



UNITED WAY OF METROPOLITAN DALLAS' ANNUAL READING DAY EVENT TO IMPACT AND INSPIRE NORTH TEXAS STUDENTS

Honorary Chair Mrs. Laura Bush Will Read to Local Students in Support of Early Literacy

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DALLAS (March 1, 2024) – [United Way of Metropolitan Dallas](#) continues to march toward its centennial anniversary in 2025 with the largest, most impactful [Reading Day](#) in the organization's history. As the inaugural event of the Aspire United Volunteer Series, presented by Texas Instruments, nearly 1,200 community volunteers will engage and inspire over 20,000 young students across 42 area campuses on Friday, March 1. During United Way Reading Day, presented by Atmos Energy, Honorary Reading Day Chair Mrs. Laura Bush will lead volunteers to encourage early literacy by reading to young scholars. Students will also have the opportunity to receive free books from volunteers who participate in book drives.

As the Honorary Reading Day Chair, Mrs. Bush will read "Our Great Big Backyard," the book she co-authored with her daughter, Jenna Bush Hager, to a group of first-grade students at Dallas ISD's J.N. Ervin Elementary School. Mrs. Bush is a vocal advocate for early reading initiatives, cultivating that passion while working as a public-school teacher and librarian. As First Lady, Mrs. Bush created and developed multiple initiatives and programs aimed at equipping children with fundamental skills to become lifelong learners.

The [Laura Bush Foundation for America's Libraries](#) is one such initiative. Since its inception in 2002, it has awarded \$21 million to over 3,600 schools across the country to expand, update, and diversify their book and print collections. This year, the Laura Bush Foundation has selected J.N. Ervin Elementary School as one of the recipients. A complete list of grant awardees will be revealed in May at the Laura Bush Book Club, an *Engage at the Bush Center* event, presented by NexPoint.

"I am thrilled to join the nearly 1,200 volunteers reading in classrooms as part of United Way's Reading Day," said Mrs. Laura Bush, Honorary United Way of Metropolitan Dallas Reading Day Chair. "By reading to students in your communities, you can inspire a lifelong love of reading. I am grateful that United Way of Metropolitan Dallas is highlighting the importance of early childhood literacy in my home community, and I encourage all Americans to be a part of this special day."

United Way of Metropolitan Dallas is honored Mrs. Laura Bush continues her family's long-standing association with the organization. Former President George W. Bush and Mrs. Bush served as honorary co-chairs for the Unite Forever Gala, part of the United Way's 90th anniversary celebration in 2014, in addition to their investment as members of the Ruth Sharp Altshuler Tocqueville Society. The previous year, Mrs. Bush kicked off the United Way of Metropolitan Dallas 2013-2014 annual campaign, resulting in the largest fundraising campaign to date for United Way in Dallas.

"Reading is the door to a world of endless possibilities for every North Texas child, enabling dreams to become reality and knowledge to become power," said Jennifer Sampson, McDermott-Templeton President and CEO of United Way of Metropolitan Dallas. "By igniting curiosity through the joy of reading, we empower young readers to reach their full potential. Strong reading skills provide a solid foundation for students to thrive throughout their educational endeavors, laying the groundwork for financial stability and good health later in life."

United Way of Metropolitan Dallas focuses on third grade reading proficiency as one of its key Aspire United 2030 goals, with the aim to increase by 50% the number of North Texas third graders reading on grade level by the year 2030. Children who read at grade level by third grade are five times more likely to graduate high school ready for success in college or a career. Reading Day is part of a comprehensive effort by the organization to create lasting change by providing local children with the tools they need to succeed in the classroom and beyond.

"Texas Instruments believes that giving joined with volunteering makes the biggest impact, and our long-time support for United Way through investments and time is a great example of that," said Andy Smith, TI's director of Giving and Volunteering and executive director of the TI Foundation. "We're excited about United Way's centennial and the many opportunities TI employees will have to make a difference in our community through the Aspire United Volunteer Series. This includes the always-popular Reading Day and working with students to introduce them to new worlds and adventures through books."

"A love of reading is essential to fueling bright minds and healthy futures for our kids, and United Way of Metropolitan Dallas shares our dedication to providing the resources children need to read at grade level by third grade," said Liz Beauchamp, Atmos Energy vice president of governmental and public affairs. "Atmos Energy is a proud supporter of United Way Reading Day and its drive to encourage early literacy, which helps spark a love of reading. In partnership with United Way, this is one of the many ways we are Fueling Safe and Thriving Communities every day of the year."

Inspiring topics for this year's Reading Day books center around the power of seeking greatness, dreaming big, and reaching for the stars. These themes promote a love of books and reading by engaging the young, curious minds of preschoolers and young elementary school students.

Individuals interested in supporting early literacy initiatives with United Way this month are invited to participate in virtual book drives, create personalized bookmarks for students or invest in the organization's Once Upon a Month program, which provides free books to young children each month. A gift of \$36 will provide a local child with books for a year. To learn more, visit unitedwaydallas.org/readingday.

In 2025, United Way of Metropolitan Dallas will celebrate 100 years as the premier social change organization serving North Texas. The centennial anniversary year will include a full slate of events, spotlighting the ways the organization will impact the future of the region and create positive lasting change in the community for the next 100 years.

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About United Way of Metropolitan Dallas

United Way of Metropolitan Dallas is a social change organization that unites the community to create opportunity and access for all North Texans to thrive. We are committed to being a fully inclusive, multicultural, antiracist movement so that we can drive transformative change and advance racial equity in the areas of education, income and health – the building blocks of opportunity. We encourage every North Texan to join this movement and Live United. To give, advocate or volunteer, visit UnitedWayDallas.org.

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