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Cumberland County to Host 16th Annual Light of Hope Ceremony

Cumberland County, PA- The next class of trained CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) volunteers will be sworn-in at the 16th Annual Light of Hope Celebration on April 11th at 6:00 pm in the Old Courthouse in Carlisle. The CASA Program and its volunteers assist the court in determining what is in the best interest of abused and/or neglected children whose cases are in the court system. The new CASA volunteers have completed extensive training to enable them to advocate for the children to whom they will be assigned. In addition to the swearing-in, the CASA Program will be celebrating the longstanding relationship it has with Kappa Alpha Theta.

For the past 16 years, the Epsilon Lambda chapter of Kappa Alpha Theta (KAT) at Dickinson College and the CASA Program have had a strong relationship; the Thetas host a philanthropy event every semester to raise money for the CASA Program. In fall 2016, KAT unveiled a brand new philanthropy event, CASA Café, where sisters raised approximately \$2,000 and donated the proceeds to National CASA, PA CASA, and Cumberland County CASA. Every fall KAT helps organize a CASA Appreciation Brunch to celebrate and recognize all of the amazing work Cumberland County CASA volunteers do. Every spring, the Thetas host the Light of Hope reception to honor CASA volunteers who are getting sworn-in. Theta's relationship with Cumberland County CASA extends beyond philanthropy events and financial support, however. The Thetas do smaller weekly service events to contribute to Cumberland County CASA, like making fleece blankets for the children or thank you cards for the volunteers.

Furthermore, multiple current and past collegian members have worked as interns in the Cumberland County CASA Office. Current CEO Elizabeth Smith interned fall 2016 and is in the midst of continuing her internship for spring 2017. Jenny Morris, who also interned fall 2016, completed and helped facilitate CASA

volunteer training as part of her internship. The CASA staff looks forward to many more years of KAT sisters doubling as interns in the office. The Theta sisters consider it an added bonus that they have a CASA Program within walking distance of Dickinson's campus and do their best to take advantage of that opportunity.

Jennifer (Hammer) DeBalko, Executive Director of PA CASA, began her relationship with the CASA Program in 2003, both as a member of KAT and as a CASA intern with Cumberland County. After Jenn graduated from Dickinson, she became a Volunteer Supervisor and Program Manager at CASA of Atlantic and Cape May Counties in New Jersey. A few years later she became the Director of the Lehigh County CASA Program. Jenn began her role as Executive Director of PA CASA in January 2017.

In 1999, Kappa Alpha Theta designated CASA as its national philanthropy, a relationship that continues to benefit CASA Programs nationwide. Currently the Kappa Alpha Theta Foundation has committed to contributing \$1 million dollars over three years to the National CASA Performance Measurement Initiative. TJ Condon, a Dickinson College alumna, serves as a Foundation Trustee.

At the upcoming Swearing-in Ceremony and Light of Hope on April 11, Thetas will once again provide a reception for attendees. The Harrisburg Area alumnae also donate their time and resources in various ways to make CASA events successful. Gretchen Petri, an alumna advisor to the Epsilon Lambda chapter, has been a steady presence at CASA events since 2001, when the first volunteers were trained and assigned in Cumberland County.

Just as seriously as the Epsilon Lambda chapter is committed to Kappa Alpha Theta for a lifetime, sisters are likewise committed to CASA and its mission for a lifetime. The CASA Program's mission, at national, state, and local levels, is to support and promote court appointed volunteer advocacy for abused and neglected children so they can thrive in safe, permanent homes. In Cumberland County, the CASA Program has been working to fulfill that mission since 2000. Today over 200 volunteers have been trained, and more than 450 children in Cumberland County have been represented by CASA volunteers. To learn more about the CASA Program and how to become a Court Appointed Special Advocate visit www.ccpa.net/casa.

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