



**HAND to HOLD**  
*Fragile Babies. Strong Support.*

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Hand to Hold Announces Photo and Essay Contest Winners**

*Premie Power Shares Triumphs of Premies, Commemorates November as Prematurity Awareness Month*

AUSTIN, Texas (November 17, 2011) – Two hundred families, doctors and nurses celebrated Prematurity Awareness Month at Texas' second annual community-wide [Premie Power Family Celebration](#) on Sunday November 13, 2011. The family event organized by Hand to Hold, a local nonprofit that supports parents of premies, gave families and health care providers an opportunity to recognize the incredible super hero qualities of NICU graduates and the milestones they have achieved.

St. David's Medical Center Chief Operating Officer and NICU graduate father, Richard Hammett, served as Master of Premies, announcing the [finalists](#) and [winners](#) of the Premie Power Photo and Essay Contest. Ninety-one families from 29 states and Canada entered their child's photo in the contest and shared their child's heart-warming, super hero stories. Celebrity judges included Kim Pleticha of *Parent: Wise Austin*; Dr. Annette McCormick, local neonatologist, and [Kasey Mathews](#), author and mother of a preemie.

Chiron Jimenez of Austin received top honors in the 0-1 year old category. "Scrappy Doo" was born at 29 weeks gestation weighing 3 pounds 1 ounce and spent 53 days in the NICU. He is now 9.5 months old. He was nominated by his mother, Elizabeth Wiley, who wrote: "Chiron could serve as Premie of the Year not due to his uniqueness, but due to his ordinariness...He exists because of the constant vigilance and care of neonatal staff every day, not just in crisis situations. Chiron is a living model of what we are all seeking to provide for all premies and thus I believe serves as a powerful model in the role of Premie of the Year." Finalists in the same category included 8.5-month-old twins Gabe and Sam, "The Real Dynamic Duo," sons of Jason and Marci Jones from Columbia, Alabama and 4-month-old Aiden, "The Mighty Pound," son of Anjeliene Wright of Mount Sterling, Kentucky.

Cade and Camdyn Hensel of Leander were named the winners in the 1+ to 5 years old category. Nominated by their mother Michelle Hensel, "The One Pound Wonders" were born at 24 weeks gestation weighing just 1 pound 2 ounces and 1 pound 8 ounces at birth. They spent 133 days in the NICU and are now 18 months old. Their mother wrote: "From the first day of life, they had to valiantly fight off all the evil NICU villains... After 133 days of continuous fighting, they left the NICU battlefield... They have left the world in awe of their amazing powers - the power to eat, breathe, walk, talk, and most importantly, live after being given only a 30-40% chance of surviving! The One Pound Wonders have proven to the world that miracles exist." Finalists in the same category include 2-year-old Luke Whitaker, "Lonestar Luke," son of

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## **Hand to Hold Announces Winners, Cont.**

Kathryn Whitaker of Austin, Texas; 12.5-month-old Zephran, “The Big Z”, son of Kaitlin Young from Medicine Hat, Alberta, Canada; and 21-month-old Bobby, “Deuce,” son of Peter Ruhno from Perryman, Maryland.

Ikey and Reagon Kohler, 8, of Austin were chosen as the top winners in the age 6 and over category. Nominated by their mother Molly, “Ikey the Invincible & Resilient Reagon” were born at 26 weeks gestation, weighed 1 pound 15 ounces each at birth and spent 97 and 98 days in the NICU. Their mother shared “After Ikey and Reagon were born by emergency c-section, they had an extremely rough start, and several weeks of the unknown... They were never feeders and growers. They were just trying to breathe. They are both amazing, smart, humorous, athletic, and just wonderful...they are just remarkable little boys who have been through far more than most people will ever go through in their entire lives.” Finalists in the same category include 6-year-old Lorenza Piper, “Smily Lorenza,” daughter of Beth Piper of New Gloucester, Maine and 8.5-years-old Ian, “Ian Man!” son of Maggie Smith of Vacaville, California.

Chiron Jimenez was also recognized with the Thundering Thurston Award for earning the most votes –4,162 in all. This award, named for Thurston Mossholder, a 2010 Premie Power winner from Round Rock, who lost his battle against complications arising from his prematurity passing away shortly after his first birthday.

In Travis County, 2,000 babies, nearly 6 each day, are born too early (before 37 weeks gestation). In Texas, one in seven births is preterm. Premature birth is traumatic and a leading cause of permanent disability and death, yet many of these babies persevere...sometimes against all odds.

“We organized Premie Power to raise awareness about premature birth and offer hope to families who may be new to the experience. We chose a super hero theme because of the incredible strength and courage of preemies and their families,” said Kelli Kelley, founder and Executive Director of Hand to Hold. “Families are often blindsided by the aftermath of having one or more children in the NICU. It is emotionally and physically exhausting. That’s why we are so passionate about sharing these stories and creating a community of parents dedicated to supporting one another.” Kelley is the mother of two children born preterm.

Hand to Hold is grateful to its title sponsors [St. David’s Foundation](#), [St. David’s Healthcare](#) and [Enfamil](#) as well as underwriters [Roger Beasley Mazda](#), [Sonic](#), [Epic MedStaff](#), [H-E-B](#), [Austin’s First Steps](#), [Knight Construction](#), [Mother’s Milk Bank at Austin](#), [Proof Advertising](#) and [Germer Gertz Beaman and Brown L.L.P.](#) for their support of the event. Winners received Premie Power super hero capes and prize packages valued at more than \$500 provided by [A Maggie Film](#), [Austin’s Park](#), [Baby Blanket Music](#), [Baby Sense](#), [Marty Barnes](#) and Family, [Brand Builders Company](#), [Brooke West Photography](#), [Carousel Designs](#), [Fisher-Price](#), [Kokopax](#), [Mellow Johnny’s Bike Shop](#), [NurturMe](#), [Pediped](#), [Tracy Tenpenny Design](#), [Mystery Inc.](#), and other generous donors.

### **About Hand to Hold**

Hand to Hold, a nonprofit organization, provides comprehensive navigation resources and support programs to parents of preemies, babies born with special health care needs and those who have experienced a loss due to these or other complications. Based in Austin, Hand to Hold’s core service is matching experienced peer mentors with new parents who have had a child in the NICU to offer support. For more information, visit [www.handtohold.org](http://www.handtohold.org).

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