



Year In Review 2000

The Dollywood Foundation

The passage of each day brings more attention to early childhood development. Whether the topic is brain research, language skills, motor development, socialization or literacy skills, the verdict has been delivered -- the years between birth and five are the most critical time in the development of a child.

For the past four years, the Foundation's Imagination Library quietly went about its business to provide children and parents an inspirational gift of a book each month. During 2000, Dolly's Imagination Library debuted as a national organization. Its emergence on the national front focused new light on the program and brought to an end the depiction of the program as merely a nice gesture from Dolly and her friends for the children of her hometown. Now, the Imagination Library is seen as a pioneer, a trendsetter and something, which can and should be replicated throughout the entire country.

In Sevier County, over 150,000 books have now been distributed to 6700 children. The Foundation's Imagineer reads at 30 locations throughout the county, strengthening the connection between reading and fun. To further document this effort in January, 2001, the Foundation will release the findings of a study conducted during 2000. A series of interviews conducted by Dr. Jinx Watson of the Department of Information Sciences at the University of Tennessee will explore the impact of the books on the children and their families.

During 2000, the Foundation and the Sevier County High School Alumni Association joined forces to create the Dolly Parton Scholarship at Sevier County High School. Eventually, the scholarship will attain a level, which will provide the recipient virtually a full scholarship at a state-supported institution.

For evermore, the year 2000 will mark the beginning of the Foundation's journey to replicate Dolly's Imagination Library. In each community, a local champion has emerged to finance the cost of the books and the mailing. In some cases, the Imagination Library joins other existing services for children and families and in others, it remains a stand alone effort. In all communities, however, it is locally owned and crafted to reflect the unique personality of the community. At the end of 2000, five other communities in three states have implemented the Library and half a dozen more are waiting in the wings.

This replication effort will produce some substantial numbers. The monthly distribution has already climbed to over 5000 books and by the end of 2001 it should surpass 15,000. By the end of 2003, there will hopefully be 100 communities providing each child under 5 a book per month.

Throughout the year the Foundation has negotiated with publishers to improve the quality of the individual titles while maintaining, if not lowering, the cost. Beginning in 2001, the Foundation will unveil the new Imagination Library in partnership with Penguin Putnam. The 60 titles, carefully selected by the Foundation's Book Selection Committee, address the educational and developmental needs of children. However, the fun is not forgotten and there are ample books which celebrate the playful side of a child's experience.

This year has indeed been a memorable one for the Foundation. A national replication effort is an ambitious project, even for a talented and determined Dolly Parton. Let us never forget, however, that the Imagination Library always leads off with *The Little Engine That Could*. So much like the Little Engine, when you walk by the Foundation's office, or listen in to the quiet conversations among Dolly, the local champions and the corporate sponsors, there is no doubt that you will hear "I think I can...I think I can...I think I can....I THINK I CAN!!!!"