

NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release

United Way
of Fort Smith Area



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United Way partners with Dolly Parton's Imagination Library

(March 11, 2007, FORT SMITH, AR) — General tips from Parents as Teachers National Center, Inc. for sharing books with your child:

- Ensuring Children's Success
- Providing Basic Needs
- Building Adult Independence
- Building Strong Communities

- Read with your child for at least 15 minutes every day.
- Pick a quiet place. Turn off television and radio.
- Sit close together so your child can see the pictures while you read.
- Use your voice to keep your child's attention. Be playful with sounds; use different voices for different characters; exaggerate rhyming words.
- Follow your child's lead. Let your child turn the pages.
- Talk about the pictures he or she points to.
- Stop when your child seem ready to stop.
- Re-read a book as often as your child wants. Repetition helps promote language skills and reading readiness.
- Have fun together.

From *The Little Engine That Could*:

*Try to be the first one up the mountain,
The highest flying dreamer in the sky.
Try your best to be an inspiration
For others who are still afraid and shy.
Try to make the most of every moment
If you fail, get up and try again.
Try each day a little harder
If you never try, you never win.*

"I think I can, I think I can," the refrain from the courageous *The Little Engine That Could* is a story of optimism read to children since 1930 and one remembered by many adults today. This classic tale of the power of positive thinking is the first book of 60 that will be mailed free to the kindergarten class of 2011 – infants born on or after September 1, 2006 – registered for Dolly Parton's Imagination Library in the Fort Smith School District.

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In partnership with Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, United Way's Women's Leadership Circle is targeting at-risk children and providing them with a book a month from birth to age five. Ten percent of giving to WLC is allocated to a community impact fund. This year WLC used more than \$8,000 for the Library. Proceeds from WLC's Power of the Purse added nearly \$5,000 to provide books.

"It is known that more than 50% of children entering kindergarten in Fort Smith perform two to three years behind their developmental norm. It is also known that families living in poverty have less than 10 children's books in the home. United Way's early literacy initiative is working to break the barriers to help children succeed," noted Ann Dawson, Women's Leadership Circle Co-Chair.

"Our community needs to focus on success for our children. Putting books in the hands of our children is a way of promoting their success," said Angela Tilley, Executive Director, United Way of Fort Smith Area.

Dolly Parton began Imagination Library in her home state of Tennessee because she believed that income should not be a restriction for children to have books in their homes. The popular initiative has spread to hundreds of communities.

The program is designed to mail a new, age-appropriate hard-cover book each month to every child registered from birth to age five – just as they prepare for kindergarten. *Look Out Kindergarten, Here I Come* is the final book each child will receive.

"Knowing how to read is the basis for what we all do everyday," continued Tilley. "As a community, we are setting these children on a path of success to help prepare them for kindergarten. The program is available in the Fort Smith School District. As funds become available, we will be increasing our service area."

The community can help support literacy and expose children to books early in life by sponsoring a child. For a \$27 donation, a sponsor provides a book a month for a year. A \$150 donation supports a child for the entire five years of the program.

To sponsor a child, send a check to United Way of Fort Smith Area, P.O. Box 2300, Fort Smith, AR 72902. To register a child – born after September 1, 2006 to age 5 and living in the Fort Smith School District, log onto www.unitedwayfortsmith.org for a form or call 782-1311 with the information.

United Way of Fort Smith Area's Women's Leadership Group is a powerful leadership network of women who strengthen our community through a focused investment of their time talent and treasure. Membership has grown to more than 100 women leaders who give \$1,000 as individuals or \$1,500 as a couple.

The United Way of Fort Smith Area serves Crawford, Franklin, Logan and Sebastian counties in Arkansas and LeFlore and Sequoyah counties in Oklahoma. United Way is an organization that gets things done for the communities we serve. Our mission is to improve lives by connecting people and resources in our six-county area.

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