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FOR INFORMATION CONTACT: Chris Steege 913-780-5649 or
Beth Shearer, Director of Development, 785-493-4688
www.kansaspediatricfoundation.org

Physician literacy campaign reaches funding goal -- \$2 million endowment

The Kansas Pediatric Foundation, the charitable arm of the Kansas Chapter American Academy of Pediatrics, has raised more than \$1 million from Kansas donors and secured an additional \$1 million challenge grant from the Kansas Health Foundation to help physicians across the state continue their participation in the *Turn a Page. Touch a Mind.* literacy campaign.

The \$2 million will be used to create a permanent endowment fund to purchase books for physicians to give to parents when they bring their children, ages 0-5, in for well-child visits. Currently there are 20 program sites across the state. Participating physicians expect to distribute more than 30,000 books a year.

Dr. Paul Nelson of Concordia, the campaign co-chair, said donors included individuals, businesses, foundations, and civic organizations.

“We are very pleased to announce the successful conclusion of the endowment phase of our campaign,” Nelson said. “This was a statewide effort that involved physicians and donors from Liberal to Overland Park, Hays to Chanute and from Wichita to Topeka.”

The program was started with a start-up grant from the Kansas Health Foundation. “The program serves to remind parents that healthy means more than just getting vaccinations,” said Dr. Dennis Cooley of Topeka, also a campaign co-chair. “Reading to children at an early age is essential to healthy development and success in life. We know that children who grow up with a love of books and reading are better prepared to succeed in school.”

Research over the past 20 years shows that parents who receive books and literacy counseling from doctors are more likely to read to their children, read to them more often and provide more books in the home, said Chris Steege, executive director of the Kansas Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics, KAAP.

“We currently have 20 early literacy sites in 14 communities across Kansas,” Steege said. “With more than 46,000 books already distributed in the first three years of the program, we are hearing positive feedback from parents and health professionals alike.”

Steege said even though the endowment phase of the project has been completed, Kansas Pediatric Foundation will continue to raise funds so that more physicians can participate in the program.

“We will continue to ask families, foundations, organizations, and businesses to establish named endowment funds to help support and expand this program that we know, from the research and what we hear from our members, helps Kansas children lead more healthy and productive lives,” Steege said.

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