

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Elizabeth Dowling
212-523-4047

**THE NITESTAR PROGRAM “SHINES” AS A NATIONAL MODEL
FOR HEALTH EDUCATION AND PREVENTION**
*Theater-Based Health Program at St. Luke’s-Roosevelt Hospital
Utilizes the Performing Arts to Engage Pre-Teens, Adolescents and Young Adults*

New York, NY (March 27, 2009) Unlike generations before them, today’s youth face a tremendous number of challenges. They are frequently confronted with issues of: sex and sexuality; domestic and teen violence; substance abuse; racial discrimination and multiple health threats, including teenage pregnancy, HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases. In fact, one quarter of all new HIV infections in the United States are estimated to occur in young people under the age of 25. Clearly, young people are in tremendous need of access to confidential health services and health education.

The NiteStar Program, a New York-based health education and prevention program, uses the performing arts and peer education to engage pre-teens, adolescents and young adults to address these important issues. The program provides crucial information in an arresting and exciting way that is greeted with great enthusiasm by young people everywhere. NiteStar has been carefully designed to help young people make informed decisions, to provide options for changing attitudes and prejudices, and to create opportunities for behavioral change. The program is built on the belief that a significant impact on adolescent health is possible only if young people have a comprehensive understanding about the issues they face growing up today.

Founded by Dr. Cydelle Berlin in 1987, NiteStar is a nationally recognized model of adolescent education and HIV/AIDS prevention. It has also been seen as especially strong for its cultural competence, sensitivity to issues of gender and gender identity and presentation of material that is linguistically and developmentally appropriate. NiteStar’s interactive programs, workshops and performances are age-appropriate and tailored to children, adolescents and young adults ranging from 10-24 years of age. Productions are all original, created by members of the theater company. The scenarios, characters and language used in each production are developed with the culture and life circumstances of target audiences in mind. Theater company actors are multicultural and represent the diverse populations living in New York City. Since its inception, the NiteStar program has served more than 2 million people.

The NiteStar Program holds professional auditions and call backs for new actor/educators once per year. The potential cast comes from varied and diverse backgrounds; some who audition have seen the company perform at their school or other venue and feel compelled to participate. Others audition because they have seen an advertisement in a professional publication and know nothing about the power of the program until they are hired and trained. More than 100 actors sign up to audition for the six to eight slots that generally open up each year. In total, NiteStar utilizes 15 actors each year. NiteStar actors are contracted and paid, evaluated twice a year and are able to stay with the company for up to three years. The theater company rehearses up to five times per week and puts on three to four performances a week. The cast is also trained to participate in follow-up, behaviorally-based interventions in the schools.

They perform in a number of different venues: from public schools in some of the poorest neighborhoods in NYC to the most well-to-do private schools in the area; at professional conferences; on college campuses and in area hospitals. Actors remain in character after the performance is over to answer questions and address issues the audience may have. Many actors go on to become core staff at NiteStar and some have been with the program for over ten years. Some of NiteStar's most recognizable "graduates" are: acclaimed film actress Kerry Washington; Tony-Award-winning actress Marissa Jaret Winokur; and Ken Leung, who plays Miles Straume on the primetime ABC drama *Lost*.

History of the NiteStar Program:

Founded by Dr. Cydelle Berlin in 1987, NiteStar was originally housed at the Mount Sinai Medical Center's Adolescent Health Center with the mission of bringing life-saving, accurate health information to young people through the medium of theater. The program has been located at St. Luke's-Roosevelt Hospital Center on West 114th Street in Manhattan since 1998.

About Dr. Cydelle Berlin, Executive Director of NiteStar:

Dr. Cydelle Berlin founded STAR Theatre in 1987 and is the Executive Director/Producer of The NiteStar Program at St. Luke's-Roosevelt Hospital in Upper Manhattan. An internationally recognized expert in the field of adolescent sexuality, Dr. Berlin holds a Ph.D. from New York University in Health Education and Human Sexuality, with a specialty in Adolescent Development and Sexuality. She also holds a Master level degree in Communication Technology from New York University. Dr. Berlin and the NiteStar Program have received numerous national and local awards for innovation in the field of peer education, educational theater and sexuality education for young people. In 1996, PBS produced an award-winning film called "Sex and Other Matters of Life and Death" about Dr. Berlin and her program. In addition to her work with NiteStar, Dr. Berlin consults with many organizations nationally and internationally, on adolescent sexuality, HIV and on the use of innovative methodology. Among her many consultations, she works with the United Nations (UNFPA), where she trains young professionals from the regions of North and Eastern Europe on adolescent sexuality and the use of theater as an educational tool. She and her colleague, Ken Hornbeck, wrote a manual on developing educational theater, which is being used by the United Nations. She has also been a presenter or keynote speaker at dozens of regional and national conferences and meetings.

If you're interested in speaking with Dr. Berlin, meeting the NiteStar cast and/or attending an upcoming performance, please contact: Elizabeth Dowling at 212-523-4047 or Debra Carey at 212-981-5219.

###