



For Immediate Release  
Contact: Samuetta Nesbitt: 205-458-2050  
[snesebitt@uwca.org](mailto:snesebitt@uwca.org)  
Joan Wright: 205-458-2186  
[jwright@uwca.org](mailto:jwright@uwca.org)

## **Business Gets IT! Value of Investing in Young Children**

Education is the number one priority for improving the quality of life and economic base of the City of Birmingham, and surrounding communities. Businesses in central Alabama clearly see the value in investing in young children as an economic development strategy. Rotary Club of Birmingham, area businesses, and future corporate leaders share their story of support for United Way Success By 6, a school readiness initiative of United Way of Central Alabama. With an increase in support from the business community, United Way Success By 6 now serves over 300 children attending 14 different child care centers located in all five central Alabama Counties: Blount, Jefferson, Shelby, St. Clair, and Walker.

The Rotary Club of Birmingham's Preschool Learning Initiative is the club's unique, significant community project. Timely appeals from Governor Riley left strong impressions of the need to improve educational opportunities for the Alabama's young children. Success By 6, a community initiative of United Way, provided the vehicle to improve lives for Birmingham's pre-schoolers.

Birmingham Rotarians, in partnership with Success By 6, provide materials, tools and resources that are critical to laying a solid foundation for children's successful preparation for school. Components of the Success By 6 reading readiness initiative include a research-based curriculum, *Building Language for Literacy* by Scholastic, Inc., classroom teaching materials, professional development training for teachers, vision and dental screenings, developmental assessments and evaluations. Success By 6 operates the program, which includes mentoring and monthly workshops for teachers, coordination of health screenings, assessments and evaluations, parenting workshops and seminars, assistance to families, and parenting materials.

Initially, Rotary Club sponsored one preschool center serving approximately 20 four-year olds. Today, it supports three preschool centers currently reaching over 70 four year-olds with plans to expand support to more preschool centers. The Rotary Club encourages other civic groups to do the same. With over 330 centers in Jefferson County alone, the need is tremendous, but Rotarians believe their investment is a worthy one, one that makes a world of difference when children enter kindergarten. "The young children learn the basics of reading and can read word cards; they play 'store' and learn a little bit of math; and through the various monthly themes, they

learn a bit about their world and how it works. But the best thing that is happening is that they and their families are experiencing the joy of growth and learning.” Susan Jackson, Executive Director, Rotary Club of Birmingham.

Mr. W. Paul Bowers, President of Southern Company Generation, current chair for Success By 6 Advisory Committee, immediately embraced the value of this United Way community initiative as a means to address a growing concern over a skilled future workforce. "Southern Company recognizes the need to have an educational foundation established early for our children. By building that foundation, we ensure that we have productive individuals for our workforce in the future. Success By 6 is one example of a program that will enable people to learn these skills, complete their education and prepare for the future. Our children, if they are properly equipped, will drive the economy of our state by being employable."

Bowers successfully secured close to \$650,000 to support expansion and sustainability for United Way Success By 6. Starting with his company's commitment, funds were procured from businesses in this community including:

First American Bank, EBSCO Industries, Inc., Brassfield & Gorrie, LLC, Hoar Construction, LLC, Southern Nuclear Operating Co., Mayer Electric Supply, BE&K, Inc., Energen/Alagasco, Burlington Northern Santa Fe Foundation, Drummond Corporation, and The Thompson Foundation.

Project Corporate Leadership (PCL), sponsored by the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce, engages future leaders in Birmingham-based businesses to develop and promote the City of Birmingham. This year, a group of PCL participants decided to invest time and resources in raising funds for Success By 6. This group not only raises funds, but also promotes awareness of the Success By 6 initiative in the community. This group's goal is to promote a program that could continue to make a difference in Birmingham.

One clear example of the benefits of investing in young children is in the case of a young boy attending a Birmingham-based pre-school. Through Success By 6's involvement, an assessment provided this fall indicated the child should have a more thorough evaluation based on some concerns over his speech development. Success By 6 referred the child for services with Birmingham City Schools. The boy qualified for speech therapy offered at a local elementary school. The family took advantage of the services. Relying on transportation from Kid One Transport, the young boy has attended all of his therapy sessions. His speech is now remarkably improved. How much better prepared for school this young child will be!

In fall 2003, United Way Success By 6 launched an aggressive reading readiness initiative to address school preparedness for young children. At that time, the initiative served just over 90 children in six child care centers located in two central Alabama counties, Jefferson and Shelby. Early success - gains in children's vocabulary development coupled with improved classroom learning environments - set the stage for expansion.

United Way of Central Alabama, Inc. supports over 80 health and human service programs and agencies that provide solutions for the most important needs in the community. Our business is to improve lives and community conditions by building and mobilizing resources. For more

information about United Way of Central Alabama, visit [www.uwca.org](http://www.uwca.org). To find or give help dial 2.1.1.