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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## **Oregon's SMART Program Named Recipient of 2014 Library of Congress Literacy Award**

*- Statewide nonprofit selected for working to build a better Oregon  
through confident readers -*

**Portland, Ore.** – SMART (Start Making A Reader Today), the statewide early literacy nonprofit organization, was named the recipient of the 2014 Library of Congress Literacy Award in the American Prize Category. SMART was selected from hundreds of applications from organizations throughout the nation. The award is a major honor for the pioneering nonprofit that, over the past 22 years, has engaged more than 113,000 community volunteers to help 170,000 at-risk students build their reading skills and self-confidence to discover a lifelong love of reading.

Through the generosity of David M. Rubenstein, the Library of Congress Literacy Awards Program honors organizations that have made outstanding contributions to increasing literacy in the United States or abroad. The American Prize is awarded to an organization that has made a significant and measureable contribution to increasing literacy levels or the national awareness of the importance of literacy.

“This is a huge honor and a validation of the hard work we are doing to deliver a high quality program that is building a better Oregon through confident readers,” said Chris Otis, executive director of SMART. “We would like to thank David M. Rubenstein and the Library of Congress for this amazing acknowledgment. It is our hope that these awards will continue to inspire other organizations, foundations and private sector groups to become involved in combating illiteracy.”

As a part of the award, SMART will receive \$50,000 to help in their efforts to build reading skills, self-confidence and a love of reading in children at risk of falling behind. During the 2013-2014 school year, SMART served over 9,100 children throughout Oregon. More than 90 percent of SMART educators feel that students participating in the program benefit significantly. According to their teachers, 100 percent of SMART students needing improvement showed progression in enthusiasm about reading, self-confidence, vocabulary, reading fluency and eagerness to interact with books.

Governor John Kitzhaber, a SMART advocate and participant in SMART's 'Reading Matters' campaign, was instrumental in the application process for the award. “In so many ways, SMART is helping create brighter futures for young Oregonians. The organization is a true partner in our

statewide efforts to improve education outcomes and promote literacy,” said Governor Kitzhaber. “I am delighted SMART has been recognized for their tireless efforts to support the vital role of reading in children’s lives and futures.”

“When it comes to a child’s literacy development, learning to read is one of the most important steps in a child’s life and it must start early,” said Oregon State Representative Betty Komp (D-Woodburn), a former teacher and principal who is the co-chair of the Education Sub Committee for Ways and Means and Speaker Pro Tem of the House, who is also a SMART advocate and participant in SMART’s ‘Reading Matters’ campaign. “Since 1992, SMART has provided the best possible learning skills for our students in Oregon. SMART is at the forefront of Oregon’s literacy issues, leveraging public infrastructure and private dollars to deliver a high quality program that is empowering Oregon children for more successful futures through books and reading.”

The Library of Congress Literacy Awards were announced in Washington D.C. on Saturday, August 30 and the award will be formally celebrated at a ceremony on Wednesday, October 8, 2014 also in Washington D.C. To learn more, please visit:

<http://www.read.gov/literacyawards/index.html>.

#### **About SMART® (Start Making A Reader Today)**

SMART is a statewide nonprofit organization that envisions an Oregon where every child can read and is empowered to succeed. We engage community volunteers to read one-on-one with PreK-3 children, helping strengthen literacy skills and encourage a love of reading. Children in the program receive 14 new books throughout the school year to keep and read with their families. Visit [www.getSMARToregon.org](http://www.getSMARToregon.org) or call 877-598-4633 to learn more about SMART.

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