



Year In Review 2002

The Dollywood Foundation

On December 13, 2002 Dolly Parton gathered several of her special guests on the stage of Celebrity Theatre at Dollywood. It was an impressive group – the Assistant Secretary of Interior for Indian Affairs, the Director of Indian Education Programs for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Chief of the Cherokee Nation, the President of Parents as Teachers National Center and the President of The National Center for Family Literacy. Smiles, handshakes and hugs were all in order because Dolly announced to the press that her Imagination Library would join forces with all of these organizations to provide a book each month to preschoolers in 92 Native American communities.

This announcement capped off an exciting year of growth for the Imagination Library. At the end of year, there were 185 communities committed to the Library and for the first time, the actual number of children receiving a book each month exceeded 30,000!

The story behind those 30,000 smiles took several interesting twists and turns. In September, under the leadership of the Sioux Empire United Way, 10 United Ways in South Dakota joined together to launch an effort to eventually provide the Imagination Library to every child in their state. In Georgia, The First Books Foundation grew to 8 communities and continued their journey to provide the books to every child in Georgia. And in Dolly's home state of Tennessee, the man who ultimately won the gubernatorial race, campaigned on a platform that pledged to provide the books to every preschooler in the state. These statewide developments were hopefully just the beginning of many more to come.

On the national level, the sponsorship from the Bureau of Indian Affairs marked a new partnership with the federal government. Once again, there is hope that this precedent setting partnership will inspire other federally funded efforts.

Local sponsors continued to come in many shapes and sizes. In addition to the dozens of United Ways that jumped on board, several local school districts adopted the program. They joined local education foundations, community foundations, civic groups, non-profits, businesses and Chambers of Commerce who all decided to give their children a very special gift.

Several decisions made in 2002 will turn into a reality in 2003. Bi-lingual books will be added to the Library as well as a couple of special editions where reading tips for parents will be printed in the books. Registration brochures are now available in Spanish and to help with local promotion, newspaper and radio ads will be available to customize for local use – and in 2003, Imagination Library polo shirts will be available.

Where do we go from here? On that December day, Dolly told the crowd she felt the Imagination Library was now truly a national gift, but it is not yet universal. There may be 20 million children under 5 in the USA so there is a bunch more book mailing yet to be done. 20 million books each month? We had better get busy!