



Year In Review 2005

The Dollywood Foundation

On June 18, 2004 Dolly, Governor Phil Bredesen of Tennessee, Barney (yes, the purple dinosaur) and Numbers usually tell about half the story. So let's first tell the numbers side of the Imagination Library 2005 story.

It was another year of exponential growth. The number of communities soared from 385 to 566 and the total number of books given for the year virtually doubled to 1.9 million. In December of 2005 the total number of children enrolled in the program crossed the 200,000 threshold and now sits right at 215,000.

The Imagination Library's first venture into a statewide universal program in Tennessee finished the year with just under 90 of the state's 95 counties participating in the program. Just think over 75% of all the preschoolers in Tennessee now have access to books each and every month.

Pretty impressive, don't you think? However as impressive as the numbers appear, it is the stories behind those numbers that truly measure the depth of the Imagination Library. For starters, those 566 communities represent thousands of local organizations who, in turn, represent tens of thousands of donors and supporters. In 2005, we saw more local school systems and civic organizations come on board as sponsors. The United Way continued to be an important part of our network as they connected the Imagination Library to local businesses, Chambers of Commerce, Success by 6 strategies, and the educational community.

In Tennessee, the statewide initiative was led by the Governor's Books from Birth Foundation. They worked with private and public leaders in every single county in the state.

Now consider the 1.9 million books. With every book there was a person who handed out a registration form and who entered the information into the database. Each month, an entirely different network of folks that spanned the entire world printed the books, shipped them, sorted them, labeled them, carried them in the mail trucks, and placed the book in the mail box. And at the end of 2005, another wonderful feature was added – each book will now arrive in its very own clear polybag in order to better protect this precious cargo.

Every book also represents all of the time and effort invested by a small group of experts who for every book selected considered another half a dozen possible alternatives. Three of the books, with the help of Penguin Group USA, were turned into theatrical productions that were unveiled during the summer at Dollywood. Dolly's Imagination Playhouse brought these books to life and touched the hearts of thousands of families. Moreover, Dolly celebrated the premiere with over 250 local sponsors of the Imagination Library from all the country who were attending our Homecomin' 2005.

Dolly's Imagination Library has become a quilt of a thousand patches. Yet the one story that remains central to the work is the story that now unfolds 215,000 times each month – a moment of promise and discovery.

Dolly captured that moment in her song "I Believe In You" that she wrote for the Imagination Playhouse.

"This big ol' world is full of dreams and possibilities
The train of life is filled with hope and opportunities
So stay on track and don't look back
Learn the rules and know the facts
Clickety, clickety, clickety clack
I believe in you!"