

News Release

January 20, 2012

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



CONTACT: Mary Godleski, Director of Marketing and Special Events

PHONE: 609.404.4483 ext. 14, mgodleski@unitedwayac.org

**United Way
of Atlantic County**

AHL Hockey Helps Raising A Reader Celebrate A Milestone January 30

Galloway, N.J. - On Monday, January 30, American Hockey League all-stars Michael Leighton of the Adirondack Phantoms and Boyd Kane of the Hershey Bears along with United Way staff are set to make an important delivery to a pre-school classroom at AtlantiCare Kids in Pleasantville at 9 am. This special package – the ‘1000th book bag’ marks a milestone for the Raising A Reader program, an early literacy component of United Way’s Success By 6 initiative.

The ‘1000th book bag’ delivery is part of a Community Engagement Day for American Hockey League players coming to Atlantic City’s Boardwalk Hall for the 2012 AHL All-Star Classic, a two-day sporting event pitting the top players from the AHL’s Eastern Conference against its Western Conference. The 2012 Classic begins with an *AHL All-Star Skills Competition* on Sunday January 29, at 3 pm, and ends with the much anticipated *AHL All-Star Game* on Monday, January 30, at 7 pm. To purchase tickets for this game which includes a donation to United Way, call United Way at 609-404-4483. Tickets for both events are available online at ticketmaster.com or by calling 800-736-1420.

“AHL teams and players play a very important role in all 30 AHL communities,” said Chris Nikolis, executive vice president of marketing and business development for the American Hockey League. “Extending that involvement in our host community each year at the AHL All-Star Classic is a natural and we look forward to a terrific visit to AtlantiCare Kids.”

Raising A Reader began as a simple idea for children to initiate reading time with parents. It has grown into a nationally recognized program that has been implemented in over 2,500 locations around the nation through 146 affiliates, serving more than 111,000 children and families. Raising A Reader is a take-home book bag program that works to connect children, parents, caretakers and the library system in a shared effort to increase early literacy. The bright red bags are filled with award-winning books that are circulated into children's homes on a weekly basis, exposing these children (and siblings) to an average of 100 books per rotation cycle. To date, programs have been implemented in 20 locations in Atlantic County including AtlantiCare Kids, several Headstart Programs, Atlantic City Family Center, Pleasantville Day Care Center, Stockton College’s Free to Be Child Care Center and others.

“Raising a Reader gets children excited about reading at an early age,” said Helen Walsh, chair of the Women’s Leadership Initiative. “Parents and caregivers are encouraged to share in this excitement and spend time reading to their children. Research suggests that the earlier books are introduced into a child’s life, the better chance they have at success in school later on.”

“We are honored the United Way of Atlantic County has chosen the AtlantiCare Kids Childcare and Early Learning Center to mark the presentation of its one thousandth book bag,” said Ronnie Lerner, Early Childhood Program administrator, AtlantiCare Kids. “We’re thrilled the AHL all-stars will help us highlight United Way’s Raise a Reader Program, which has enhanced the learning of children who attend AtlantiCare Kids and AtlantiCare Behavioral Health Atlantic City Family Centers.”

Success By 6 is a national United Way initiative focused on the overall health and education of children ages 0-6. It was introduced in Atlantic County more than 8 years ago. In 2006, the United Way's Women's Leadership Initiative- a group of more than 60 civic and corporate women leaders working to improve the quality of life for young children and their families through United Way, adopted this program and has been a major source of funding and growth since then. The programs address a variety of early childhood development issues from parenting classes and immunizations to pediatric dental care and early literacy.

More information on United Way's Success By 6 programs and the Women's Leadership Initiative can be found online at www.unitedwayac.org. Media interested in attending the Raising A Reader milestone event, should contact Mary Godleski in advance at 609-404-4483 ext 14 or mgodleski@unitedwayac.org.

About Success By 6

Success By 6, an initiative of the United Way of Atlantic County, is leading an effort to create a web of services within our community to make a positive impact on the lives of children ages 0-6. Success By 6 is a community-wide early childhood initiative that brings together resources from a partnership of individuals from businesses, education, health care, government, media, and service organizations who share the common vision of having children ready to succeed when they enter school. Success By 6 is the largest early childhood movement in the country and the most recognized United Way initiative. Success By 6 has been adopted around the country as the community model for targeting child health issues.

About the American Hockey League

The first AHL All-Star Game was held in 1942 as a fundraiser for U.S. and Canadian efforts in World War II; this will be the 18th All-Star Classic since the event was resurrected in 1995. Of the 562 players to take part in the AHL All-Star Classic since 1995, more than 93 percent have competed in the National Hockey League, including Patrice Bergeron, Brad Boyes, Dan Boyle, Daniel Briere, Brian Campbell, Zdeno Chara, Miikka Kiprusoff, Ryan Miller, Zach Parise, Bobby Ryan, Martin St. Louis, Jason Spezza, Eric Staal and Tomas Vokoun. Last year the Eastern Conference swept both nights' events, including an 11-8 win over the Western Conference in the All-Star Game. The 2012 edition is presented by the Atlantic City Convention & Visitors Authority, the Casino Reinvestment Development Authority, Caesars Atlantic City, and the AHL.

In operation since 1936, the American Hockey League continues to serve as the top development league for all 30 National Hockey League teams. More than 83 percent of today's NHL players are American Hockey League graduates, and for the 10th year in a row, more than 6 million fans attended AHL games across North America in 2010-11. Through the years, the AHL has been home to more than 100 future members of the Hockey Hall of Fame. For more information, visit the AHL online at www.theahl.com or "like" us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/theahl.

About Boardwalk Hall

Historic Boardwalk Hall, which first opened in 1929, underwent a three year, \$90 million renovation to transform the building into a modern special events arena capable of variable seating for up to 14,770 people. Listed on the National Register of Historic Landmarks, Boardwalk Hall's renovation produced a glimpse into the dramatic and original Roman Renaissance style, while providing a 21st century experience in terms of comfort and amenities. Upon its reopening in 2001, it has been recognized as the destination's premier entertainment venue, known for high profile concerts, family shows, and sporting events. SMG manages Boardwalk Hall on behalf of its client, the Atlantic City Convention & Visitors Authority. Visit us at www.boardwalkhall.com for more information. Like us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/boardwalkhall and follow us on Twitter @boardwalkhall. For destination information about Atlantic City, please visit www.atlanticcitynj.com

United Way of Atlantic County is a local, volunteer-driven, charitable organization mobilizing people and resources to meet our community's most pressing health and human services needs. United Way is dedicated to making a positive impact on the quality of life for Atlantic County residents by supporting dozens of programs that reduce substance abuse and promote mental wellness, provide basic needs and increase self-sufficiency, support community health issues and foster safer homes and neighborhoods. Volunteers closely monitor these programs to ensure effective and efficient use of donor dollars. For more information on United Way of Atlantic County call 609-404-4483 or visit www.unitedwayac.org. If you or someone you know are in need of services dial 211. United Way works closely with local businesses and organizations to create agendas for lasting change. **AtlantiCare** and **Caesars Entertainment** as LIVE UNITED partners, and **ACUA** and **Atlantic City Electric**, as LIVE UNITED Advocates continue to be exceptional contributors to United Way and its efforts to advance the common good in Atlantic County.