



The Rotary Club of Sedona News Release

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Parents can register children under five for FREE books

July 29, 2016—Sedona—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.

Parents can register their children at any area library or online at imaginationlibrary.com or attend upcoming Verde Valley launch events to be held **Aug. 20**, 10 to 12 noon at libraries in Camp Verde, Clarkdale and Cottonwood.

The program is part of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library. The country music singer, created the Imagination Library in 1996. Since that time the program has distributed over 60 million books to pre-school children in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom. Currently, 971,505 children are enrolled. Books that are distributed are selected by a panel of noted educators and early childhood development specialists to help promote a passion for reading and learning.

The program 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.

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 individual donors.

Partial funding from the Arizona Community Foundation prompted the Rotary Clubs of the Verde Valley and Sedona Red Rocks to help register children for the program and develop a plan for future funding. Libraries in Clarkdale, Cottonwood and Camp Verde teamed up with the Sedona and Beaver Creek Libraries as the primary locations for parents to register children.

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Northern Arizona Healthcare is also 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, 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.

"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."

She says it's important to focus resources and energy on the preschool years.

"The science of brain development has clearly established that the first three years of life are the most critical time for brain development, when the neural pathways for language and literacy are established. Putting free books directly into the hands of parents and young children using Dolly Parton's Imagination Library overcomes many of the obstacles faced by busy parents with young children," Barton said.

"The books are engaging and toddlers are excited to receive a gift in the mail each month. If parents have fun talking and reading to their children every day starting in infancy, they will give their children a huge head start when they start school. Parents are still the key to the child's success," she adds.

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, sedonarotary.org, rotarycluboftheverdevalley.org and sedonaredrocksrotary.org.

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