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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

BOOKS FOR KEEPS ASKS COMMUNITY TO GIVE THE GIFT OF READING TO KIDS IN NEED

ATHENS, GA. – Dec. 3, 2013 – As Santa’s elves kick into high gear for their main event, Books for Keeps is following suit, preparing to distribute books to 3,000 Athens children in 2014.

But the elves at the Books for Keeps workshop need help. As of December 2, Books for Keeps is still seeking sponsors for 1,135 children before year’s end.

It takes just \$25 to sponsor a child, providing 12 new or like-new books to read all summer long; community members and businesses can sponsor an entire classroom for \$500.

“Giving high-quality, high-interest books to at-risk children is proven to boost their reading achievement to the same degree as summer school – at a fraction of the cost,” said Leslie Hale, executive director of Books for Keeps.

“It’s also really exciting for the children we serve. Spring distributions at Books for Keeps feel a lot like Christmas – so it’s fitting that we reach out to folks at this time of year to help ensure that we can reach every child we’ve committed to serve.”

Earlier this year, the nonprofit announced plans to serve two additional Athens schools in 2014 – Oglethorpe Avenue Elementary and Winterville Elementary. In the previous school year, those two schools exceeded the threshold of 90 percent free or reduced-price lunch, a benchmark used by Books for Keeps to determine need.

With the addition of Oglethorpe and Winterville elementary schools, Books for Keeps is now committed to serve half of Athens-Clarke County’s 14 public elementary schools.

“We made a big commitment a couple of months ago to expand our program to meet the need at these two additional schools,” Hale said. “We’ve had great success getting donated books so far this year. But we need the community’s help to fill in the gaps.”

Additionally, Books for Keeps is planning to serve two new schools outside of Athens in 2014 – Dunbar Elementary School in Atlanta and Freeman Elementary School in rural Warrenton. Books for Keeps is working to find funding support in the service areas surrounding those schools.

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The Books for Keeps program is unique, inviting each child in the schools served to choose 12 high-quality, new or like-new books to take home and keep just in time for summer. With the help of the Clarke County School District and researchers at The University of Georgia, Books for Keeps is evaluating the impact of this program on the reading achievement of those children served.

Books for Keeps works year-round to collect donated books for the program, but donations still only account for 25 percent to 30 percent of books distributed to the children in the program. Where those donations fall short, Books for Keeps seeks sponsors. Donations allow Books for Keeps to purchase books on deep discount – brand new books for as little as \$.35 each.

This holiday season, Books for Keeps is asking the community to consider giving a child the gift of reading.

Note to photo and assignment editors: Books for Keeps will be holding two small distributions to pre-school students at Oglethorpe Avenue Elementary and Fowler Drive Elementary on December 11 and December 17, respectively. There will be opportunity for photo at both distributions.

For more information, contact leslie.hale@booksforkeeps.org or (828) 713-2132.

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 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.

Books for Keeps distributed 40,000 books to Athens-Clarke children in the 2012-13 school year, including 24,000 through *Stop Summer Slide!*

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