Insurance Industry Charitable Foundation Raises More than $400,000 for Regional Nonprofits at the IICF Midwest Division Blazing the Trail Benefit in Chicago

Chicago, IL (March 13, 2018) – The Insurance Industry Charitable Foundation (IICF), a nonprofit organization working with the insurance industry to help communities and enrich lives, today announced that over $400,000 was raised for the IICF Midwest Community Grants Program at its 7th annual Midwest Division Blazing the Trail Benefit, on March 8 at the Radisson Aqua Blu Hotel in Chicago. More than 350 insurance professionals and industry supporters joined with representatives of local Chicagoland nonprofit and charitable organizations in celebration of the industry’s ongoing commitment to philanthropy and community.

Kevin Smith, President and Chief Operating Officer, CNA Specialty, and a recently elected member of the IICF International Board of Governors, welcomed guests and encouraged the insurance industry to continue its outstanding philanthropic work around the world through the IICF. “CNA is proud to sponsor IICF and the 2018 Blazing the Trail Benefit, and collaboratively demonstrate the power of our industry working together to better our communities,” added Smith.

Featuring prominent Chicago news anchor Rob Johnson of CBS 2, serving as Blazing the Trail emcee for the third year, guests also heard motivating words from Bill Curry, Chief Program Officer, of Breakthrough in Chicago’s Garfield Park neighborhood. Sharing that children in Breakthrough’s literacy program are reading at over 80th percentile of national averages, overcoming challenges faced in their young lives and in their underserved community, Curry attributed their literacy success in large part to the IICF Community Grants awarded to Breakthrough. Mary Kate Callahan, member of USA World Championship Paratriathlon teams, advocate for Paralympic programming and an international sports envoy, further inspired the audience with her personal story of perseverance and overcoming institutional barriers in creating opportunities for athletes with disabilities. Dare2Tri, the program through which Mary Kate got her start in swimming and that supports her dreams, is a recipient of an IICF Community Grants for its trailblazing work.

“We experienced such a generous response from the Midwest insurance community in raising funds that will support a range of vitally important programs,” observed Sabrina Hart, IICF Midwest Division Chair and Executive Vice President, Zurich. “By uniting our efforts and working side by side through the IICF, we’re able to make a much greater and lasting impact in the communities where we live and work.”

Since 2011, the IICF Midwest Division has contributed more than $2.2 million – along with 23,000 volunteer hours - to communities from Chicago, Cleveland, Columbus, St. Louis and throughout the Midwest, supporting nonprofits in the area of health, education and safety, and making a real difference in these communities. This year an additional $28,500 was pledged at the Blazing the Trail Benefit by the Midwest insurance industry through a new text-to-give option.
During the benefit dinner, IICF awarded its 2018 Trailblazer of the Year to Deborah Babcock of the Katie School of Insurance at Illinois State University, for her exemplary philanthropic leadership and exceptional service to the insurance community, in particular, students and young professionals.

Proceeds from this year’s Blazing the Trail Benefit will fund the following 2018 IICF Midwest Division Community Grantees:

- Bernie's Book Bank
- DuPage Pads
- Mutual Ground
- Oak Park River Forest Infant Welfare Society
- Shelter, Inc.
- SOS Children's Villages
- Sue Duncan Children's Center
- Youth Guidance

“We're so appreciative of the ongoing support from the Midwest insurance community, partnering with IICF to help build more resilient communities and help those in need,” said Kelly Hartweg, IICF Midwest Division Executive Director. “Funds raised through our Blazing the Trail Benefit and other events throughout the year allow us to award grants to organizations dedicated to making a meaningful difference to so many.”

To hear more from Breakthrough and how IICF is making an impact in the community, please view this news segment from Chicago’s own, news anchor Rob Johnson of CBS 2: http://chicago.cbslocal.com/video/3826200-iicf-benefit-raises-money-for-worthy-causes/

For more information about IICF please visit https://www.iicf.org/about-iicf/midwest-division.html or contact Kelly Hartweg at (773) 991-2149 or khartweg@iicf.com to learn how to join IICF and help communities and enrich lives, together.

**About the Insurance Industry Charitable Foundation (IICF)**
The Insurance Industry Charitable Foundation (IICF) is a unique nonprofit that unites the collective strengths of the insurance industry to help communities and enrich lives through grants, volunteer service and leadership. Established in 1994, IICF has contributed nearly $30 million in community grants, along with 270,000 volunteer hours by more than 100,000 volunteers, to hundreds of charities and nonprofit organizations, reinvesting in local communities where funds are raised. IICF is a registered nonprofit organization under section 501(c)(3) of the IRS code. Learn more at www.iicf.org or follow us on Twitter @doublicf.

**Contact:**
Cybil Rose  
Vice President, KemperLesnik  
M: (312) 755.3537  
cybil.rose@kemperlesnik.com

Kelly Hartweg  
Executive Director, Midwest Region, Insurance Industry Charitable Foundation  
M: (773) 991-2149  
khartweg@iicf.org

Alisa Breese
Communications Director, Insurance Industry Charitable Foundation
M: (949) 207-9717