



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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MISS BEAUFORT/JASPER COUNTY WINS DOLLY PARTON IMAGINATION LIBRARY COMPETITION

Columbia, SC – Nina Gilliam, Miss Beaufort/Jasper County 2006, has been named the winner of the Dolly Parton Imagination Library competition. Working with Jasper County First Steps, Gilliam raised \$2,500 and worked 62 hours for the program. For her efforts, Gilliam was awarded a grand prize of a trip to Dollywood and a meeting with Dolly Parton.

The competition, a partnership between the Miss South Carolina Pageant Association and S.C. First Steps to School Readiness, awards the pageant contestant who raises the most funds and/or logs the most volunteer hours for the Imagination Library. Gilliam was among 40 contestants and 36 teen contestants who raised a total of \$6,000 and volunteered hundreds of hours signing up children, helping at events, and promoting the Imagination Library.

“Nina has been in the trenches with Jasper First Steps staff promoting this program, and we are extremely grateful for her efforts to improve literacy for young children in our county,” said Jasper County First Steps Executive Director Cathy Gardner. “Through her hard work, more children in Jasper County from birth to age 5 will receive a hardcover, age-appropriate book mailed to their homes every month. Hats off to Nina – we are proud to be associated with her.”

Founded by Dolly Parton in 1988, the Dolly Parton Imagination Library provides free age-appropriate books to children age birth to 5 years. Many children receiving books might not otherwise have many quality books at their reading level in their homes. Children who register in their local communities are mailed one book per month through their fifth birthday. The initiative also invites the development of companion programs to further encourage families to read to their young children. First Steps partnerships in nearly 30 South Carolina counties are currently participating in the program, impacting over 23,500 children.

Gilliam will represent Beaufort/Jasper Counties in the upcoming Miss South Carolina Pageant. Pageant preliminaries will be July 4th-6th, and finals will be on July 8th. Each evening of competition will be held at 8 p.m. at the Spartanburg Memorial Auditorium.

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South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness ('First Steps') is a comprehensive, results-oriented statewide education initiative to help prepare children to reach school healthy and ready to succeed. Public and private support are combined through county partnerships to enable individual communities to address the unmet needs of young children and their families.

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