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***If You Were a Penguin* honored as 2009 selection for PA's One Book, Every Young Child early literacy program**

HARRISBURG, PA – *If You Were a Penguin*, written by Florence Minor and illustrated by Wendell Minor, has been named the 2009 selection of the fourth annual Pennsylvania **One Book, Every Young Child** early literacy program.

BookList writes “This husband-and-wife team’s appealing picture book invites readers to imagine all the remarkable things they could do if they were one of these lively, aquatic birds.”

The PA One Book program will kick off with a reception at the Pennsylvania State Capitol, March 31, 4-6 p.m. Members of the Pennsylvania Library Association, legislators and other community leaders will join the author to promote the development of early literacy skills through interactive experiences with books and stories.

The Capitol launch event is a prelude to the Minor’s 18 days of visits across the state that start April 2, 10 a.m., at the Joseph T Simpson Public Library, 16 N Walnut Street, Mechanicsburg. A full listing of their visits will continually be updated on the website www.paonebook.org.

More than a half million Pennsylvania children ages 3-6 are reached annually through the **One Book, Every Young Child** program which stresses the importance of reading early and often to young children and how that impacts their future lives.

For the fourth year, Verizon is proudly supporting the Pennsylvania **One Book, Every Young Child** program with a \$40,000 grant as part of its commitment to unlock the promise of literacy and enhance lifelong learning. This grant will provide a copy of *If You Were a Penguin* to more than 15,000 Pennsylvania childcare facilities, licensed preschools, Head Start programs and family literacy programs.

“Verizon is proud to partner with the Pennsylvania Department of Education and the Office of Commonwealth Libraries in this program that empowers young children and their families with the skills, passion and enthusiasm to pursue a life of learning,” said Gale Y. Given, president of Verizon Pennsylvania. “Verizon is committed to helping individuals gain the complex literacy skills needed across the lifespan, from early childhood through adulthood, to participate, compete and be successful in the 21st Century.”

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The beauty of the **One Book, Every Young Child** program goes far beyond asking parents and caregivers to read to preschoolers. It emphasizes ways that adults can engage children in activities such as talking about a book's cover and illustrations, discussing the action in the book and favorite parts and making up pretend play games related to the story.

"Wendell and I are so honored to have our book selected for this important program," said Florence Minor. "It's a joy to help children unlock the world around them through books, and making this our life's work is very fulfilling for us. We both feel that the enjoyment of reading is the key to the future of every child, and we are dedicated to creating books that will entertain, teach and inspire them."

In this brand new book, children use their imaginations as they step inside a penguin's world. This entertaining and educational story provides children with fun facts about penguins and helps them identify the many different kinds of penguins found throughout the world.

"Wendell and I share a love of the outdoors and animals," said Florence. "And after spending an afternoon with our four-year-old niece the idea for *If You Were a Penguin* was born. She told us how much she loved penguins, and it was then that we decided how much fun it would be to do a book about penguins for her age group."

The book is realistic in both imagery and text to show children where the different species of penguins live, and some of the things they like to do. "Knowing how many children struggle with reading, I used a simple, rhyming text that they would enjoy listening to and hopefully be inspired to read on their own," said Florence. "Wendell then created appealing and humorous pictures that are also educational, since the images are based on real penguins."

In its inaugural year, 2006, the **One Book, Every Young Child** program won a coveted, national John Cotton Dana Library Public Relations Award for its comprehensive approach to early literacy.

"The **One Book, Every Young Child** is a program that highlights Pennsylvania's commitment to giving our youngest learners a solid start," said Secretary of Education Gerald L. Zahorchak. "Thanks to Governor Rendell's vision and the legislature's leadership, the Commonwealth has made historic investments in early childhood education, and those investments are making a real difference in raising student achievement."

"For a child, a book can spark a love of reading that will last a lifetime," said Public Welfare Secretary Estelle B. Richman. "Through this initiative, we're providing children and their families with the opportunity to learn and grow together as they develop the skills they need to succeed in school and in life."

In today's economy, libraries have become an even more important resource to the people they serve. Across the state, libraries are reporting that use of service is up. Allentown Public Library reported "one of the busiest summers in years," with the daily circulation reaching a high of 6,000 items, double the average rate; Palmyra Public Library had 450 more kids participate in summer reading programs over last year; and Hollidaysburg Area Public Library reported a 50 percent increase of use from four years ago.

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And for families looking for inexpensive activities for their children, the **One Book, Every Young Child** reading initiative provides that option. There will be library and museum programming for families and activities for parents, early care providers and educators – all to promote the value and benefits of reading early and often to preschoolers and to encourage family bonding through books and reading. The program includes author visits across the state to libraries, children’s museums, preschools, Head Start centers and family literacy programs. Many of these ideas can be found on the program’s website at www.paonebook.org.

There also will be 65 traveling trunks developed by museum educators to help expand upon the concepts of *If You Were a Penguin*. Each trunk is filled with fun book-related puppets, games and manipulatives for young children, as well as a guide for librarians and educators that encourages use of the trunk contents in activities that are aligned with the Pennsylvania Early Learning Standards.

Additionally, about 100 legislators and representatives from the Pennsylvania Departments of Education and Public Welfare will be traveling the state to read to children in various settings.

The Pennsylvania Library Association through its member libraries will support the **One Book, Every Young Child** reading initiative throughout the year. Wendell and Florence Minor will speak at its Early Learning Forum at the Hilton Harrisburg on April 1, 2009, and assist in recognizing best practice winning libraries across the state.

One Book, Every Young Child is made possible through a collaboration of the Pennsylvania Department of Education, Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh, Please Touch Museum, State Museum of Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania Library Association, Pennsylvania Public Television Network, Pennsylvania Center for the Book, Pennsylvania Association for the Education of Young Children, The Pennsylvania Child Care Association, PennSERVE, HSLC/Access PA and Verizon. This program was supported in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act as administered by Pennsylvania’s Office of Commonwealth Libraries.

Information about **One Book, Every Young Child** may be obtained by visiting www.paonebook.org which also includes a schedule of the author’s visits around the state.

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