



## The Rotary Club of Sedona News Release

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### **Local Rotary Clubs & ACF expand book program for preschoolers**

**July 29, 2016—Sedona—** Early childhood language and literacy programming expands throughout the Verde Valley as organizations join to promote Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library. Starting in August, children from birth to their fifth birthday living in the Verde Valley are eligible to receive a free, new, age-appropriate book each month mailed directly to their home.

The opportunity for a Verde Valley-wide program came this year when the Arizona Community Foundation of Sedona awarded the Rotary Club of Sedona a \$25,000 grant to partially fund the first year of expansion.

This start-up funding has prompted the Rotary Club of the Verde Valley (in Clarkdale/ Cottonwood) and the Rotary Club of Sedona Red Rocks to help register children for the program and develop a plan for future funding. Libraries in Clarkdale, Cottonwood and Camp Verde have teamed up with the Sedona and Beaver Creek Libraries as the primary locations for parents to register children. Northern Arizona Healthcare is helping to register all newborns in the Verde Valley. Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and Project Head Start (both federal programs focusing on the well-being and development of children under five years old) will expand their efforts to register children.

Jean Barton, a retired pediatrician, joined the Rotary Club of Sedona in 2014 when she learned of the club’s commitment to early childhood literacy. She now chairs the Imagination Library Committee, which is made up of volunteers from each of the three Rotary Clubs in the Verde Valley. Barton and the Rotary Clubs will be working with Arizona’s First Things First, Read On Arizona and other organizations dedicated to early childhood education to improve kindergarten readiness.

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“Children who are behind when they start school have an uphill climb,” Barton said. “They are more likely to require special education, become frustrated, demoralized, act out, and drop out of school early.” Barton said it’s important to focus resources and energy on the preschool years.

“The generous Arizona Community Foundation grant has allowed us to get the program started. However, the long term challenge is to identify funding through a grass-roots program identifying individuals, businesses, corporations and foundations committed to early childhood literacy,” she adds.

Imagination Library was first introduced to the Verde Valley in 2012 when the Rotary Club of Sedona sponsored the Sedona /Village of Oak Creek affiliate of Dolly Parton’s preschool book program. After glowing support from parents and children, the Rotary Club became determined to expand the program to the entire Verde Valley.

Proceeds from Rotary Club of Sedona’s Great Sedona Chili Cook-Off, the event’s generous sponsors and a handful of donors have provided primary funding sources for the Sedona/Village of Oak Creek program. In 2015, the Rotary Club of Sedona expanded the program to the Beaver Creek area with the help of the Red Rock Quilters, Lake Montezuma Women’s Civic Club and other donors.

Parents can register their children at any area Library or online at [imaginationlibrary.com](http://imaginationlibrary.com).

Donations to help support the Imagination Library can also be made at [sedonarotary.org](http://sedonarotary.org).

The Rotary Clubs of Sedona, the Verde Valley and Sedona Red Rocks are local affiliates of Rotary International, which works to improve lives in the areas of health, education, and economic development. For more information about Rotary or when the respective clubs meet, visit their websites at [rotary.org](http://rotary.org), [sedonarotary.org](http://sedonarotary.org), [rotarycluboftheverdevalley.org](http://rotarycluboftheverdevalley.org) and [sedonaredrocksrotary.org](http://sedonaredrocksrotary.org).

The Arizona Community Foundation works to expand philanthropy, harnessing the collective generosity of Arizonans to advance public will and create a better quality of life for all. For more information visit their website at [azfoundation.org](http://azfoundation.org).

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