

STARK COUNTY

Heart of Stark: Stark County Imagination Library celebrates enrollment milestone

Canton Repository

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In partnership with The Repository, every Monday, Stark Community Foundation highlights positive happenings in our community. Here's to Good News Mondays!

The Stark County Imagination Library recently reached its enrollment goal and celebrated a huge program milestone — more than 50% of the eligible children in our community are now enrolled and receiving free books each month.

To date, nearly 114,000 books have been mailed to more than 11,400 local children.

Through Stark Library's partnership with Dolly Parton's Imagination Library of Ohio, any child in Stark and Carroll counties from birth to age 5 is eligible to receive a new, age-appropriate book in the mail each month at no cost to the family, regardless of income.

Studies have shown the more a child reads and interacts with books, the greater their chances are for success. With Imagination Library, children enrolled from birth can develop a love of reading and receive up to 60 books by the time they turn 5.

“Simply having books in the home is proven to help develop those critical early reading skills, with parents more likely to read with their little ones,” said Mary Ellen Icaza, Stark Library CEO and executive director.

Stark Library has also expanded the reach of its Imagination Library by partnering with Aultman and Cleveland Clinic Mercy Hospitals to enroll newborns in the program. Through this partnership, our community's youngest citizens receive their first book on the day they are born.

Inspired by her father's inability to read and write, Dolly Parton started the Imagination Library in 1995 for children within her home county in Tennessee. Today, her program spans

five countries and gifts over 2 million free books each month to children worldwide through funding and assistance from local community partners.

Prior to 2019, Dolly Parton's Imagination Library was only available in pockets of Ohio, and only 13% of eligible kids had access to the program in Ohio.

Ohio First Lady Fran DeWine saw the impact the Imagination Library had in her own family's lives and wanted every child in Ohio to have the same opportunity. In 2019, she established the Ohio Governor's Imagination Library, which matches funds to help offset the cost of the program for local affiliates, including Stark Library. Since 2020, the Imagination Library has been available in all 88 counties of Ohio.

Learn more about the Stark County Imagination Library at www.starklibrary.org/dolly-parton-imagination-library.

Stark Community Foundation helps individuals, families, businesses and nonprofits achieve their philanthropic goals through a variety of charitable funds and strategic initiatives. Ranked in the top 10% of community foundations in the country, the foundation and its family of donors have granted \$230 million to nonprofits since 1963. Learn more at www.starkcf.org.