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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

BOOKS FOR KEEPS ANNOUNCES RACHEL WATKINS AS FIRST PROGRAM MANAGER

ATHENS, GA. – November 20, 2015 – Athens resident and lifelong literacy advocate Rachel Watkins is joining the Books for Keeps team.

Watkins will begin work in January with Athens-based Books for Keeps, as the nonprofit's first-ever program manager. She will spearhead the organization's expansion into 15 new elementary schools in the next five years, part of an ambitious strategic plan by the 5-year-old organization. In that time, Books to Keeps intends to reach every elementary school in the Clarke County School District, five new schools in Atlanta, and three new schools in rural counties.

In her new role, Watkins will be the second employee ever hired by Books for Keeps, joining executive director Leslie Hale.

"Rachel's skill set as a people connector, her deep roots in the Athens community, and her affinity for all things literacy position her perfectly to help us almost triple our program reach," Hale said. "I'm looking forward to working with Rachel to harness the tremendous momentum behind this organization, and to put it toward placing books in the hands of more children."

Watkins, who was born and raised in Mississippi, moved to Athens to earn her master's degree in adult education in the early 1990's. She spent ten years in Monterey, California, before moving home to Athens in 2005. Since 2011, Watkins has worked part-time at Avid Bookshop.

"As literacy, books, and education, have been a focal point both personally and professionally my entire life, joining the Books for Keeps team is a natural fit," Watkins said. "I am honored to be given the opportunity to help grow Books for Keeps and look forward to the work ahead."

Watkins has four children in the Clarke County School District. Her husband is a paramedic in West Africa with International S.O.S.

Books for Keeps is currently serving 3,800 children at 10 schools each spring through its flagship program, Stop Summer Slide! By the end of its expansion, the organization will be in 25 schools, serving an estimated 11,000 children.

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

WWW.BOOKSFORKEEPS.ORG

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.

Books for Keeps distributed 50,000 books to students in the 2014-15 school year, including 45,000 books given to K-5 students through *Stop Summer Slide!*

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