

"Imagine the apprehension that a child might feel when suddenly faced with a visit to the clinic, or the prospect of being seen by multiple physicians and caregivers," said **Ed Howell**, Vice President and CEO, UVA Medical Center, in a letter to Soho in June, following the organization's 10,000-book donation. "This wonderful contribution nurtures both the spirits and the minds of our smallest patients, and instills a love of reading while at the same time offering a welcome distraction during the healing process."

The Soho Center and UVA Children's Hospital are a natural fit, explains Hospital Education Program Director **Nancy Ellen Artis**. "UVA Children's Hospital and the Soho Center share a number of objectives in the area of literacy," she says. "Both believe that getting children's literature into the hands of parents and children is one of the most important aspects of promoting early literacy."



Jeanna Beker, founder and director of The Soho Center

"We feel strongly that a way to make a difference in kids' lives is to promote school readiness and school success, and children's literacy is a big key to that," says **Jeanna Beker**, founder and director of The Soho Center. "We want children to have access to really high-quality books."

Supporting quality early-childhood education has been the work of Beker's life. She started Soho 41 years ago in New York City, where the nonprofit's initial central endeavor, The Children's Energy Center, evolved into the largest early childhood education program in Manhattan. Through her role as director of The Soho Center, Beker worked with several universities and colleges to train teachers in early childhood education and was chosen to establish the United Nations Child Care Centre.

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In 1989, Jeanna and her husband George — president of a PR and media firm who is deeply involved in Soho's work — moved to Central Virginia, drawn by our region's natural beauty. On the heels of the move, they made two pivotal decisions: Soho would widen its reach and help not hundreds of children, but thousands. Secondly, Soho's services would all be offered free of charge.

"Soho is always looking for what we can do that doesn't duplicate what other groups are doing," Jeanna says. "Our goal is to help the largest number of children, many of whom are low-income, and do it in a meaningful, substantial, and cost-effective way."

Over the years, these efforts evolved to include a number of initiatives. Largest among these is the book donation program, which gifted 50,000 books in Virginia to children and child-related programs in 2013. Soho also created a free children's literacy website filled with tips for parents and teachers. Among its other early childhood education efforts, Soho set up a model classroom and resource library with more than 18,000 books and extensive educational materials, designed to support training and professional development for childcare providers and teachers. In addition, Soho created the [Virginia Health Information Project](#), an online resource providing the public with national, state- and county-specific health, safety and nutrition information.

Soho's Book Giveaway Program aims to promote children's literacy, school readiness and school success through exposure to high-quality books from a young age. In 2013, Soho gave away over 50,000 brand-new, hardbound children's books to organizations throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia. This included the 10,000 books donated to UVA Children's Hospital, and 30,000 books to Virginia's 1,000 Head Start classrooms, as well as books to begin mini-libraries in area churches. Each of these groups represents a touchpoint — another opportunity for Soho to connect a child to a book and in so doing, connect that child to the world.

While 50,000 children's book donations was an impressive feat in 2013, Soho is on the cusp of tripling that in 2014, with the goal of giving away 150,000 children's books — 60,000 to UVA Children's Hospital alone.



"This book project is immense," says Artis. "Its impact will be felt throughout the Commonwealth and beyond. After all, what could be better than coming to the doctor and leaving with a 'mine forever' book? We are deeply grateful to the Soho Center not only for its vision but for its generosity to UVA Children's Hospital."

Soho also plans to expand its book donation program to all Boys & Girls Clubs in Virginia, send an additional 30,000 books to Virginia's Head Start classrooms and donate 30,000 books to 700 Title I Kindergartens and First Grade classrooms at 84 schools in Central Virginia — efforts that will help over 75,000 children. All of these books will be provided free of charge, something made possible by individual and corporate donations, grants and generous support from book publishers. Every \$100 The Soho Center receives allows it to give away \$1,000 worth of brand-new books.

"It is a real joy to be part of giving books away, especially of this quality, to all these places in Virginia," Jeanna says. "I look forward to becoming an old lady who has this wish come true to be able to do more and more of these good deeds because other people help me do it. And then I become one link in this chain of giving and doing good deeds that brings this kind of joy and positive childhood memories and great educational experiences to kids. I feel really honored to be part of that."

While the goals of supporting early literacy skills and developing lifelong readers are vital, here at UVA Health System, these books do even more. Perhaps the most touching stories of how the Soho books help our patients come from Health System staff who have been able to see the impact of this program close up. **Patricia Carrubba**, Child Care Teacher Supervisor at the Hospital Education Program shared one such story with Jeanna, from a day when she gave a book to a 3-year-old who was visiting Kluge Children's Rehabilitation Center.

"I gave a book to a little girl this morning and her mother said, 'Do you have any idea what you have done for my child? You gave her a book the last time we were here — and now she is a book lover! She will not go ANYWHERE without a book!'" recalls Carrubba, before adding:

"That made MY day!"