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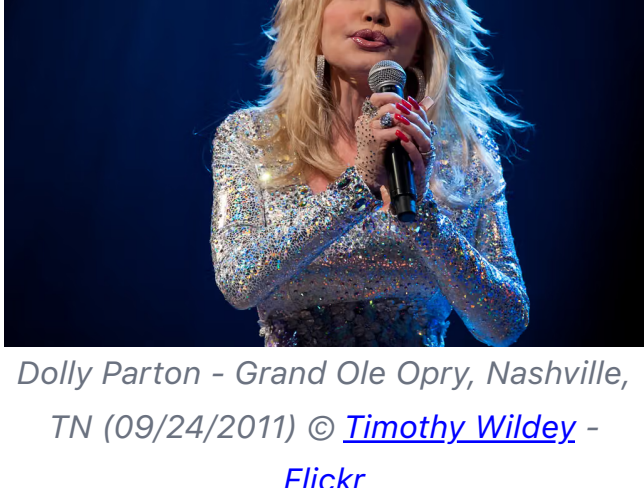
Dolly Parton's health care legacy: Two decades of giving

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Dolly Parton, who died Aug. 25, 2026, at 80, funded research at Vanderbilt, a women's health center in her home county and the Knoxville children's hospital that bears her name.

Dolly Parton gave Vanderbilt University Medical Center \$1 million in April 2020. The Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority went on to commit [\\$955 million](#) to develop Moderna's mRNA-1273 COVID-19 vaccine through licensure, and the federal government later added up to \$1.525 billion to manufacture and deliver the first 100 million doses.



Dolly Parton - Grand Ole Opry, Nashville, TN (09/24/2011) © [Timothy Wildey](#) - [Clickr](#)

Mark Denison, M.D., director of Vanderbilt's Division of Pediatric Infectious Diseases, told [The New York Times](#) in November 2020 that Parton's gift paid for what he called the "critical" early stages of the work.

Parton died Tuesday in Nashville, [her family announced](#). She was 80. A statement attributed to her nephew Bryan Seaver said she died "peacefully." No cause was released.

Parton, known as the queen of country music, wrote more than 3,000 songs and recorded 25 No. 1 country singles in a career that began with her first record in 1959. She won 11 Grammy Awards, including the Recording Academy's lifetime achievement award in 2011, and her catalog includes standards like "Jolene," "I Will Always Love You," "Coat of Many Colors" and "9 to 5."

Her health care contributions covered roughly two decades: early-stage research at Vanderbilt, a women's health center in her home county, a pediatric cancer program and, in February, an independent children's hospital in Knoxville that now carries her name.

Related content: [Dolly Parton Children's Hospital CEO talks about 'transformational' gift](#)

'That little seed money'

Parton's 2020 gift created the [Dolly Parton COVID-19 Research Fund](#) at Vanderbilt and supported three pandemic research projects, one of them connected to the Moderna vaccine, according to Najj Abumrad, M.D., the Vanderbilt surgeon and longtime friend whose conversation with Parton prompted the donation.

The funding statement of ["Safety and Immunogenicity of SARS-CoV-2 mRNA-1273 Vaccine in Older Adults"](#), published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* in 2020, credits the Dolly Parton Covid-19 Research Fund alongside grants from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and the National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences.

Denison is among its authors. Parton learned her money had reached the vaccine work at roughly the same time the public did.

"I felt so proud to have been part of that little seed money," she said.

She gave Vanderbilt [another \\$1 million in June 2022](#), this time for pediatric infectious disease research. Denison said the division had led work on diagnosing, treating and preventing life-threatening infections for more than 40 years and that the gift would accelerate it.

Jeff Balser, M.D., Ph.D., president and CEO of VUMC and dean of the Vanderbilt University School of Medicine, said her earlier support for infectious disease research and the pediatric cancer program had "already saved countless lives."

