

HILLSDALE

DAILY NEWS

FREE BOOK PROGRAM

Fundraiser to support Imagination Library By Nancy Hastings

HILLSDALE — A local mom is spreading the word about an upcoming fundraiser for a cause she truly believes in. Cheryl Schaerer of Hillsdale has two daughters, one of whom has benefited from Dolly Parton's Imagination Library and another who is currently benefiting. The Imagination Library fundraiser, Passport to Paris, will be held from 6-9 p.m. May 3 at Johnny T's Next Door, Hillsdale. Hosted by Hillsdale County Great Start, the event will include dinner, drawings, cash bar, silent auction, live auction and live music. Tickets are \$50 each and if purchased before April 18, there is entry into a drawing for the grand prize, a 42-inch, flat screen T.V. Imagination Library is a free book program for all children in Hillsdale County who are registered and are infants to age 5. "If they are registered, they receive a free book in the mail delivered right to their door each month," Great Start director Ginelle Skinner said.

Skinner tells parents that by reading regularly with their children during their preschool years, they are giving their children the biggest boost toward a successful education they will ever get. Schaerer agrees wholeheartedly. Her daughters, Brenna, 6, and Miara, 3, are examples of how reading improves and inspires outlooks. They got started with the program by a recommendation of a cousin, who told them about the benefits of the program. "They look forward to receiving a book each month," Schaerer said. "I'll announce somebody got some mail and they tear right into it and look at the pictures. It comes with their name on it and inside the book, it tells about the program." Schaerer said the books are age appropriate and have good lessons about sharing and getting along with others.

"We read everyday and every night," Schaerer said. "My husband and I are very adamant about it." Reading provides good family time and is something they can all do together or just to spend time one on one, she added. "My husband likes to read to them because he doesn't get that time that I spend with them, since I'm a stay-at-home mom," she said. The girls can remember the first book that came, one of their favorites, "The Little Train That Could." Brenna said another of her favorites is "Ladybug Girl." "The first thing Maira does is look at the pictures because she can't read yet," Schaerer said. "So, I ask her to tell me what the book is about from what the pictures tell her. Sometimes we try to do counting." Being a little older, Brenna picks out words she recognizes, reinforcing and building on her skills. Schaerer said both were premature when they were born and there's no doubt in her mind that their development has flourished with the program. "What's great is that the books are available to every child, no matter what the family income is," she said. Skinner said there are 841 children in Hillsdale County who are signed up for the program. "We do a lot of parent education about the importance of reading to children," Skinner said. "The Intermediate School District provides much of the fees, and any money raised goes directly to postage and books. We're proud of what the ISD does, but they absorb much of the cost and we're trying to see that the program continues."

Skinner said it costs \$25,000 for 10,000 books, with each book averaging \$2.30, including postage. The collaborative effort, along with ISD, Great Start and Dolly Parton's Dollywood, gives kids the boost they need at an early age, she added. Schaerer said the fundraiser is a great way to promote the program. "I hope more people get their kids signed up once they learn it's available to them," she said. "The binding time they can spend with their kids reading is irreplaceable." Skinner said once people get registered for the event, they get two tickets for the silent auction. She noted a live auction will also take place and there will be lots of cool prizes. "We hope the community will come out in force to support this great cause," Skinner said.



Cheryl Schaerer reads a new arrival from the Imagination Library to her daughters, Maira and Brenna.

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