



Year In Review 2003

The Dollywood Foundation

In December of 2003, representatives from many of the communities that replicate Dolly's Imagination Library gathered in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee to share and dream. It was such a treat to see all of these folks gathered together. They came from all over the country and represented businesses, schools, United Ways, civic organizations, Chamber of Commerce, Parents as Teachers, education foundations and government. A diverse group indeed but tied together by their commitment to instill in every child a love for reading.

This event and Dolly's benefit concerts brought another successful year to a grand conclusion. By the end of the year 260 communities in 35 states had committed to providing Dolly's books to their preschool children. The number of children receiving books each month (63,000) was more than twice the number at the end of 2002 and the same doubling held true for the total number of books distributed for the entire year.

Dolly proudly presented a little girl from Alabama with the one millionth book, a milestone for the program that symbolized not only what has been accomplished but also the promise of even more significant accomplishments to come. In the last two years approximately 850,000 books have been mailed to children but in 2004 over 1.2 million books are projected to be mailed! Now that is some rate of growth.

This year also witnessed the release of the first study about the impact of Dolly's Imagination Library. Conducted by the High/Scope Research Educational Foundation, the study concluded "Parents overwhelmingly report that Dolly Parton's Imagination Library program is effective at increasing time spent reading with children, making children more interested in books, making parents more comfortable reading to children, and increasing parent awareness of their children's reading levels." Wow, could we have asked for a better conclusion?

In Sevier County, the home of the Foundation and Dolly, four \$15,000 Dolly Parton scholarships were created for the county's four high schools. Three local businesses – Citizens National Bank, Tennessee State Bank, Dixie Stampede and one non-profit—the Sevier County High School Alumni Association partnered with the Foundation to provide these substantial scholarships.

As successful as 2003 has been, we all share the belief that we have just barely scratched the surface. Ahead of us lies many exciting possibilities: a presence in all 50 states, entire states adopting the program, a new web based data base/book ordering system and our first international community.

In the end, however, it all comes back to books and children. The Imagination Library continues to offer books of the highest quality. Wonderful books are made even better by our commitment to customize and personalize the titles as much as practical. Consequently we have bi-lingual books, letters from Dolly in the books, reading tips for parents in some of the books, personalized mailing labels and the ability to add special messages. These are indeed books to be excited about and they allow us to be a part of a special moment in tens of thousands of homes each and every month – when a child takes the book out of the mail box and says, "read it to me!!" What a blessing.