

FirstMerit Bank Partners with National Nonprofit Kids in Need to Provide Educational Tools to Underserved Students at Critical Point in School Year

February 13, 2015 /3BL Media/ - Today, FirstMerit Bank volunteers surprised 425 students at Hope Institute Learning Academy with free backpacks filled with essential school supplies. The school also received supplies for its students with special needs to assist in tactile sensory stimulation, communication and academic skills.

The financial support for the supplies was made possible as a result of FirstMerit Bank's participation in CBS EcoMedia's EducationAd program. EcoMedia's national non-profit partner, the Kids In Need Foundation, provided the school supplies and backpacks through its School Ready Supplies Program. The Kids In Need Foundation's mission is to ensure that every child is prepared to learn and succeed by providing free school supplies nationally to students most in need.

Funding from FirstMerit Bank comes at a critical time. School districts rarely cover the full cost of a year's supplies so teachers routinely spend money out of their own pockets purchasing supplies for children who come from families unable to buy school necessities. According to national estimates, teachers spend approximately \$1,000 of their own money each year on supplies.

Representatives from FirstMerit Bank participated in a special assembly today where they distributed backpacks to students at Hope Institute Learning Academy. Hosts included Michael Jakubowski, Principal of Hope Institute Learning Academy; Dave Smith, Executive Director of the Kids In Need Foundation; Josh Sobel, Director of Sales & Business Development of CBS EcoMedia; Pete Gillespie, President and CEO, Chicago Region at FirstMerit Bank; and Clint Paul, President and CEO of the Hope Institute for Children and Families.

"FirstMerit has been giving back to the communities it serves since 1845 and we are so pleased to be able to support the children of Hope Institute Learning Academy today," said Pete Gillespie, president and CEO, Chicago Region, FirstMerit Bank. "Today's students are tomorrow's leaders. Helping them succeed now will benefit all of us in the future."

"Awareness that not all students go to school with a backpack full of school supplies is growing," said Dave Smith, executive director of the Kids In Need Foundation. "FirstMerit Bank is stepping up to break down this barrier that prevents many students from keeping pace with their classmates. We appreciate CBS EcoMedia's leadership in this area. They understand students' need for supplies, as well as the fact that with supplies, students' classroom behavior improves, grades go up, absenteeism goes down, and kids feel they have a better chance of achieving in the classroom because of this support."

"Providing students with the most basic educational supplies is, sadly, a real problem for today's budget-strapped schools," said Paul Polizzotto, President and Founder of CBS EcoMedia. "FirstMerit Bank's support through our EducationAd program will give students the confidence to finish out the school year knowing they have the tools they need to learn. And teachers will have the supplies they need to keep their classrooms running efficiently."

About FirstMerit Bank

FirstMerit Corporation is a diversified financial services company headquartered in Akron, Ohio, with assets of approximately \$24.9 billion as of December 31, 2014, and 383 banking offices and 411 ATM locations in Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois and Pennsylvania. FirstMerit provides a complete range of banking and other financial services to consumers and businesses through its core operations.

Principal affiliates include: FirstMerit Bank, N.A., and FirstMerit Mortgage Corporation. For more information, visit firstmerit.com.

About The Kids In Need Foundation

The Kids In Need Foundation is a national 501(c)(3) charitable organization founded in 1995. The Foundation's mission is to prepare children to learn and succeed by providing free school supplies to students most in need. Its National Network of Resource Centers includes 34 facilities where teachers from low-income schools go to obtain free school supplies for their students. School supply giveaways in communities not served by Resource Centers are accommodated through the School Ready Supplies program, and students who have gone through natural disasters are helped to get back to their normal routines with new backpacks and supplies through the Second Responder® program. In addition, two Teacher Grant programs award preK-12 educators with funding to provide innovative learning experiences for students. The Kids In Need Foundation has distributed more than \$668 million in school supplies since its founding, directly benefiting 4.2 million students and more than 120,000 teachers annually, and has awarded \$1.6 million in grants to teachers. Kids In Need has earned the Gold GuideStar Exchange Seal, demonstrating its commitment to transparency, and has been given a 4-star rating from Charity Navigator, indicating that it operates in a fiscally responsible way and outperforms most other charities in America. For more information, visit www.kinf.org. Join Kids In Need Foundation on Twitter at twitter.com/kidsinneed and Facebook at facebook.com/kidsinneed.

About CBS EcoMedia Inc.

At EcoMedia, we're propelled by the desire to create positive social change; that's been our mission since we founded the company in 2002. In 2010, after successfully partnering with CBS on a wide range of environmental projects, EcoMedia became the newest addition to the CBS Corporation portfolio, exponentially scaling our reach across television, radio, interactive, publishing and outdoor media.

Through our patent-pending EcoAd, WellnessAd and EducationAd programs, an innovative twist on traditional advertising, advertisers are able to support much-needed local projects which in turn creates jobs, saves taxpayer money and improves the quality of life in communities nationwide. In the process, we're fundamentally altering the advertising landscape, elevating the ordinary, traditional commercial – and media, in general – into a catalyst for tangible, quantifiable social change. Please visit ecomediabcbs.com, like us at facebook.com/EcoMediaCBS or follow us at Twitter.com/EcoMediaCBS.

By participating in EcoMedia's EcoAd, WellnessAd and EducationAd advertising programs, EcoMedia's advertisers agree to provide funding for projects we believe will have a beneficial effect upon the environment, health and/or education within local communities. EcoMedia's advertising programs are not certification programs nor are the EcoAd, WellnessAd or EducationAd logos seals of approval. EcoMedia does not in any way certify, endorse or make any representations about EcoMedia program advertisers, their products or services.