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**Sarasota County Named One of the
100 Best Communities for Young People
by America's Promise Alliance and ING U.S.**

*Annual Competition Recognizes Communities that Prioritize
Youth Education and Well-Being*

[September 6, 2012 Florida]—Sarasota County today was named one of America's Promise Alliance's *100 Best Communities for Young People presented by ING*. The national award was given to Sarasota County to recognize its outstanding and innovative work in addressing the high school dropout crisis and for its programs and services that make it an outstanding place for youth to live, learn and grow.

An emphasis on education and youth safety are key factors in Sarasota County being honored as a *100 Best* community winner for a second time. Sarasota has made education a top priority with programs like the [Early Learning Coalition](#) and [Literacy Empowers All Families](#). The Early Learning Coalition integrates leadership and community resources to promote high-quality early education and family support by allocating resources to the school system and implementing programs for childhood development and readiness.

Child safety is supported by organizations such as the [Safe Children Coalition](#), which provides abused, neglected or abandoned children with access to child welfare services including case management, independent living and adoption. To address youth poverty, the [Schoolhouse Link](#) program ensures that homeless youth are able to enroll in school and have access to a quality education. For lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) young people, [ALSO Out Youth](#) provides services to ensure that they have access to safe places and mentoring support from adults to enhance their self-esteem.

“The recognition that this community again has been designated as one of the best in the country for young people reflects the strength of our commitment to education and the safety of our youth,” said Christine Robinson, Sarasota County Commission Chair. “Along with our early learning and literacy programs, our economic development initiatives focus

on workforce training. We want our young people to have the skills they need to find productive jobs with local employers who can grow and help diversify our economy.”

“As young people across the country go back to school, it is especially timely to recognize communities like Sarasota County that have come together to make supporting young people a top priority and that are committed to helping young Americans reach their full potential,” said John Gomperts, America’s Promise Alliance president and CEO. “The *100 Best* winners are doing outstanding work delivering the Five Promises that create the conditions for all young people to have the best chance for success. We hope the example set by these communities provides inspiration for others to take action.”

At noon EST on Sept. 12, Gomperts will join America’s Promise Alliance Chair Alma Powell and ING Foundation President Rhonda Mims at the Newseum in Washington, D.C., to officially announce the 100 winning communities during a live [webcast](#).

“The increase we have seen in graduation rates over the past few years is due, in large part, to the hard work communities such as Sarasota County have done to make sure their youth have access to an outstanding education and support services,” said Rhonda Mims, president of the ING Foundation and head of the ING U.S. Office of Corporate Responsibility. “It is also important for ING to partner with organizations such as America’s Promise Alliance so we can share these best practices and play a role in improving student achievement and the nation’s economy.”

Sarasota County will receive a \$2,500 grant, signage identifying the community as one of the nation’s *100 Best Communities for Young People*, and access to America’s Promise Alliance’s community development resources.

The *100 Best* competition is part of the Grad Nation campaign, a large and growing movement of dedicated individuals, organizations and communities working together to end the dropout crisis. The goal of Grad Nation is to raise the national high school graduation rate to 90 percent by 2020, with no school graduating fewer than 80 percent of its students on time.

All communities entering the *100 Best* competition completed a rigorous application where they provided details on how their existing programs and initiatives help deliver the Five Promises—resources identified by America’s Promise as being critical to the development of healthy, successful children: caring adults; safe places; a healthy start; effective education; and opportunities to help others. Applicants also were asked to describe how different sectors of their community work together to help children and families overcome challenges. Most importantly, communities were judged on the strength and innovation of their efforts and programs to help young people graduate from high school prepared for college and the 21st century workforce.

In its sixth year, the competition experienced its greatest interest to date with nominations from more than 320 communities representing all 50 states, Washington, D.C., the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico. Winners were chosen by a distinguished panel of judges that included 2012 National Teacher of the Year Rebecca Mieliwoki, 2012 National

Superintendent of the Year Heath Morrison, National Urban League President Marc Morial, and GLSEN Executive Director Eliza Byard.

Two youth representatives also were named as selection panelists. These include Austin Bargmann, 15, from Brighton, Colo., a two-time *100 Best* winner, and Ashley Levanduski, 17, from Paso Robles, Calif., who serves as a volunteer coach with an America's Promise partner organization, The First Tee, an international youth organization that introduces golf and its inherent values to young people.

A list of all 2012 winners can be found at AmericasPromise.org/100Best. The webcast can be viewed at AmericasPromise.org/100Bestwebcast.

About America's Promise Alliance

America's Promise Alliance is the nation's largest partnership dedicated to improving the lives of children and youth. We bring together more than 400 national organizations representing nonprofit groups, businesses, communities, educators and policymakers. Through our Grad Nation campaign, we mobilize Americans to end the high school dropout crisis and prepare young people for college and the 21st century workforce. Building on the legacy of our Founding Chairman General Colin Powell, America's Promise believes the success of young people is grounded in the Five Promises—Caring Adults, Safe Places, A Healthy Start, Effective Education, and Opportunities to Help Others. For more information, visit AmericasPromise.org.

About ING U.S.

ING U.S. constitutes the U.S.-based retirement, investment management and insurance operations of Dutch-based ING Groep N.V. (NYSE: ING). In the U.S., the ING family of companies offers a comprehensive array of financial services to retail and institutional clients, which includes life insurance, retirement plans, mutual funds, managed accounts, alternative investments, institutional investment management, annuities, employee benefits and financial planning. ING U.S. holds top-tier rankings in key U.S. markets and serves approximately 13 million customers across the nation. For more information, visit <http://ing.us>.

About the ING Foundation

The ING Foundation's mission is to improve the quality of life in communities where ING operates and its employees and customers live. Through charitable giving and employee volunteerism, the Foundation focuses on programs in the areas of financial education, children's education and physical education. For more information, visit <http://www.ing-usafoundation.com> or connect with us on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/act2impact>) and Twitter ([@INGact2impact](https://twitter.com/INGact2impact)).

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