

For Immediate Release  
December 20, 2005

*Press Contact:*  
Rick Kinsel, (212) 472-4720  
or rick.kinsel@vilcek.org

## **A MAJOR NEW AWARDS PROGRAM HONORS AMERICAN VISIONARIES AND INNOVATORS**

NEW YORK, NY — Today Jan T. Vilcek and Marica F. Vilcek, co-founders of The Vilcek Foundation, announced the creation of a major new annual awards program designed to honor foreign-born Americans who have made extraordinary contributions to society in the arts and biomedical research since immigrating to these shores.

Accompanied by a \$50,000 cash award and a commemorative object created by noted designer Stefan Sagmeister, The Vilcek Prize is the only national award to honor outstanding creative achievement by new Americans.

The first Vilcek Prizes will be bestowed on Tuesday, March 21, 2006, in a gala ceremony at the Mandarin Oriental on Columbus Circle in New York. Special guests include Dr. Harold E. Varmus, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, who will deliver a keynote address, and Agnes Gund, President Emerita of The Museum of Modern Art.

Dr. Vilcek, a professor and research scientist at the New York University School of Medicine, and Mrs. Vilcek, an art historian, established The Vilcek Foundation in 2000. During its first years, the Foundation focused mainly on the support of research in the field of autoimmune diseases. In 2005 The Vilcek Foundation added a new focus—celebrating the achievements of foreign-born individuals living permanently in the U.S.—as a way of to honor innovation in their respective fields and show appreciation for the opportunities they received as newcomers to the United States. The Vilceks came to the United States as refugees from former communist Czechoslovakia.

“In launching the Vilcek Prize program, we hope to raise public awareness of a very positive side of immigration: the way in which the intelligence, talent, and drive of new Americans actually keeps this country vital and makes good on its historic promise as a land of opportunity,” says Dr. Vilcek.

“When we came to this country, we were unknown. We started here with no references or guarantees, and this country gave us the opportunity,” adds Mrs. Vilcek. “Since we are now able to offer opportunities to others, we want to give back as much as we can.”

### *The Vilcek Foundation*

Jan and Marica Vilcek, who established The Vilcek Foundation, were born in Bratislava, Slovakia. They arrived to New York in 1965, having left communist Czechoslovakia with all their possessions packed inside a pair of suitcases. That year Dr. Vilcek accepted a teaching position at the New York University School of Medicine, where he remains until today, and Mrs. Vilcek joined the staff of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, an institution to which she eventually devoted 32 years, primarily in collections management.

At NYU, Dr. Vilcek led groundbreaking research which contributed to the development of a therapeutic drug for the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis, Crohn’s disease, and other inflammatory disorders. Dr. and Mrs. Vilcek used a portion of the royalties due to them from the sales of this medicine, Remicade®, to establish The Vilcek Foundation.

The inaugural prize-winners were chosen by the Board of Directors of The Vilcek Foundation. In succeeding award cycles, honorees will have been nominated by independent panels of experts.

# # #