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**Big Brothers Big Sisters Hosts Grand Opening & Announces**

**$1 Million Gift From Auer Foundation**

**Fort Wayne, IN** – Big Brothers Big Sisters of Northeast Indiana and Southcentral Michigan held its new facility Grand Opening on Tuesday, October 15, 2013, in celebration of its expansion and future goal to serve more children in need in our local community. With more than 150 local business leaders, City of Fort Wayne and Allen County employees, volunteers, agency supporters from the entire 13-county area and community members in attendance, the celebration featured a press conference in which the Auer Foundation announced a $1 million gift to the agency. It then continued with a Mission Moment from one the agency’s “Little” Brothers who expressed the value that a volunteer can make to the more than 700 “Littles” currently waiting for a Big Brother or Big Sister. The press conference was followed by a Ribbon Cutting Ceremony and facility tours that allowed the public to see how the agency has expanded to become a true Mentoring Center that has resources and technology that make it easier on its volunteers and matches.

The press conference started with an announcement by the Edward D. and Ione Auer Foundation that it is honoring Big Brothers Big Sisters and Chief Executive Officer Josette Rider with a $1 million gift in the form of an endowment fund this is named after Rider. Members of the Auer Foundation spoke on how they also hope the gift will encourage others to see the value of endowments and contribute to the campaign. The $1 million commitment is dedicated for use in the expansion of daily and mentoring services and programs for Big Brothers Big Sisters as it continues to devote significant energy exploring ways to expand mentoring programs, including the necessary support needed to sustain each match and the life of the mentoring relationship. By creating this endowment, the Auer Foundation is making a lasting tribute to the community, which aligns with Edward and Ione’s passion for the education of children.

“I’m humbled by this generous gift, but the true recognition really goes out to my staff,” said Chief Executive Officer Josette Rider. “I’m simply a mirror of those that work for this agency as we continue looking toward the future of what Big Brothers Big Sisters can do for the communities of our 13-county service area. Our waiting list is currently at 700 children and grows by the day. More than 70% of that waiting list is young boys that just need a male mentor and a friend. This gift provides us the opportunity to focus on getting these kids matched and put on the path to success versus the other alternatives and challenges they will face in life without a mentor.”

The message was further driven home by a speech from a “Little” in the program named John. John spoke of how his mother was murdered and his father had left him and his sister as young children. It was through his relationship with his Big Brother Brad and his supportive grandparents that John has excelled in school and looks forward to a successful career as a fighter pilot. His message was clear and focused on the fact that many kids are just like him and just having that friend and mentor can be the difference between a successful productive childhood and life or an upbringing full of mischievousness.

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At the conclusion of the press conference, attendees were allowed to tour the building, mingle with staff and see firsthand how the new facility will benefit volunteers (“Bigs”) and the children (“Littles”) in the program.

“We have prided ourselves in facilitating relationships that are fun for the volunteers and impactful for the children,” said Rider. “But this new facility allows us to be very intentional in helping kids prepare academically and socially for what the world has to throw at them. New study areas, our College Success Mentoring dedicated room, interactive technology and a fun game room are all available to make the job of the volunteer easier and more successful.”

In 2012, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Northeast Indiana and Southcentral Michigan supported 1,993 matches between volunteers and children in need, and the agency is on track to support 2,000 this year. It won Agency of the Year, Board of the Year and had the Big Sister of the Year – all on a national level. This was the third time winning Agency of the Year (2006, 2009 and 2012) and the first time receiving recognition as the National Board of the Year. Children in Big Brothers Big Sisters’ programs are: 52% less likely to drop out or skip school, 42% more likely to get a college degree, 46% less likely to use illegal drugs and 33% less likely to hit someone.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Northeast Indiana is a nonprofit organization that serves children in Adams, Allen, DeKalb, Huntington, Kosciusko, LaGrange, Noble, Steuben, Wells and Whitley counties in Indiana and Branch, Hillsdale and St. Joseph counties in Michigan. Big Brothers Big Sisters’ mission is to help children reach their potential through professionally supported one-to-one mentoring relationships with measureable impact. For more information, to donate or to learn how you can help support our mission, contact Eric Pulley, Director of Marketing and Recruitment at 260-456-1600, eric.pulley@bbbsnei.org or visit our website at [www.bbbsnei.org](http://www.bbbsnei.org).

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