WALK

Asheville, NC (October 27, 2010)- Miss North Carolina International, Kristie Tobias, was in Asheville on October 26<sup>th</sup> promoting the Asheville AIDS Awareness Walk. Miss Tobias toured the town in her sash and crown shaking hands at Isaac Dickson Elementary, meeting with students from the after-school programs at Asheville Middle School and Delta House, and speaking before City Council and Mayor Terry Bellamy. All in an effort to encourage people to join Western North Carolina AIDS Project along with over 35 community partners at The AIDS Awareness Walk at 11a.m. on Saturday, November 6<sup>th</sup> in downtown Asheville.

Miss Tobias spoke with students from the after-school programs at Asheville Middle School and Delta House encouraging them to come out for the Walk. She talked with them about the basics facts of HIV/AIDS and the need to be aware that the epidemic continues. During an initial question and answer session, not one student could explain that the letters in the acronym AIDS stand for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. She then asked two volunteers to act out how they would discourage a friend from smoking, illustrating how they could be leaders for healthy behaviors and smart choices.

Kristie Tobias is spending her year as Miss North Carolina International advocating for HIV/AIDS awareness and education. "If I can get the attention of one teen so that they go home to their parents and ask for more information, I will have made a difference," says Miss Tobias. Despite advances in life-sustaining medical treatment, there is no cure for AIDS and the epidemic continues. According to the CDC, Blacks and Latinos account for a disproportionate share of HIV infections relative to their size in the U.S. population. HIV was the 4<sup>th</sup> leading cause of death for Black Men and the 3<sup>rd</sup> leading cause of death for Black Women ages 25 –44 in 2006. In 2007, teen girls represented 40% of AIDS cases reported among 13 to 19 year olds in the United States.

Miss Tobias along with Lee Madison, WNCAP supporter, went before Asheville's City Council to accept a proclamation from Mayor Terry Bellamy for the Western North Carolina AIDS Project in support of the Asheville AIDS Awareness Walk.

Throughout the day, Miss North Carolina was escorted by SISTA Facilitators, Lillian Butler and Jennifer Poore. SISTA, which stands for Sisters Informing Sisters on Topics about AIDS, is an HIV prevention intervention developed for African American women by African American women and packaged for dissemination by the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention. "I was very impressed with Miss Tobias's commitment and determination to educate people about HIV and AIDS," said Lillian Butler. "It is so important for people to see a young person take a stand against HIV stigma. Stigma is fueling the spread of the virus. People need to have the courage to get tested and protect themselves."

Miss Tobias is a graduate of Wake Forest University where she was a member of the Varsity Cheerleading squad, Delta Delta Delta sorority, and the Wake Forest Gospel Choir. Currently, she is pursuing her Master's degree in Healthcare Administration at Winston Salem State University, and is the Board Co-chair for Positive Wellness Alliance, an HIV/AIDS non-profit agency based out of Lexington, North Carolina. Kristie Tobias is proud to be the first black Miss North Carolina International.

The Asheville AIDS Awareness Walk is hosted by the Western North Carolina AIDS Project in partnership with over thirty-five community-based organizations, non-profits, churches and businesses on Saturday, November 6<sup>th</sup>. Walkers will gather at 11am in front of The Grove House at 11 Grove Street in downtown Asheville and proceed up Patton Avenue to the Vance Monument, where Womansong of Asheville will perform. Kristie Tobias will be there along with other scheduled speakers including County Commissioner David Gantt, AIDS Advocate Joy Oliver, and Reverend Brian Combs of the Haywood Street Congregation.

In the spirit of this year's theme of Unity and Hope, Asheville citizens are encouraged to come together to show their support for those living with HIV & AIDS and to remember the 25 million lives lost worldwide.

Western North Carolina AIDS Project provides client services, prevention education and outreach to 18 counties in Western North Carolina. For more information about services and the upcoming AIDS Walk please go to <http://www.wncap.org/>.

