

(This script is a suggestion of what each person might say. It is offered to highlight the points we would like made by each speaker.)

VALERIE JACKSON – Master of Ceremonies (time 2 minutes)

Ladies and Gentlemen, I've been privileged to MC a lot of events in my life but none more hopeful or with as much promise as what we are here to witness today.

This is history in the making.

Seldom do we see the alignment of Opportunity with a willingness to take on monumental challenges...

Literacy is the foundation of a functioning society. It is the air we breath and the enabler that allows people to pursue their life's ambitions – without being literate, life can be a struggle. Being literate opens a world of opportunities....some might say it allows you to go between the lines

At a time when we are all concerned about the economy, we should begin our program today by recognizing that the health of our economy in Georgia is tied directly to the capabilities of our work force. Who better to make the connection between literacy and our economy than Mr. Dennis Lockhart, President of the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta and a champion of Literacy through his work as Co-Chair of the United Way of Metro Atlanta's Early Education Commission.

DENNIS LOCKHART (time 6 minutes)

*Dennis's job is to make the link between literacy and Georgia's economy. This is the **WHAT** part of the program. We need to hear if Dennis he has information he would like to use. He might say how much illiteracy costs Georgia business each year, use statistics like 1/3 of the Georgia's work force is functionally illiterate....Employers seek an educated and literate work force including businesses looking to relocate to a new city.*

After the hard facts linking literacy to our economy it would be good if he could add something like There is also a great human toll that comes with illiteracy.....wasted potential of course but it doesn't take much to understand that not having the skills needed to compete in this global society can drive some people to self destructive behavior. The fact that over ½ of Georgia's 60,000 inmates are functionally illiterate tell us that those people were faced with choices that you and I never had to confront. Also, the cost to house, feed, cloth and secure these people each day is a major drag on our State's economy....Just think what we could do with the money if we could cut that population in half someday. The days when a man could earn a living by the sweat of his brow will be greatly limited in the 21st century so.... it's increasingly important that Georgians acquire the skills that employers need not only to build a strong economy but of equal importance to have a successful life.

VALERIE (This is the **WHO** part of the program – time 4 minutes)

Thank you Dennis.....Well, there's the problem....so what are going to do about it? Today, you and I are going to witness something that, in my heart, I know will have a major impact on our State. We all know that Rotary International is one of the world's finest organizations. Georgia has benefited immensely from the work of Rotarians in everything from their support of local initiatives in education, homelessness and others... to a global campaign to eradicate Polio from the face of the world.

The Ferst Foundation for Childhood Literacy is a much newer organization but one that has in 10 short years managed to have a profound effect on our State. Robin Ferst has been at work in Georgia since 1999 and in that time she has built a program which now operates in 64 of our 159 Counties. Her foundation has delivered over a million two hundred thousand bookssent by name to children between birth and 5 years of age. Robin and her organization now send out over 42,000 books each month.....but they've hardly scratched the surface.

When you put these two powerhouse organizations together, I'm confident that it won't be long before kids in all 159 Georgia counties will be enrolled in this wonderful program. Together, these two great organizations, working in concert with a host of others, are building a new foundation for a more literate Georgia.

Robin Ferst is a fourth generation Atlantan whose family have been philanthropists since they've been here. Robin, who is also profoundly deaf, learned at an early age that books could open a whole new world to her. She went on to have a highly successful career in business and since 1999 when she retired from that world, has spent her time building the Ferst Foundation for Childhood Literacy.

It's my pleasure now to introduceand thank.... Ms.Robin Ferst for her tireless commitment to the children of our State.....Thank you Robin for the great work you do... (Robins shakes hands with Valerie)..... And now representing the 750,000 children between birth and five years of age, I'd also like to welcome 6 very special Georgians from Atlanta's Premier Academy and their teacher Ms. Gladys Gore. You know these kids are the future of our State. If we want them to hold good jobs, pay taxes and nurture their own kids for a brighter future..... now is the time to ensure that outcome.

