



For Immediate Release

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## **DRSEA LAUNCHES READING PROGRAM FOR DOMINICAN CHILDREN**

**SANTO DOMINGO, Dominican Republic** -- In keeping with a tradition in the cigar industry called *el lector de tabaquería*, the Dominican Republic Sports & Education Academy (DRSEA) and Children International are launching a program that will send people out into Dominican communities to read aloud to children.

**The program will begin February 11, 2009, at 3 p.m. at the Children International community center at Calle Primera No. 52, bear Bobina, Finca Vigía-Tanquecitos, Boca Chica, in Santo Domingo. Children ages 6 to 10 are being invited to participate.**

Charles S. Farrell, a co-founder of the DRSEA, and one of the creators of the reading program said, “Remember when your mother used to read to you at night, tucking you into bed to narrate one of your favorite bedtime stories? The image probably has stuck with you all of your life and it was the beginning of your interest in reading, right?”

In both Cuba and the Dominican Republic, the cigar industry, even today, has long employed a reader to entertain the cigar rollers while rolling and cutting the leaves. The *lector* reads aloud from newspapers and novels to help while away the hours. The readings came to be regarded as a social and cultural right, and spurred many cigar rollers to learn to read, and also to social activism.

The DRSEA is a project designed to provide young, gifted student athletes the opportunity to become well-rounded individuals, preparing them for college scholarships in the United States. The reading program will help to “brand” the DRSEA in the Dominican Republic as it prepares to open its doors as early as 2010, and help create a feeder system for the school.

Rafael M. Mejia, Agency Director for Children International, said the reading program is another example of Children International working to stimulate an interest in education at an early age. “Reading can open up the entire world, even the universe to children who have never ventured outside of their neighborhoods, let alone the Dominican Republic. Expanding horizons can make these kids hungry to know more, to read more, and even encourage their brothers and sisters and their parents to get involved.”

The first reading will be done by Valoree Valdez de Lebron, Director of the Lebron & Barney International Learning Center who has worked as an educator in the Dominican Republic for the past 30 years. For the past four years she has worked with Major League Baseball organizations including the Boston Red Sox, Cleveland Indians, New York Mets, and Seattle Mariners in the Dominican Republic. Her objective mainly has been helping to improve the player’s personal and academic development while

at the same time advancing in their academic level. At this moment 33 players have received their high school diplomas. This gives the Dominican player a second option in life if they are released from their baseball career, which happens to a very large percentage of players. She is also on the board of the DRSEA.

“As a teacher, and as a mother and grandmother, I understand how important reading can be as a motivational factor for young people,” she said. “If we can develop a love for reading at an early age, this will follow them the rest of their lives and open up unimaginable doors.” Ms. de Lebron is also bringing Luis Perdomo, a Dominican Major League baseball player, to the reading to discuss the importance of education and how it has helped him succeed in baseball. Perdomo recognizes that baseball players are role models in their communities and expresses the importance of improving the player’s intellectual level.

The Sports Foundation in Bronx, NY, is donating school supplies that will be distributed to the children after the reading. Vaughn Thomas, president of the foundation, said the reading program is an extension of the motto for his foundation, “Strong Body, Strong Mind.”

***About Children International:***

Established in 1936, Children International is a nonprofit organization with its headquarters in Kansas City, Missouri. Children International’s programs benefit over 300,000 poor children and their families in 11 countries around the world, including Chile, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, India, Mexico, the Philippines, Zambia and the United States. If you would like to help, Sponsor a Child today at [www.children.org](http://www.children.org).