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AUTISM AWARENESS GAMES

Major League Baseball is teaming up with Autism Speaks (www.autismspeaks.org), the world's leading autism science and advocacy organization, in a league-wide effort to recognize Autism Awareness Month in April. All 30 MLB Clubs will raise awareness for the disorder during one home game in April, or on another date during the regular season. Many of the MLB Autism Awareness games throughout the league will provide special opportunities and a safe, friendly environment for families and individuals affected by autism.

Working with Autism Speaks or other autism awareness organizations, many Clubs will recognize local families during pre-game ceremonies, and members of the autism community will participate in various traditional baseball activities, including throwing out the first pitch, singing the National Anthem, announcing "Play Ball!," singing "Take Me Out to the Ballgame," or performing "God Bless America."

Autism affects many of our fans and members of the baseball family," said Baseball Commissioner Allan H. (Bud) Selig. "Many Clubs are longstanding supporters of the autism community. As an extension of those efforts, Major League Baseball is very proud to educate our fans through the MLB Autism Awareness initiative."

"For many families in the autism community, the joy of a baseball game has never been possible. With Major League Baseball's support, a time-honored tradition will now be a reality for thousands of families across the country," said Liz Feld, President, Autism Speaks.

Autism is a general term used to describe a group of complex developmental brain disorders – autism spectrum disorders – caused by a combination of genes and environmental influences. These disorders are characterized, in varying degrees, by communication difficulties, social and behavioral challenges, as well as repetitive behaviors. An estimated one in 88 children in the U.S. is on the autism spectrum – a 78 percent increase in six years that is only partly explained by improved diagnosis.

In a similar fashion, Turtle Wing Foundation will be partnering with area high school baseball and softball programs to hold Autism Awareness games throughout the month of April. The teams who have volunteered to participate include (home teams in bold):

- **Flatonia** vs. Schulenburg (softball game) – April 5 @ 6 PM
- **Weimar** vs. Flatonia – April 11 @ 7 PM
- **La Grange** vs. Smithville – April 12 @ 7 PM
- **Columbus** vs. Bay City – April 12 @ 7 PM
- **Hallettsville** vs. Rice Consolidated – April 15 @ 7 PM
- **Schulenburg** vs. Shiner – April 26 @ 7 PM

Local students will be honored with the opportunity to throw out the first pitch. Information on Autism and the foundation's work will be available at the games along with Turtle Wing merchandise being for sale. During the 5th inning Turtle Wing volunteers will throw goodies into the crowd and collect donations towards providing Turtle Wing's services. The 5th inning was selected as this is the 5th year that Turtle Wing will host their Jack Hooper Day at the Ballpark and Homerun Derby, which is scheduled for May 14, 2016 at the Schulenburg Sports Complex.

Turtle Wing Foundation is a 501c3 non-profit organization aimed at helping children with learning challenges in rural areas achieve their full potential. This foundation was founded by DeeAnn Hooper, in honor of her son, Jack Hooper, who passed away April 5, 2011 of a viral-like syndrome of unknown origin. Jack was diagnosed with high-functioning Autism at the age of six and due to the various academic and social skill supplemental services Jack received; he was a very successful 4th grader at Schulenburg Elementary School. During their 2014-2015 fiscal year, Turtle Wing Foundation helped provide Early Intervention and Supplemental Services to 159 children with hundreds more being impacted by Community Education & Advocacy programming. The recipients have all been from Colorado, Fayette, Lavaca and surrounding counties with academic, social-emotional, behavioral and/or developmental needs. To learn more about Turtle Wing Foundation visit www.turtlewingfoundation.org or contact Managing Director, Susie Shank, at 979-820-8964. For more information about MLB Autism Awareness and to check on respective Club dates commemorating the initiative, please visit MLBCommunity.org.

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