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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Early Childhood Champion Bob Ashley honored at national conference  
with Karen W. Ponder Leadership Award**

Greensboro, NC – **Durham's Partnership for Children (the Partnership)**, a *Smart Start Initiative*, is pleased to announce that Bob Ashley, editor of *The Herald-Sun* in Durham County, was awarded the Karen W. Ponder Leadership Award at the 2016 National Smart Start Conference. The award, named for Smart Start's former president, recognizes outstanding service to young children and families in North Carolina. A \$1,000 cash award will be made to the Partnership in his name.

Ashley is in his second term serving on the Board of Directors for the Partnership. As a board member, he has devoted time to the Executive Committee and the Board Development Task Force (chair), seeking to expand support within the business community for the early childhood system in Durham and the region.

"Bob has a heart so broad and a mind so deep that it's hard to imagine Durham's Partnership for Children, this community at large, and the early childhood movement in North Carolina, without him," said Partnership Executive Director Laura Benson.

In addition to his role as a board member, Ashley has also served as chair of the Community Awareness Committee since 2011. His input and guidance ensures that the committee engages the many facets of the early childhood network in Durham. As an advocate and a strong leader, he has increased the community's understanding of early childhood education and its long-lasting impact on a child's future.

"Bob has been committed to giving early childhood a voice," said Cindy Watkins, President of the North Carolina Partnership for Children. "His dedication to increasing broad public awareness of how critical the early years are has continued to build strong support for investing in early education."

Ashley and his wife Pat, who is also a great advocate and professional educator, live in Durham. Bob also worked at the Charlotte Observer and Raleigh Times, and edited papers in Owensboro, KY and State College, PA. He holds a degree in history from Duke University.

**About Durham's Partnership for Children – Preparing our children to succeed.**

Founded in 1994 and first funded in 1995 to administer the Smart Start grant in Durham County, the Partnership works as an independent, local nonprofit that serves young children birth to age 5 and their families to ensure that all children enter school healthy and ready to succeed. For more than 20 years, the Partnership has helped parents pay for child care, improved the quality of child care and provided health and family support services to thousands of Durham County families with young children. The Partnership leverages the public and private sectors to achieve its mission: *To ensure every child in Durham enters school ready to succeed, we lead community strategies for children birth to 5 and their families that promote healthy development and learning and enhance access to high quality care.* The Partnership administers Smart Start, NC

Pre-K, and Early Head Start in Durham County. For more information about the Partnership, visit [www.dpfc.net](http://www.dpfc.net) or call 919-403-6960, ext. 221.

**About Smart Start**

Smart Start, a network of nonprofit local partnerships led by The North Carolina Partnership for Children, Inc. (NCPC), creates innovative solutions to measurably increase learning and the healthy development of children birth to five. Smart Start gives local communities the freedom and responsibility to determine how to increase the health, well-being and development of their children based on the needs and resources of their local communities. NCPC establishes measurable statewide goals and communities determine the best approach to achieving them. Visit [www.smartstart.org](http://www.smartstart.org) for more information.

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