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## **Local Hardware Stores Raise Awareness, Money to Fight Lead Poisoning in GR Neighborhoods**

*\$6,000 Collected from Customers Via "Round-up" Campaign*

GRAND RAPIDS - As the lead poisoning of children in Grand Rapids' neighborhoods continues increase, and gain attention, one local business took the message to their customers - and raised \$6,000 in doing so.

As part of their holiday season "round-up" campaign, all three Grand Rapids area locations of Rylee's Ace Hardware stores educated their customers about the dangers of lead poisoning in children while asking them to "round-up" their purchase to the next dollar. The funds raised will help support the Healthy Homes Coalition of West Michigan, whose work continues to spotlight the growing health concerns and dangers of this issue.

The "round-up" program ran from Thanksgiving through Christmas Eve last year, according to Lori Terpstra, owner and CEO of Rylee's Ace Hardware.

"With an average of 1,500 customers coming through our three stores collectively on a daily basis, we knew we had a dedicated audience who would be hearing about the kids that are hurting in our community due to lead poisoning, and what Healthy Homes is doing to fight that," said Terpstra. "The two questions our customers had were 'is this organization local' and 'are you sure the money is staying in our community,' and once we told them yes, they were eager to round-up their purchase."

Statistics show that lead poisoning has been on the rise in Grand Rapids for the past two years. Whereas five years ago the number of lead poisoned children was dropping precipitously, recent trends have not been so favorable. That recent change caught the attention of Grand Rapids Mayor Rosalynn Bliss and County Commission Board Chair Jim Saalfeld, who joined together to appoint a special Kent County Lead Task Force

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in 2016. This past weekend, Chair Saalfeld included combating childhood lead poisoning as one of his top 15 priorities for the county in 2018.

“This is a great example of how a local business can step up and take action on a pressing social issue,” said Healthy Homes Coalition executive director Paul Haan. “Rylee’s saw a need in the community to help kids stop hurting, knew that they could do their part, and asked their customers to join the cause. It’s clear to us that Rylee’s and their customers don’t want to see any children lead poisoned in Grand Rapids.”

According to Terpstra, in past years Rylee’s has done similar campaigns for other organizations, but this year they selected the lead poisoning issue after it was brought to their attention by a Rylee’s employee. “We realized that the educational component is key with this issue – few people we talked with were aware that we a problem in the city.” she said.

The Healthy Homes Coalition will use the funds to provide lead safety supplies for low-income households with children and to help parents check their homes for lead hazards.

Added Terpstra: "We had no clue how successful this would be, but the community responded in a BIG way and we're hoping that as more people in our community learn about this, they too will help keep our kids safe from the dangers of lead poisoning."

More information on lead poisoning, including the latest statistics and report from the community-wide Lead Task Force, can be found at [healthyhomescoalition.org](http://healthyhomescoalition.org).

### **About Healthy Homes Coalition of West Michigan**

The organization’s mission is to improve children’s health and wellbeing by eliminating harmful housing conditions. The organization achieves that mission through policy and advocacy, outreach and education, direct services, and continuous collaboration.

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