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rschoen@researchds.org**“Light the Way” Event Announced by Governor First Spouses to Support Advances in
Biomedical Research to Treat Down Syndrome Cognitive Impairment**

Washington DC, March 7, 2011 – New Jersey Governor First Lady Mary Pat Christie and several other Governor First Spouses have joined together to bring attention to Down syndrome cognitive research, a rapidly advancing area of research that holds great promise for improving memory, learning and communication for Down syndrome individuals of all ages. The First Spouse “*Light the Way*” event will be launched on World Down Syndrome Day, March 21, 2011. This date is particularly meaningful as Down syndrome results from the presence of three copies of chromosome 21. On the evening of that day, Drumthwacket, the official residence of the Governor of New Jersey will be illuminated in the color blue to symbolize First Lady Christie’s support of Down syndrome cognitive research.

Mrs. Christie announced the event on February 28, 2011 at a First Spouse Breakfast in Washington DC, and First Spouses across the country are participating. To date, First Spouses from Alabama, Georgia, Maine, Mississippi, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Texas, Utah and Wisconsin have endorsed this event. The goal of the *Light the Way* program is to expand awareness of Down syndrome cognitive research, including the efforts of the non-profit foundation Research Down Syndrome (RDS) to fund this research. Noting the reasons that she and other participating First Spouses have endorsed the *Light the Way* campaign, Mrs. Christie stated “I am inspired by initiatives which are designed to empower individuals in New Jersey and pleased that other First Spouses have joined this campaign to increase awareness about this research which brings a fresh approach to the complex issues related to the needs of those with intellectual disabilities.” Dr. Robert Schoen, President of Research Down Syndrome, adds “We are gratified by the First Spouse responses we have received so far and believe support of this initiative will continue to grow nationwide”.

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The *Light the Way* campaign will add support to RDS’ efforts to educate and increase awareness and funding for Down syndrome cognitive research – motivating not only the Down syndrome community, but also the general public to support RDS’ work to empower individuals with intellectual disabilities to reach their fuller potential.

RDS is a 501c3 non-profit foundation which funds research at leading institutions directed towards identifying safe and effective biomedical therapies to treat the intellectual challenges associated with Down syndrome. In the last few years, researchers have made significant progress toward understanding and treating the cognitive issues associated with Down syndrome. These studies now provide the promise of biomedical therapies for improving memory, learning and communication in individuals with Down syndrome, offering the potential for increased life opportunities.

Down syndrome is the result of an extra copy of the genetic material present on chromosome 21. It is the most frequently occurring chromosomal abnormality, with an incidence of approximately 1 of every 700 live births. Currently there are an estimated three million persons with Down syndrome worldwide, including approximately 400,000 in the United States. The presence of additional chromosomal material impacts development, manifesting differently in each affected individual. A number of medical conditions occur with increased frequency in those with Down syndrome, including congenital heart defects, thyroid disorders and Alzheimer’s disease. All individuals with Down syndrome experience some degree of cognitive impairment, usually in the mild to moderate range. According to Dr. Schoen, “Recent advances in health care and inclusive living have resulted in people with Down syndrome living into their 60’s and beyond, underscoring the importance of assisting this population achieve and maintain independent living. RDS prioritizes funding toward programs with a high probability of readily contributing to the development of safe and effective therapies.

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This research has achieved significant success in a relatively small amount of time. Dr. Schoen notes that "Over the last few years, researchers have identified multiple different neurobiological pathways representing potential targets for the development of drugs to positively impact learning and memory in individuals with Down syndrome. This research is rapidly moving towards human clinical trials". Dr. Schoen also notes that there is broad applicability of Down syndrome research to conditions impacting the general population. "Associations between Down syndrome and Alzheimer's disease have been identified which open promising paths of investigation for treating both Down syndrome and Alzheimer's. In addition, a decreased incidence of breast and colon cancer has been reported within the Down syndrome population and this finding offers additional clues which may prove to be useful in developing treatments for these conditions."

RDS supports cognitive research at leading research institutions that are studying the basis of the intellectual impairments associated with Down syndrome, including Johns Hopkins University, Stanford University; The University of Arizona; University of California, San Diego; and University of Colorado.

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About Research Down Syndrome

Research Down Syndrome is a non-profit foundation that supports and funds Down syndrome cognitive research conducted at leading institutions that are studying the basis of the intellectual impairments associated with Down syndrome, including Johns Hopkins University, Stanford University, The University of Arizona, University of California, San Diego, and University of Colorado. Recent scientific advances have revolutionized this field of research, providing for the near term development of targeted medical therapies to treat the cognitive challenges associated with Down syndrome, improving memory, learning and communication, expanding and enhancing life opportunities, for people of all ages with Down syndrome. Research Down Syndrome is a legal corporate entity, and is a 501(c) (3) nonprofit organization designated by the Internal Revenue Code. For more information, please visit www.researchds.org or contact RDS at info@researchds.org. or 877.863.2121.