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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **100% OF PANERA BREAD'S 'PIECES OF HOPE' COOKIES APRIL 3-9 TO BENEFIT AUTISM SPEAKS OF CENTRAL OHIO**

COLUMBUS, OH, March 31, 2017 – Covelli Enterprises, the Ohio-based franchisee of Panera Bread, is partnering again with Autism Speaks of Central Ohio during Autism Awareness month to raise money for research, awareness and advocacy programs. Monday, April 3 through Sunday, April 9, 100% of the proceeds from all 'Pieces of Hope' cookie sales will be donated to Autism Speaks. The puzzle piece cookie has been specially designed to represent the symbol for autism and will be sold in all cafes in the Columbus/Central Ohio region.

Last year's 'Pieces of Hope' cookie campaign resulted in a \$40,000 donation to Autism Speaks of Central Ohio. Since 2010, Covelli Enterprises has donated over 1.2 million dollars to non-profit autism organizations in the areas it serves.

"We're so proud to once again support Autism Speaks of Central Ohio and the important work they do to for individuals with autism," said Sam Covelli, Owner/Operator of Covelli Enterprises. "This special cookie campaign allows us to make such a positive difference in the community, which is what we aim to do every day through our products and our bakery-cafes."

Throughout the month of April, Panera Bread will also be collecting community cashbox donations at the registers of all of its local cafes to raise additional funds for the cause.

"I am beyond thrilled to work with Covelli Enterprises again on this amazing campaign. In the past 6 years, the organization has raised more than \$240,000 in Central Ohio," said Sheri Weithman, Director of Field Development for Autism Speaks. "Throughout our partnership, the company has demonstrated not only a true commitment to giving back to the community, but has created amazing awareness of autism in the region."

Last year the cookie was reformulated to align with Panera Bread's clean food policy. It is now made completely free of any artificial colors, flavors, additives or preservatives.

1 in 68 children have been diagnosed with autism, making it one of the fastest growing developmental disabilities in the country, as reported by The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

### **About Covelli Enterprises**

Covelli Enterprises is the largest franchisee of Panera Bread, LLC with more than 300 bakery-cafes in six states. In 2016, the company donated more than \$28 million to charity through unsold bread products for local hunger relief agencies and monetary donations to other non-profit organizations. [www.covelli.com](http://www.covelli.com)

### **About Autism Speaks**

Autism Speaks is dedicated to promoting solutions, across the spectrum and throughout the life span, for the needs of individuals with autism and their families. We do this through advocacy and support; increasing understanding and acceptance of autism spectrum disorder; and advancing research into causes and better interventions for autism spectrum disorder and related conditions. We empower people with autism and their families with resources, online tools and information covering the life span. To find resources, join a fundraising walk or make a donation, go to [www.AutismSpeaks.org](http://www.AutismSpeaks.org).

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