



Contact:  
**Leslie Hale**  
Executive Director  
(706) 410-1912  
Leslie.Hale@booksforkeeps.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

## **ATHENIAN NAMED L'OREAL WOMAN OF WORTH, IN COMPETITION FOR \$25K GRANT**

ATHENS, GA. – NOVEMBER 2, 2015 – Athens resident Melaney Smith was unveiled as one of 10 L'Oreal Women of Worth today, just six years after founding a grassroots program to give books to children in need.

When Smith met a second-grader in 2009 who loved to read but had no books at home, she wanted to donate a few books.

“My first thought was why doesn't somebody DO something about this?” said Smith. “My second thought was: I am somebody. I can do something.”

Smith thought her involvement would end there. However, she quickly learned that many children from low-income families in her Athens, Ga., community face the same challenge – and that lack of access to books during the summer is a major contributor to “summer slide.” This well-documented learning loss affects children from low-income families at a significantly disproportionate rate, and is documented as a key contributor to the achievement gap.

She created a program that aimed to prevent summer slide by allowing children to choose and keep 12 high-interest books at the end of each school year. The program is based on research that pioneered this highly effective strategy. Smith reached out to Dr. Jennifer Graff, co-author and associate professor at University of Georgia College of Education, for assistance in developing the program.

"When Melaney approached me about her plan to turn our study into a program, I thought to myself, 'We had eight paid staff, millions of dollars in funding and a publisher handling fulfillment – and she wants to do this with none of those?!'” Graff said. “She did it, and she's still doing it.”

Smith's efforts are being recognized by L'Oreal Paris, through the 2015 Women of Worth program. Books for Keeps will receive a \$10,000 grant from L'Oreal, and is now competing with the other Women of Worth honorees for an additional \$25,000 grant.

“A \$25,000 grant would be a game-changer for an organization of our size,” said Leslie Hale, executive director of Books for Keeps. “We recently announced a plan to more than double our reach across Georgia, and the grant funds will go toward that expansion. With the community's help, we can reach more children in need.”

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[WWW.BOOKSFORKEEPS.ORG](http://WWW.BOOKSFORKEEPS.ORG)

The online voting competition extends through November 20, with a winner announced in December. Supporters can vote once per day at <http://www.lorealparisusa.com/en/women-of-worth/2015-honoree.aspx?profile=Melaney-Smith>.

“We need people to get out and vote – every day - for Books for Keeps” Smith said. “With only 10 organizations competing, every single vote will matter... and those votes mean more books for more children.”

For more information, contact [leslie.hale@booksforkeeps.org](mailto:leslie.hale@booksforkeeps.org) or (706) 410-1912.

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**About Books for Keeps:** Books for Keeps started as one woman’s effort to help a child who loved to read but had no books at home. It grew from a grassroots movement into a research-based program to end summer slide in Athens, Ga., by ensuring children have access to books when school lets out. The nonprofit was incorporated as a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization in 2011.

Books for Keeps distributes books to students ranging from pre-K through 12th grade. The flagship elementary school program, *Stop Summer Slide!*, is based on a University of Florida study that found giving economically-disadvantaged elementary school children each 12 high-interest books at the beginning of summer had an impact on reading achievement statistically similar to attending summer school. Since its founding, the organization has given 185,000 books away to children in Northeast Georgia.

Books for Keeps distributes 45,000 books each year in Athens, Atlanta, and Warrenton, Ga. It has plans to expand to 15 additional schools in Athens, Atlanta, and rural Georgia.

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