Boys and girls, I have a present for you today. Each of you get your very own copy of The Little Engine That Could. This is the first book that all boys and girls get when they are enrolled in the Imagination Library program. You'll be receiving books each month until your 5th birthday when you graduate to Pre-kindergarten. Now we're going back in the back to read this book ...and...meet a very special lady.....

(Valerie exits stage with the kids while Robin starts her remarks)

ROBIN FERST (HOW and WHY – time 6 minutes)

Thank you Valerie, This is how our program works:

The Ferst Foundation's program starts with Dolly Parton's highly successful Imagination Library Program.

Registered children receive their very own free book every month at their homes through U.S. mail from birth until their fifth birthday.

Families also receive from us a "Ferst" library card, Parent Guide information with tips on how to read aloud with their child, and monthly newsletters featuring a book guide, child activity page, and local community literacy announcements.

Since sending our first book in March of 2000, we have delivered over 1,200,000 books to more than 72,000 Georgia children while keeping our program cost at only \$36/year

Investing in Young Minds:

Children who are poor readers are at a disadvantage throughout their entire school careers. Students who are not reading on grade level by end of 3rd grade are much less likely to graduate from high school.

Half of America's Below-Basic readers and even one-third of readers at the Basic level drop out of high school.

In 2007, 35% of Georgia 4th graders were reading below proficient levels

Luckily, one of the easiest ways to improve a child's school preparedness is the simplest – read to him or her daily.

As a society we cannot afford to postpone investing in children until they become adults, nor can we wait until they reach school age – a time when it may be too late to intervene.

Program Benefits:

Ours is the only program in Georgia that provides continual, monthly distribution of books to the home for the critical first five years of a child's life.

The Ferst Foundation Program eliminates the key reason why parents do not read to their child - lack of quality books available in the home.

It develops the habit of parent and child interaction that continues throughout the educational career of the child.

Local Community Action Teams raise the \$3/book cost from individuals, corporate sponsorships, and grants.)

Impressive Results:

According to a High Scope study, "85% of parents with children enrolled in the Ferst Foundation program reported that they read with their child almost once a day or more!"

"After partnering with the **Ferst Foundation**, Dr. DeJarnett, Superintendent of Morgan County Schools reports that 44% more children in Morgan County were 'Ready for Kindergarten' and our goal of 90% reading on grade level by the end of grade three has been met by the end of grade two!" Also, the Jasper County Family Connection's evaluation concluded that students participating in the Ferst Foundation program consistently had higher test scores than any other early learning program.

In our 2007 parent survey, 99% of participating families reported that the Ferst Foundation program was helpful in preparing their children for kindergarten, and 96% reported that their children "excitedly" look forward to the arrival of the Imagination Library books.

We are presently sending books to children in 64 counties in Georgia. We are here to celebrate that, with the help of our Rotary partnership, we will be able to expand into every county in Georgia. With Rotarians strengthening our local CAT teams around the State who have gotten us to our present level and helping us start ones where they don't yet exist, we will work together to

enroll all 748,000 children under five and give them the greatest start they will ever have to enter school ready to learn – **because children who read succeed.**

VALERIE (This is the **HOW** Rotary will do it's part. Valerie interviews the 3 DGs - time 9 minutes)

Thanks you Robin. You are truly an inspiration to us all ...and for you kids.....we know you will soon be enjoying the other great books in the Imagination Library....keep reading those books with your mommies and daddies and your life will be enriched by a whole new world of possibilites.

Now let me introduce the men who lead Rotary in Georgia and who will play a key role in taking this program to the four corners of our State . There are three Rotary districts each with a District Governor.....From District 6900, please welcome Governor Ted Propes, from District 6910, Governor Gary Moore, and from District 6920, Governor Kenan Kern.

Governor Propes, let me start with you....

