Ford Fund, First Book Expand Literacy and STEAM Initiatives; Elena Ford Drives Efforts to Boost Educational Opportunities

- Elena Ford, Ford Motor Company’s chief customer experience officer, is championing a new wave of Ford Fund activities to increase literacy among young people from low-income families
- Program creates opportunities for students in underserved neighborhoods to learn about STEAM subjects with assistance from Ford employees and local Ford dealers
- Ford Fund invests more than $16 million annually to support STEAM and other educational initiatives that empower people and strengthen their communities

DALLAS, March 11, 2019 – Inspired by her great-great grandfather Henry Ford’s belief in the power of learning to make everyone’s lives better and by her own passion for new thinking and innovations that can improve people’s experiences across the company, Elena Ford is championing a new initiative launching today to address literacy shortfalls and advance student success in science, technology, engineering, arts and math (STEAM).

The initiative, a collaboration between Ford Fund – the philanthropic arm of Ford Motor Company – and the nonprofit First Book, aims to increase access to books, boost opportunities for literacy and encourage STEAM education for children in low-income families, providing educational resources that will help them develop the literacy skills vital to their success across STEAM disciplines.

In her role as chief customer experience officer, Elena Ford is charged with creating positive experiences for Ford customers and that extends to her commitment to their lives outside the dealership. That’s why she feels incredibly passionate about working with First Book to address the literacy and educational issues within communities, providing equal access to educational opportunities.

“Working in the auto industry has been my lifelong passion, but the business of the future is facing a troubling shortage of skilled workers trained in STEAM,” said Ford. “Reading is the critical starting point for addressing tomorrow’s workplace demands – and that’s true of STEAM-related roles, too. I could not be more excited to lead this important initiative and help the next generation achieve personal success, creating more opportunities and educational programs for them that will have a lasting impact on the community.”

“Honing literacy skills and cultivating curiosity in STEAM subjects is critical to the future of our nation,” said Kyle Zimmer, president, CEO and co-founder of First Book. “First Book built a curated collection of STEAM titles on the First Book marketplace to spark that curiosity and encourage students to see themselves in STEAM careers. We could not be more grateful to Ford for its investment in expanding the breadth and the reach of the collection. It will yield benefits for an entire generation.”

North Texas was selected as the starting point for this educational initiative because of an increasing local need for reading programs. Today, more than 800,000 adults in Dallas County alone are illiterate and, by 2030, that number is projected to grow to more than 1 million (30 percent of Dallas County’s projected population), according to Literacy Instruction for Texas.

The issue becomes even more urgent in light of the state’s workforce projections that suggest over the next decade, most jobs in Texas will require strong STEAM skills. Texas is expected to have the second-highest percentage of future STEAM job opportunities in the nation. By launching this initiative in Dallas County, Ford Fund and First Book are helping to increase access to educational STEAM programs, improving the lives of all people.
To help bridge the literacy gap, the initiative unveiled today includes:

- Distribution of 10,000 STEAM-related books in each of three markets, beginning with Dallas, and later this year in Kansas City and Phoenix
- Hands-on participation in literacy events, monthly reading parties and other activities to engage students and encourage a love of reading and interest in STEAM subjects
- Ford employees will help lead STEAM career exploration and events, such as STEAM Camp, to help students understand and develop the skills necessary to interpret technical texts, grasp content-specific vocabulary, learn critical thinking, and clearly communicate complicated STEAM concepts to others both verbally and in writing
- Ford’s strong dealer network in Texas will be enlisted to help create ongoing educational programs with partners such as First Book and Boys and Girls Clubs to provide equal access and opportunity for all kids
- In Texas, the literacy effort will serve as an extension of the Ford Driving Dreams program, which has reached more than 14,000 students and invested more than $3 million in educational resources and activities to help them build academic success and stay in school

“Ford Fund has donated more than 100,000 books with First Book, but that was just the beginning,” said Pamela Alexander, director, community outreach, Ford Fund. “As we expand and accelerate this initiative, we are encouraging more diversity in a well-trained workforce skilled in STEAM and ready to compete successfully in the global economy.”

Ford Fund invests more than $16 million each year to support educational initiatives that empower people to build stronger communities, create social change and improve lives. Ford’s belief in the power of learning and providing equal opportunities for all people is a key driver for Ford Fund’s investments in education, including resources that promote literacy and programs that emphasize learning by doing and applying classroom studies to the real world.

About Ford Motor Company

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