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N E W S R E L E A S E

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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***Make-A-Wish Connecticut awarded with Youth Engagement Innovation Award at annual national conference for “Lacrosse for Wishes” program***

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**(Trumbull, CT)**

The Connecticut chapter of Make-A-Wish was recently awarded with the Youth Engagement Innovation Award at the Foundation’s annual national conference, which took place in Anaheim California in mid-October. The award is intended to honor a chapter who engages young people in their fundraising, marketing or wish granting initiatives. The engagement program includes well-developed strategies that support wish granting enhancements or creative fundraising efforts. These activities could include anything from establishing a youth advisory council or alumni group to participating in a wish send-off party to creatively including kids in fundraising activities.

Make-A-Wish Connecticut’s “Lacrosse for Wishes” program was established 4 years ago in Fairfield County when Bill Giugno, Lacrosse enthusiast and local business owner, had a vision. He had an idea to bring Lacrosse kids from various towns together with a fundraising model to integrate fundraising and the game of Lacrosse, all with one common goal of making wishes come true. Local coaches were approached with the new idea of creating the new youth summer Lacrosse team that would participate in a number of summer tournaments. However, instead of the young athletes paying to play in the competitions, they would approach the tournaments and share their mission – to raise money for Make-A-Wish Connecticut, and to represent the organization both on and off the field.

The young athletes got fully behind the effort, not only reaching out to friends, family and neighbors for donations, but by creating engagement opportunities like car washes, bake sales and even dinner events at their family homes. While each child was required to raise \$500, the average contribution per player was a staggering \$1,200 across the summer

season. Year 1 of Lacrosse For Wishes resulted in a \$30,000 donation to Make-A-Wish Connecticut. Year 2 would double in size, to two teams including 44 young men from one team of 20 the year before, and the 2013 Lacrosse For Wishes campaign raised over \$50,000. In 2014, 6 teams were formed with over 130 athletes, participating in more tournaments than ever before, and a Girls' Lacrosse For Wishes team was added to the program as well. The year would be a monumental one, with over \$100,000 raised for Make-A-Wish Connecticut. This past year, during the summer of 2015, Lacrosse For Wishes would reach new heights yet again. 7 Boys' Teams and 1 Girls' Team would form with over 160 athletes competing in at least 3 tournaments each, and raising over \$110,000 for Make-A-Wish Connecticut. In just 4 years, these young men and women in Connecticut donated almost \$300,000 to make wishes come true for kids their own age.

Each player had come from their own town or school teams, competing against one another during the academic year, and bonded together for the summer to become a part of something life-changing. They learned the value of community service and volunteerism. They developed essential leadership skills and experienced the meaning of being passionate for a purposeful mission. Finally, they were educated on money management, developed presentation skills, and become entrepreneurs.

"It is incredible to part of something that, year after year, has engaged more and more youth from our communities across Connecticut," stated Kim Smith, Development Director for Make-A-Wish Connecticut. "The participants are doing something they love most...playing Lacrosse...and at the same time making a difference in the life of a child when they need it most. Kids helping kids through Lacrosse For Wishes has had a tremendous impact on the families involved and has created a contagious growth in the program. It is a true joy to share with the players the wishes that are coming true because of their awesome support season after season."

Make-A-Wish Connecticut is proud of the players and coaches that over the course of four years have built the Lacrosse For Wishes program into one of national recognition within the organization. It has granted more than 30 wishes and has grown into a model platform that will not only sustain but will continue to thrive and reach new levels in the years to come.

### **About Make-A-Wish® Connecticut**

The Make-A-Wish Foundation® of Connecticut grants the wishes of children with life-threatening medical conditions to enrich the human experience with hope, strength and joy. Wish-come-true experiences can do wonders by providing a much-needed break from lengthy hospital stays and medical treatments. They give back to a child what a serious medical condition can take away—the chance to simply enjoy being a kid. Wish kids choose something that will inspire happiness and will allow them to spend precious time with their families. The Connecticut chapter has made over 2,700 wishes come true since its inception in 1986. Learn more about Connecticut wishes at

[www.ct.wish.org](http://www.ct.wish.org), or join Make-A-Wish on Facebook (search Make-A-Wish Connecticut), Twitter and Instagram (@MakeAWishCT).

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