



News Release

For Immediate Release

Media Contact:
Jacquie Hill, specialist
External Communications
Assurant Employee Benefits
2323 Grand Blvd.
Kansas City, MO 64108
Ph: 816.881.8968
jacquie.hill@assurant.com

Former NCAA All-American and Best-Selling Author to Receive 2009 Shining Star Award *Assurant Employee Benefits honors coach for going the distance to a new life*

Kansas City, Mo. (April 27, 2009) – In recognition of everyone who goes the distance to overcome life's challenges, on May 13, 2009, Kansas City-based Assurant Employee Benefits will present its Shining Star of Perseverance award to former NCAA All-American runner and best-selling author Gilbert Tuhabonye. Through incredible perseverance, Tuhabonye has overcome the effects of an unimaginable atrocity and severe physical injury, to lead a successful life and inspire others.

Born to a Tutsi tribe farming family in Burundi in east central Africa, Tuhabonye grew up in the midst of the centuries-old war between the Tutsi and Hutu tribes. In October 1993, members of the Hutu tribe invaded Tuhabonye's high school and captured members of the Tutsi tribe, including Tuhabonye, following the assassination of Melchior Ndadaye, a Hutu and Burundi's first elected president. The captives were beaten and then burned alive in a building near the school. Tuhabonye, the only survivor, escaped after more than eight hours inside the burning building, where he had been buried beneath the corpses of his friends.

Tuhabonye first came to the United States in 1996 as one of the select members of the International Olympic Committee's development training camp for athletes from developing nations. In 1999, he was recruited as a runner by Abilene Christian University in Texas, where he earned All-American honors six times while completing a bachelor's degree.

Today, Tuhabonye is the award-winning coach of Gilbert's Gazelle's, a training group consisting of hundreds of dedicated runners of all skill levels, as well as a best-selling author. Tuhabonye shares his life story in *This Voice in My Heart*, a testament to the triumph of the human spirit. In 2006, he co-founded the Gazelle Foundation, a 501 (c) (3) charitable foundation with the mission of improving life for people in Burundi and offering education assistance to children in Austin, Texas, where Tuhabonye lives with his wife and two daughters.

Tuhabonye will be the seventh recipient of the national Shining Star of Perseverance award given annually to honor those who have made a significant recent contribution toward demonstrating perseverance through disabling illness or injury. Past Shining Star award recipients include Army veteran and "All My Children" actor J.R. Martinez, who fought and became disabled in the Iraq war and today uses his scars to inspire others; the authors of *Nordie's at Noon*, a book about

coming together to reach the common goal of beating cancer, and former U.S. Senator Robert Dole, whose achievements following devastating battlefield injuries sustained during World War II inspired a generation of Americans.

Tuhabonye is the first Shining Star of Perseverance award winner to be nominated by an Assurant Employee Benefits employee. Denise Sabol, a developer in Assurant Employee Benefits' Information Technology department, submitted his name for award consideration when the nomination process was opened to all employees for the first time this year.

The 2009 award, designed by an artist with disabilities, will be presented during a ceremony hosted by Assurant Employee Benefits. Former major league umpire Steve Palermo, who overcame paralysis after being shot in 1991 and is an Assurant Employee Benefits' disability claimant, will present the award.

"Tuhabonye's story is an outstanding example of everything the Shining Star award stands for," said Palermo. "His extraordinary perseverance has enabled him to emerge from an unthinkable ordeal and inspire so many other individuals on a daily basis."

It is no coincidence that the award is being presented during May, which is Disability Insurance Awareness Month. As a national provider of disability insurance and other non-medical employee benefits, Assurant Employee Benefits is hopeful that the award will raise awareness of the need for disability insurance. According to the Society of Actuaries, nearly one in seven people will be disabled for five years or more before reaching age 65. Yet research released by the Social Security Administration in 2007 indicates that just 30 percent of the private sector workforce has long-term disability coverage.

"The Shining Star of Perseverance award is one of many ways that Assurant Employee Benefits sets itself apart from other disability insurance providers," said John Roberts, president and chief executive officer of Assurant Employee Benefits. "It demonstrates our commitment not just to helping employees with disabilities return to productive lives, but also to recognizing those who are successfully overcoming obstacles and achieving outstanding things as they move forward with their lives."

This year's Shining Star award event will be held from 11:00 a.m. to noon, May 13 in Crown Center Exhibit Hall B, located at 2323 McGee St., adjacent to the Hyatt Regency Crown Center Hotel. Gilbert Tuhabonye will be present at the ceremony to accept the award and address those in attendance. To learn more about the Shining Star of Perseverance award program and this year's winner, visit <http://www.assurantemployeebenefits.com/shiningstar>.

The Shining Star event is open to the public and reservations are required to attend. For information, please call 816.881.8968.

About Assurant Employee Benefits

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www.assurantemployeebenefits.com

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