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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
ACC FOUNDATION ANNOUNCES 2005 DISTINGUISHED GRADUATE**

Dr. Alhasan Sisawo Ceesay of the Gambia, West Africa, was awarded the 2005 Distinguished Graduate Award at the 52nd Alpena Community College commencement ceremonies May 5. Established in 1998 by the ACC Foundation, this award honors ACC graduates who have gone on to contribute to society through successful careers. Its recipients are examples of how a solid foundation from ACC can launch a lifetime of achievement.

On hand to receive the award for Dr. Ceesay were members of the Howard Riggs family, his first host family when he came to Alpena in 1967. According to Dr. Ceesay, “The Riggs were the ideal Americans. . .an average working family who readily shared the little bit God gave them with others less fortunate.”

Before coming to America, Ceesay attended the Gambia Nursing School for three years. He then earned his Associate of Arts from Alpena Community College in 1969 and went on to Olivet to earn his bachelor’s degree with a full-tuition scholarship from the Besser Foundation. He earned his master’s degree in biological sciences from Michigan Technology University in 1973.

In 1979, he returned to Africa and entered the University of Liberia Medical School in Monrovia. Because of political unrest in the Gambia in 1981, Ceesay escaped to the United States in hopes of completing his life-long dream “to provide medical relief to . . . the villager who is forced to walk miles on end to seek medical aid for his already dying child, wife or friend.”

During the time he was seeking political asylum in the United States, he never gave up his quest for education and he continued to take classes, some at Michigan State University as a guest student and some at Wayne State University. After nearly six years, he was finally accepted at the American University of the Caribbean in the West Indies and he began the final segment of his journey to becoming a doctor.

In 1992, after 25 years of educational struggles, Alhasan Sisawo Ceesay was awarded his Doctor of Medicine degree from the American University of the Caribbean.

Upon achieving his doctor of medicine degree, Dr. Ceesay returned to the Gambia and gave free medical assistance to the villagers for an entire year before he took a position as House Officer at Royal Victoria Hospital, Banjul, and was eventually promoted to the post of Medical Officer.

Dr. Ceesay is the proud founder of Manding Medical Centre, a self-help organization located at Njawara Village, the Gambia, West Africa, which provides much needed medical aid to the villagers. His autobiography, "The Legend Against All Odds," chronicles his struggle to survive in his quest for education. As his life unfolds chapter by chapter, the reader is led to appreciate the stamina and integrity of this dedicated man who began his education at age 11, walking 7 miles one way to attend school. His book is available at the Alpena Community College Stephen H. Fletcher Library. Proceeds of his book go to supporting Manding Medical Centre, scholarships in medicine and agriculture for indigent rural candidates in the Gambia.

Ceesay is married and has three daughters, ages 14, 11 and 7. His eldest is doing well in school and would like to attend, if possible, Alpena High School and Alpena Community College before becoming a doctor.

Ceesay would like to "express thanks to the remarkable and noble friends" he met in Alpena. He credits the good will and foresight of the staff, students and community of Alpena for giving him the chance to earn an education and help move his people forward in life.