

Year In Review 2004

The Dollywood Foundation

On June 18, 2004 Dolly, Governor Phil Bredesen of Tennessee, Barney (yes, the purple dinosaur) and about 1000 children and parents gathered at Dollywood to celebrate another dream come true. On this day, the state of Tennessee announced it was joining forces with Dolly to provide the Imagination Library to every child under 5 in the entire state. Just think, for the first time a state guaranteed that every child within its borders will have access to quality books and the joy they inspire.

It was indeed a landmark day but probably just a hint of what we can expect down the road. During 2004 discussions about a statewide Imagination Library were launched in half a dozen states.

The number of participating communities continued to soar. At the close of the year 375 communities in 39 states now provide Dolly's Imagination Library for their children. In December, for the first time ever, the number of children receiving books each month surpassed 100,000 and brought the yearly total of books to 980,000. The magnitude of this growth can be better understood when one considers this – just four short years ago the Foundation and its partners mailed 74,000 books and today we mail more than that each month!

As the year drew to a close, the new database system was launched creating a much easier way to enter children into the database. The combination of these technological improvements and the generosity of Dolly, Dixie Stampede, Dollywood and our corporate sponsors secured all of the overhead required to bring a book to every home. As a result, communities continue to pay for only the cost of the book and its mailing. It seems economic forces usually conspire to only increase cost so it is gratifying to know that the annual cost of the Library is still the same as it was 4 years ago. However, now for that same \$27, the books have a higher retail value, six are bi-lingual, three have reading tips for parents, two have personal messages from Dolly and all greet each and every child with the same message – we love you!!

The heart and soul of Dolly's Imagination Library is the community champion. In 375 communities the business, philanthropic, educational, and government leaders have summoned the will and the resources to make this happen for their children. They have also created companion programs, inspired new communities, led the discussions for statewide replication and affirmed the impact of the Library through their own surveys. A summary of these surveys was released in December.

Dolly and her Foundation family have much to celebrate. Perhaps the most compelling summary of the year was best expressed by a parent in a letter to her local community champion. "I really can't thank you enough. Words, ironically, cannot express what a remarkable gift you have given us."