Designing for the HOLIDAYS

- REACH OUT AND READ ALABAMA
- HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE
- DELICIOUS, EASY APPETIZERS
Dr. Seuss said it best in his book, I Can Read with My Eyes Shut! “The more you read, the more things you will know. The more you learn, the more places you’ll go.” And, that’s a primary mission for about 300 Alabama pediatricians and Reach Out and Read-Alabama.

Reach Out and Read-Alabama has helped put more than 1.6 million books in the hands of Alabama’s children. Most of these children are in lower income households and books are a luxury the family often cannot afford. But, the gift of a book is more than the gift of adventure… it’s an opportunity for bonding between parent and child.

“In Alabama, about 91 percent of our children receive their medical care from either their family physician or pediatrician,” explained Reach Out and Read-Alabama’s Statewide Coordinator, Polly McClure. “The way Reach Out and Read works is to use those physicians and medical professionals to introduce the importance of reading to their children.”

According to the 2017 Alabama Kids Count Data...
Book, published by VOICES for Alabama’s Children, about 34 percent of children under the age of five live in single-parent households and about 27 percent live in poverty. Reach Out and Read-Alabama works to fill some of the gaps a struggling, single parent may face in the early development of their child.

“For most single-parent households, it’s difficult and stressful to make the necessary choices to get your family through the day. Oftentimes sitting down with a book they get from their pediatrician is the only quality time a parent may have with their child. That quality time simply begins when you give them a great book and ask them to read aloud to their child. The bond strengthens and builds from that point. We also know it changes a child’s brain when you read to them every day,” McClure said.

By “prescribing” books to children and encouraging families to read together, children acquire early language skills and build a better foundation for a lifetime of learning.

“There is definitely a difference with children who are read to on a regular basis. We may have younger moms that may not think that giving a book to a 6-month-old is something they need to think about as important for that child. When they are given a book by a physician and told this is a great way to bond with your child even though that baby can’t read yet that parent talks to their child, describes colors, shapes and numbers and tells the story in a different way,” said Dr. Vanosia Faison, chief medical officer for Health Services, Inc. (HSI).

Dr. Faison, who practices Internal Medicine and Pediatrics, has witnessed many successes through the Reach Out and Read-Alabama program.

“We want to make sure the children we see at HSI are ready to start kindergarten by having a love of learning from reading,” Dr. Faison said. “When they come in for their sick-child visits they may not get a new book, but they get gently used books from the waiting rooms. For those children older than 5 years, it’s just as important for them to have books as well, so we have them in the waiting room for our older children and teenagers. Our children know they may be coming to HSI today to see a doctor and get a shot, but they’ll get a book, too.”

To provide books for the program, fundraisers are held and partnerships are created with volunteer organizations like the Public Relations Council of Alabama. There are more than 67 medical practices and clinics across Alabama participating in Reach Out and Read, an arm of the Alabama Chapter - American Academy of Pediatrics.

“We created Change for a Child earlier this year as a way for our members to donate money during our monthly meetings and fellowship activities,” said Megan Gramer Hughes, president of PRCA Montgomery. “We have these wonderful memories of our favorite books from our childhood and wanted to be part of the program providing these lifelong memories for children in Alabama. It’s an honor to be part of the Reach Out and Read-Alabama program and bring adventure and continuous learning opportunities to our families here in the River Region.”

To learn more about Reach Out and Read-Alabama, make a donation, or to partner with the organization, visit www.ro-alabama.org.