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FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:
Heather Haigh
Executive Director
firstdayshoefund@gmail.com
269-271-5527

FIRST DAY SHOE FUND CELEBRATES 10TH ANNIVERSARY

KALAMAZOO, MI – First Day Shoe Fund, a local nonprofit that believes all children should start school on equal footing, is excited to announce that 2016 marks the 10th anniversary of the organization providing new athletic shoes to school-age children in Kalamazoo County who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.

In 2004, Valerie Dengeh was volunteering in the Kalamazoo Public Schools Edison Environmental Academy when she encountered students on a daily basis who didn't have proper shoes for school. Since many families were unable to purchase new shoes, many students were forced to wear shoes that were too big, too small, tattered, and worn. The work of First Day Shoe Fund began that day – mostly one pair of shoes at a time. The first official distribution event of First Day Shoe Fund was in the summer of 2006 when 307 pairs of shoes were distributed to students at Woods Lake Elementary School.

Throughout the past 10 years, First Day Shoe Fund has expanded to support more school districts, covering more grades to include Preschool – 5th graders, partnered with many nonprofit organizations for distributions, expanded our Board of Directors, created an active working Committee structure of volunteers, and hired a part-time Executive Director. Last year, we distributed a record 4,371 pairs of shoes to low-income students in Kalamazoo Public Schools, Comstock Public Schools, Paramount Academy and WoodsEdge Learning Center.

Since our founding in 2006, First Day Shoe Fund has distributed a total of 19,580 pairs of brand new athletic shoes to low-income students in Kalamazoo County. "The work of First Day Shoe Fund has become an integral part of the Kalamazoo community and we are excited to be

celebrating 10 years of impacting families”, Executive Director Heather Haigh said. “Meeting children’s basic needs removes the stigma and discomfort many of the program’s participants experience when they are forced to attend school in worn-out or poorly fitting shoes.”

Throughout 2016, 10th Anniversary events will be held in celebration and recognition of First Day Shoe Fund's accomplishments over the past decade. The money raised during our celebration events will be utilized to sustain and grow our distribution process to provide new athletic shoes to children. We will also introduce a new logo and look to the First Day Shoe Fund branding that emphasizes our mission to provide new athletic shoes to low-income children allowing them to fully play, join recess games, participate in athletics, and be comfortable amongst their peers.

Registered as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, First Day Shoe Fund is funded by generous donations from foundations, corporations, and individuals. All donations are tax-deductible.

[Donations](#) to First Day Shoe Fund may be made via PayPal at www.firstdayshoefund.org or by mailing a check or money order payable to: First Day Shoe Fund, P.O. Box 2751, Kalamazoo, MI 49001.

Those interested in volunteering, hosting a new shoe drive, or supporting the program with a tax deductible donation are invited to visit www.firstdayshoefund.org, follow the organization’s Facebook page at [Facebook.com/firstdayshoefund](https://www.facebook.com/firstdayshoefund), follow the organization on Twitter [@FirstDayShoe](https://twitter.com/FirstDayShoe), or email <mailto:firstdayshoefund@gmail.com>.

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