How did the three of you, all operating in different parts of the state, decide to get together and help the Ferst Foundation?

GOVERNOR PROPES

Well Valerie, when you're elected as a District Governor you get trained with all the other DGs across the country. The three of us met through that process and decided we wanted to work together to accomplish more than any one of could do alone. It's a big job for each of us.....in my case covering 71 clubs from Metro Atlanta all the way to the Florida line...All together we have 204 Rotary Clubs in just about every city in our State.... In our year, the International President of Rotary, Mr. D.K. Lee from South Korea, asked each of us to get our clubs involved with literacy and to make a difference. The good news is we all liked each other so it's been a lot of fun building our friendships and working on something really important at the same time.

This year the three of us also held joint State wide Literacy conference at the Carter Center to get our clubs fired up about literacy and I think it's really going to work.

VALERIE

That's great....Now tell what was one thing told you that literacy was something that could fire up your clubs around the State?

GOVERNOR PROPES

When I learned that some states determine the number of new prisons cells to build each year based on the reading scores of fourth grade children, I saw that as an indictment of society and knew we had to do something. If books can help launch a successful life, then can we do anything less than to carry this wonderful program to the four corners of our State?

VALARIE

Governor Moore, How do you see 204 Rotary clubs tackling what to me looks like a monumental challenge?

GOVERNOR MOORE

Valerie, Rotary Clubs are made of community leaders who come from business, government, education and other professions and who want to improve their towns and cities. We know two things already. First, the Ferst Foundation for Childhood Literacy is a program that gets children ready for school during their most formative years....Children are not empty vessels waiting for the age of 5 to start learning. The Imagination Library is the vehicle we want to get behind. And second, we can not do this alone. There are only about 12,000 of us in Rotary and about 750,000 kids in our state that should benefit from this program.

VALERIE

Where do you start?

GOVERNOR MOORE

We know that there are great literacy projects going on in each of our communities already. We don't want to reduce our commitment to those projects but we do want Rotary to help spread the Ferst Foundation program to the other 95 counties in our State. The Ferst Program is organized around **Community Action Teams** or CATs and we think Rotary can provide leadership in getting new CATs started in the 95 counties where they don't already exist and reinforcing the ones that do. We can accomplish this objective and then to be a good partner with all the other groups that are doing equally important things to help break the cycle of illiteracy that for to long has plagued our State.

I would like every child under the age of 5 to have the same positive experience that I had as a child, and that my child had - which is having age appropriate books in the home starting at birth and continuing thereafter. This will only yield positive influences on the child and prepare him/her for school and a life of learning

VALERIE

Governor Kern, What more could you possibly add to what your colleagues have said?

GOVERNOR KERN

Well just to add that many of our cities have become or are striving to become Certified Literate Communities through the CLCP program. We believe what we are doing is a step in this direction...we want to coordinate with The United Way, the local public library in each community, public school and colleges, right down to the churches. We see the Ferst Foundation program as a common thread running throughout our State. Each city and town is unique, so addressing literacy must maximize the resources that are already there. We believe Rotarians are very capable, smart people who know how to get things done. Our job is to get people excited about the difference they can make in their own communities if they just put this issue on the front burner.

VALERIE

And what convinced you that this is such a worthy goal?

GOVERNOR KERN

With 1 in 5 kids in our State living in poverty and the fact that 61% of low-income families do not have a single book suitable for a child in their homes, I knew that was something Rotary could do something about. I have always observed that Rotary is at its best when we are doing for others....our motto is Service Above Self. As great as Rotary is, I know that we Rotarians are also very busy people with our work and with all the other things we have committed ourselves to do in our communities. I know that, when we all pull on the same end of the rope, we can truly make a difference and that's when it really feels great to be Rotarians. We have a lot of good fun and fellowship in Rotary but when we do something significant for the good of our fellow man, we know why Rotary exists.

