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Birthday Blessings
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Donation of 8,350 books enables nonprofit to give gift of literacy to homeless kids *Birthday Blessings is recipient of First Book-Charlotte grant and Barnes & Noble book drive*

(Charlotte, NC, January 12, 2010) -- In the past three months, local nonprofit Birthday Blessings was gifted a record-breaking 8,350 new books. Its good fortune started with a grant of 6,000 new books from First Book-Charlotte, and was capped off with a holiday book drive held by Barnes & Noble SouthPark, which raised a total of 2,350 books from its customers.

With a national ratio of one age-appropriate book for every 300 children living in poverty, Birthday Blessings, a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that celebrates the lives of homeless children, aims to include one new book in every birthday gift package provided to the homeless children it serves, while also providing books as party favors during special celebrations across the nine area shelters it currently serves.

Said Amy Cervantes, volunteer executive director and co-founder of Birthday Blessings: "For children experiencing homelessness, it goes beyond strengthening literacy; reading a book is also about giving them an outlet where they can be transported away from everyday struggles through stories, characters and imagination."

During past book drives, Barnes & Noble SouthPark collected, at most, 600 books for various local organizations, making this holiday book drive a record-breaker, despite a down economy. Signage and books were placed at each register for a two-month period of time, allowing enthusiastic Barnes & Noble associates to share Birthday Blessings' mission with each customer. Many holiday shoppers responded by purchasing and donating their favorite books, knowing their beloved stories would soon be in the hands of homeless children.

"With everybody struggling, I think people really do try to be generous. I think that spirit is really with us this season, which is really wonderful," said Judy Harper, Barnes & Noble SouthPark community relations manager. "I would like to continue this next year."

"We are grateful to First Book-Charlotte for their generous grant, and to Barnes & Noble SouthPark for choosing Birthday Blessings as the recipient of their holiday book drive. This is proof that even when times are down, giving goes up," said Cervantes.

Plans are in process for the nonprofit to organize a "Gift of Literacy" library room at the organization's facility in February.

To date, Birthday Blessings has celebrated birthdays for more than 950 local homeless children, bringing joy and support to thousands of needy youth and families across the greater Charlotte area. Birthday Blessings was founded in 2005 by Charlotte couple Amy and John Cervantes. The nonprofit currently serves nine homeless facilities and programs across Mecklenburg, Union and York counties, as well as homeless elementary and middle school students throughout Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. The organization continues its local expansion, and will begin serving Cabarrus County in 2010 through a partnership with Smart Start/Cabarrus Partnership for Children. Birthday Blessings recently launched a national expansion program, with affiliate chapters getting under way in northeast Indiana; Cincinnati, Ohio; and Atlanta, Georgia.

For more information, please visit www.birthdayblessings.org, www.firstbookcharlotte.org and www.barnesandnoble.com.

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