

# Hug Your Kids Today, Tomorrow and Everyday

A movement to honor a lost child

**“H**ug your kids today. We wish we could.” This simple phrase started it all. Now celebrating its second year as a nationally recognized holiday, Hug Your Kids Day promises to be bigger and better than ever before, and it all started right here in Reno.

Eleven years ago, founder Michelle Nichols was facing the struggle most working parents do, trying to find balance between her work and family life, when her son, Mark, who was 8, became ill. The doctors thought he had the flu, but 11 days later, he died of brain cancer. “I learned the hard way that there isn’t supposed to be a balance between work and family,” Nichols says. “The truth is, if you lose your job, you can always find another one, but it’s the time we spend with our family that is irreplaceable.”

Mark went to Huffaker and Roy Gomm Elementary Schools, where he was a good student and a Cub Scout. He enjoyed playing Little League with his dad, Ron, as his coach. Nichols says Mark once told her what he wanted his life to stand for: “Tell a joke, share and be a good friend.” And it was with this positive message she

**What:**  
Reno’s National Hug Your Kids Day Celebration  
The fun begins at 5:45 p.m. and it’s free!

**When:**  
Monday, July 20

**Where:**  
Reno Aces Stadium

## It’s gonna be a ball!

This year’s celebration, on Monday, July 20, will take place in the plaza in front of the new Reno Aces Stadium, and promises free ice cream from Model Dairy, performances from the Hug High School cheerleaders and various elementary school choirs. Kia Crader will lead families in the “Hug Your Kids Today” song and dance, while Drew Simpson, a former Reno High baseball player who has recovered from a brain injury received in 2008, and his parents, will speak about the importance of family. The fun begins at 5:45 p.m., when families will be asked to gather for The Biggest Little Hug photo; this will take place at 6:20 p.m. The ball game will kick off at 7:05 p.m., with Drew Simpson throwing out the first pitch, and 300 sets of parents and kids, previously selected, will enjoy the game for free. Nichols says she expects about 1,000 people, maybe more, to attend.

“The response I’ve gotten to this holiday has been both surprising and exciting,” she says. “I didn’t want this to be a sad thing. I wanted to take what I learned and do something positive with it. You wouldn’t believe how many heartwarming stories I hear everyday. The power of a hug can change a life. It can change the world.” ☺

*Elizabeth Hogue is also the assistant editor of RLife magazine and a Northern Nevada freelance writer.*



Last year there was a whole lot of huggin’ going on at the Hug Your Kids event. Everyone enjoyed the opportunity to not only hug their kids, but all of those who attended too. Photo courtesy of Michelle Nichols.