(podium and mic are removed by stage hands)

Valerie, if it's OK with you I would like to bring another member of the Rotary team up to join us. This gentleman, Mr John Germ from Chattanooga, Tennessee, is a trustee with the Rotary Foundation and was sent here today on behalf of Rotary International President, Mr. D. K. Lee to make a very important announcement about Rotary and Literacy. I do want to mention that within Rotary circles, John is known as one of the voices of literacy and was the chief architect of the new Rotary initiative that you will hear about todayIt's my pleasure to welcome Mr. John Germ

JOHN GERM (time 7 minutes)

A hearty Rotary welcome to everyone here today for this very special event. I am John Germ, trustee of The Rotary Foundation.

As most of the people in this room know, Rotary has championed the value of literacy for many, many years. In fact, March is Literacy Month on the Rotary calendar.

In today's world, literacy is a basic requirement for success in life. Without literacy, education is not possible, and a rewarding, meaningful career or occupation is difficult. Not to mention the intangible -- but equally important -- feeling of joy we all can experience through reading. That's why in the past three decades alone, more than 16,000 Rotary clubs worldwide have supported literacy and numeracy programs for children and adults.

Today, it is my privilege to announce a groundbreaking collaborative relationship between Rotary International and the Dollywood Foundation that will help lift our literacy effort to the next level by promoting early childhood reading.

Under the agreement -- approved recently by the Rotary International Board of Directors -- Rotary clubs in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom are encouraged to support the Dollywood Foundation's Imagination Library program, which provides age-appropriate books to children from birth until they enter school, so that parents and other family members can begin reading to them as soon as possible. Exposure to reading for pre-schoolers -- especially in families where the effort to make ends meet might make children's books an unaffordable luxury - - gives them the head start they need to succeed in school and, later, as productive adults. Literacy can help break the cycle of poverty that keeps children -- and their families -- and entire communities -- from reaching their potential.

And as you just heard, the Rotary clubs of Georgia -- working with the Ferst Foundation -- will be the first on board under this new relationship. I know they will set the bar very high for the Rotary clubs that will become involved with the Imagination Library as word of this unique opportunity spreads.

Now it is my honor to introduce the amazing woman whose vision and commitment to literacy make this entire program possible: Star entertainer and dedicated philanthropist -- Dolly Parton.

DOLLY PARTON (the music starts and Dolly makes her entrance - time 20 minutes)

Walks on to 9 to 5 –sing whole song

Dolly has Remarks – this will be mostly thanking Rotary and Robin

Q & A – She would like to bring John Germ, Robin and the 3 District Governors back on stage to each ask her a question – they can pass a mic from one to another or Valerie can hold it. These are the questions to ask – and in this order

JOHN GERM: I am always asked why you have been so devoted to kids and books?

ROBIN: What would be your advice on making this a statewide program in Georgia – or in any state?

DG GARY MOORE: Dolly, everybody is talking about a stimulus package – do you have a stimulus package?

DG TED PROPES: What is your favorite children’s book?

DG KENAN KERN: Last Question – We hear you will soon release a children’s book – what is it and what else is going on with your work life?

(After the last question, Dolly will make it “funny” clear they need to walk off stage
She will then close with a bit she is working on now – part poem/part song
Dolly will then close and exit.)

VALARIE (time 2 minutes)

Thank you Dolly , Thank you Robin, Thank you Rotary International for bringing your gifts of hope and promise to our State. And thank you to our sponsors, Americasmart for hosting us in their beautiful new building and Tech Rentals for AV support.... I think you in the audience have all seen history in the making today. I believe that 20 years from now we’ll look back at this occasion and realize that this was the tipping point when Georgia began it journey to becoming **the most** literate State in the Nation....well maybe just behind Tennessee!

If you haven’t already signed in up to support this great program, you can still invest in the future Georgia by buying a stock certificate for only \$36 to support one child or go to our web site - www.ferstfoundation.org - to see how to get involved. .

.... ..Thanks again for being here today.

