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April 1, 2009

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh – Hazelwood wins statewide award

Harrisburg, PA — The Pennsylvania Library Association has honored Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh – Hazelwood with its **Best Practices in Early Learning Award** for its innovative program, IT’S REAL (Infants Teens Stories Reading Education and Libraries).

The library’s program was selected as a “best practice” in the sixth annual Pennsylvania Library Association’s **Best Practices Awards for Programming and Services to Children under the Age of Six, Their Families and Caregivers** in the category of Programs Serving At-Risk Children and Families. The awards honored 22 Pennsylvania public libraries for programming in early literacy.

Awards were presented April 1 at the Early Learning Forum and Best Practices Luncheon, *Pennsylvania Libraries: Learning Starts Here!* — an education session attended by several hundred librarians, advocates and policymakers at the Hilton Harrisburg.

Here’s how the IT’S REAL program evolved:

Teenage mothers in Pittsburgh public high schools needed more than books for their children. Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh – Hazelwood responded with IT’S REAL (Infants Teens Stories Reading Education and Libraries), a holistic program designed to help teens grow into healthier women.

Ellen Sikov, children’s librarian, and Sara Dora, teen specialist, presented 34 sessions during the school year, attended by 310 student parents at two Pittsburgh public high schools. They focused on how reading can strengthen bonding between parents and their children, followed by distributing books and IT’S REAL “Recipe Cards for Early Learning.”

The whimsically designed recipe cards provided nursery rhymes, favorite children's songs and poems in a convenient format. Laminated and placed on a binder ring, they can be kept in a purse or diaper bag. Each mother was also given a baby journal to document memories and milestones, add photos and preserve mementoes.

The librarians also invited partners to visit the program. Dr. Bruce Rabin, from the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center's Health Lifestyles Program, presented on the effects of negative stress on parents' and children's health. Artist LaVerne Kemp, from the Pittsburgh Center for the Arts Residency Program and the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, demonstrated the African art of woven prayer or wish amulets.

"We wanted to reach a group we weren't reaching," explained Mary Ann McHarg, manager, Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh - Hazelwood. "And we were fortunate enough to get funding from PNC's Elizabeth Shiras Charitable Trust to do so."

The program is important because of its early literacy services to the citizens of Allegheny County. The **Best Practices Award** celebrates public library programs that are especially creative, innovative and effective in serving young children, their families and caregivers.

The awards were presented by illustrator and author, Wendell and Florence Minor. Their book, *If You Were a Penguin*, is this year's selection for the **One Book, Every Young Child** initiative.

**One Book, Every Young Child** is a statewide literacy initiative, a collaborative project to promote the development of early literacy skills through interactive experiences with books and stories.

More than a half million Pennsylvania children ages three to six are reached annually through the **One Book, Every Young Child** program, which stresses the importance of reading early and often to young children and how that impacts their future lives.

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