



ROTARY

Rotary International | One Rotary Center | 1560 Sherman Avenue | Evanston, IL 60201 USA

Media Contact: +1 847 866-3237
e-mail: pr@rotary.org
www.rotary.org

NEWS RELEASE

CONTACT: Wayne Hearn (847) 866-3386; wayne.hearn@rotary.org
David Dotson (865) 428-9604, ddotson@dollyfoundation.com

Rotary works with entertainer Dolly Parton to give children a head start on reading

New collaboration urges local Rotary clubs to support Dollywood Foundation's Imagination Library, providing free books to youngsters from birth to kindergarten

EVANSTON, Ill. (March 6, 2009) -- Country music legend Dolly Parton and Rotary clubs may seem an unusual pairing, but their shared passion for promoting literacy more than bridges any perceived pop culture gap.

Rotary International today announced a groundbreaking collaborative arrangement with Parton's Tennessee-based Dollywood Foundation to promote early childhood reading. Under the agreement, Rotary clubs in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom are encouraged to support the Dollywood Foundation's Imagination Library program, which provides an age-appropriate book each month to children from birth until age five, so that parents and other family members can begin reading to them as soon as possible.

The program is especially valuable for children in underprivileged and working class families for whom children's books might be an unaffordable luxury in today's uncertain economic climate. Local Rotary club participation could include promoting the program within the community, helping to identify and register the children, and paying for the books and mailings. The average annual cost is \$28 per child (CAD\$60 in Canada; £24 in the U.K).

"In today's world, literacy is a basic requirement for success in life," says Rotary Foundation Trustee John Germ, of Chattanooga, Tenn. "For decades, Rotary clubs worldwide have supported literacy and numeracy programs for children and adults, and this collaborative relationship with the Dollywood Foundation will help lift our literacy effort to the next level by promoting early childhood reading."

"I am thrilled about our partnership with Rotary International," says Parton, who developed a personal love of books growing up in rural Tennessee, where she saw firsthand the toll illiteracy can take on families. "Rotarians love kids as much as I do, so I truly believe we can do something extraordinary together to help even more children love to read and succeed."

(more)

(page 2)

Once a child is registered with Imagination Library, the Dollywood Foundation sends the child one book a month, beginning with “The Little Engine That Could.” The books are chosen to match the typical childhood development stages. Appropriately, the final title is “Look Out Kindergarten, Here I Come.” Since its launch in 1996, Imagination Library has provided more than 15 million books to preschoolers.

According to the Dollywood Foundation, research shows that preschoolers exposed to reading are more likely to look forward to starting school, do better in class, read at or above grade level, and finish high school and go on to college. The program also helps to strengthen families by encouraging positive interaction between parents and children through shared reading.

About 115 individual Rotary clubs already participate in Imagination Library. That number will quickly triple with the addition of all 204 Georgia Rotary clubs, the first to sign on under the new agreement. Working through the Georgia-based Ferst Foundation for Childhood Literacy, their goal is to extend Imagination Library into all 159 counties in the state.

In all, there are about 10,400 Rotary clubs in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, the nations covered in the new agreement. Worldwide, Rotary has more than 33,000 clubs in 200 countries and geographical areas. Since 1985, more than 16,000 Rotary clubs have supported literacy and numeracy programs throughout the world.

For more information, visit www.imaginationlibrary.com or www.rotary.org.

###