



MEDIA RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: January 8, 2020

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Read City USA to Log First Reading Minutes for Read Around the World Challenge

KNOXVILLE, Tenn.— In 2020, Read City USA will travel around the world 20 times. Challenge 2020 effectively doubles our 2019 goal and asks the community to collectively read 500,000 hours between January and December. Just over 2,000 hours have been logged so far.

At 10:15 a.m. on Monday, January 13, Mayor Jacobs will log his first official minutes of the 2020 challenge. This story time “flight” will depart from the Burlington Branch Library (4614 Asheville Hwy). He will be joined by students from Freedom Christian Academy, attendees of morning story time and library staff and will read *Violet the Pilot* by Steve Breen, *Those Magnificent Sheep in Their Flying Machine* by Peter Bently and David Roberts, and other books as time allows.

Some Read City USA Student Ambassadors may also be present. These ambassadors which represent many of our public, private and home schools are being tasked with promoting and encouraging Read City USA participation in their schools and will receive occasional challenges from the Mayor to spur reading and tracking.

Each school with an actively participating Ambassador representative will be entered into a drawing at the end of the spring semester for the opportunity to win one of two one-time \$2,020 grants. The grants were made possible by the following partners: The Allergy, Asthma and Sinus Center; Denark Construction; Friends of the Library; Hiatt Magical Vacations; Knox County Schools Partners in Education; Mobile Beats Entertainment; Outpatient Diagnostics; Stowers Cat; and Zack Ballinger.

The Burlington event will also mark the official kickoff of the *Reading Gives You Wings* book drive where members of the local media will represent a collection of schools with active Student Ambassadors as they compete to collect the most elementary-appropriate, new, hardbound books. The book drive will officially close on Friday, Feb. 7. All books will be donated to Great Schools Partnership.

On Monday, Feb. 10 at Wild Wings Café in Turkey Creek, all book drive participants are invited to celebrate the close of the book drive with the Mayor. This celebration will include a hot wing eating contest during which our media partners will compete to consume the highest number of hot wings in the fastest amount of time.

In 2019, Read City USA “landed” on the moon by hitting the 250,000-hour goal in late October. Total reading hours for the year reached just under 350,000.

Why Read City USA?

It is largely reported in this area that many of our third graders are not reading on grade level—a big problem because third grade is the academic year when students must know how to read to be able to learn. Worse, students who are unable to read at grade level in the third grade are more likely to stay behind throughout their academic careers, may never catch up to their classmates and have a higher rate of failing to complete high school at all.

This means Knox County will have fewer students ready to enter post-secondary education or trade schools. This translates to less students receiving advanced degrees or trade certifications and leaving Knox County without a ready workforce to attract new business to the community. Without consistently bettering our economic vitality, the skilled labor we do have may be more inclined to leave our community, perpetuating the cycle of being unable to attract new business.

Though a fun challenge, at its core Read City USA is a collaborative effort to help all children, regardless of their socio-economic background, learn to read early and well. This event is not exclusive to children and readers of all ages and skill levels are encouraged to participate.