'My Tennessee Mountain Home'

Parton contributed \$1 million to the LeConte Medical Center project in Sevier County, the East Tennessee county where she grew up. The hospital and cancer center opened in Sevierville in 2010 with a 30,000-square-foot [Dolly Parton Center for Women's Services](#), which now operates as part of Covenant Health.

She also made a contribution to the pediatric cancer program at Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt, which the medical center described as transformational, made in honor of Abumrad and a niece who was successfully treated there for leukemia as a child.

'What it means to take care of one another'

East Tennessee Children's Hospital announced Feb. 26 that it would be renamed [Dolly Parton Children's Hospital](#).

"I've always believed that every child deserves a fair chance to grow up healthy, hopeful and surrounded with love," Parton said in the [video announcement](#).

The Knoxville hospital has operated since 1937 and describes itself as a freestanding, independent, not-for-profit pediatric health system with 152 beds and close to 40 additional locations across East Tennessee, including primary care, specialty clinics, urgent care and rehabilitation.

Tennessee certifies it as one of four Comprehensive Regional Pediatric Centers in the state, and it is the only hospital in eastern Tennessee dedicated exclusively to the care of children.

About 60% of its patients rely on Medicaid, and philanthropy plays an important role in sustaining the organization, [Chief Healthcare Executive](#) reported in March. President and CEO Matt Schaefer called Parton's contribution a "generational and transformational commitment."

Schaefer said the money is meant to fund a pediatric residency training program the hospital hopes to launch this year, telehealth aimed at rural communities outside Knoxville, level one children's surgical verification through the American College of Surgeons, level four NICU accreditation and recruitment for pediatric neuroscience and epilepsy, gastroenterology and otolaryngology.

The hospital is already seeing more interest from clinicians, he said, and he framed the benefit as extending to referring physicians as much as to families.

Schaefer said the hospital expects Parton's name to lift giving from other donors and that it was already seeing early results.

The Imagination Library

Parton started the [Imagination Library](#) in 1995 in honor of her father, who could not read or write.

"He was the smartest man I have ever known," she said, adding that his inability to read probably kept him from fulfilling his dreams. The program mails free books to children from birth to age 5 and has gifted [more than 325 million](#) as of June.

Pediatricians have paired it with Reach Out and Read, the literacy intervention delivered at well-child visits. A [2021 study](#) in *Pediatrics* examined a combined program run through urban primary care sites and concluded that pairing literacy guidance at clinic visits with more books in the home could potentially improve kindergarten readiness.

Parton's family asked that [donations go to the Imagination Library](#) in lieu of flowers.



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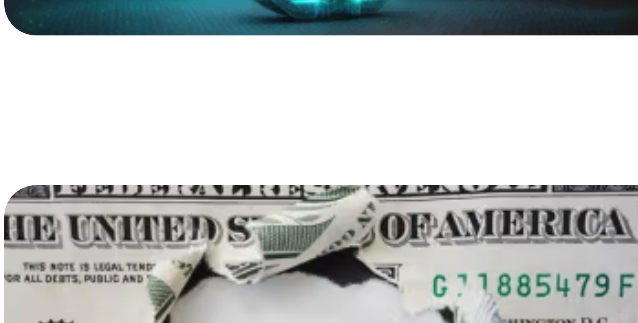
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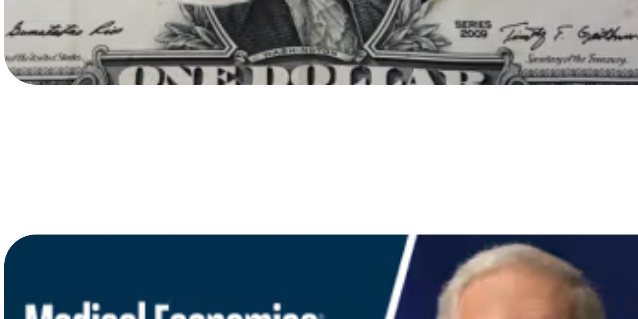
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