

The Illinois Fatherhood Initiative (IFI) honors and celebrates fathers each year on many occasions. Founded in 1997, the Illinois Fatherhood Initiative (IFI) is recognized as the first statewide not-for-profit fatherhood organization in the United States and has since its inception found yearly and ongoing opportunities to honor fathers. Building upon its mission of "connecting children and fathers" by promoting responsible fathering and helping equip men to become better fathers or father-figures, a signature celebration of fatherhood comes with the annual statewide Illinois Fatherhood Initiative/White Sox Fatherhood Essay contest.

Over the last twelve years, the children of Illinois have written more than 400,000 essays as part of IFI's annual Fatherhood Essay Contest. Themes for the essays have included "What My Father Means to Me" and "What My Dad Dreams for Me." Volunteers from across the state read the emotionally-charged essays in four categories: fathers, stepfathers, grandfathers and father figures. Every essay writer receives a handsome certificate of participation and a coupon sheet that includes two tickets to a Chicago White Sox game, and a host of other prizes.

Essays are written in January and February. In the Spring, the 156 finalists are invited to a special Faces of Fatherhood Celebration. Around Father's Day, twelve essayists and their dads (three in each category) are recognized at the IFI Fatherhood Dinner.

The 4 winners – Father, Stepfather, Grandfather, Father-Figure and the students are then invited by the Chicago White Sox to a game where the students will throw a pregame first pitch to their "dads".

Finally, educators from the top participating schools are also acknowledged at the IFI Fall Fatherhood Celebration.

[Click to view the list of schools who participated this year](#)

IFI appreciates and recognizes all of the Volunteer Reading Centers.

[Click to see some pictures of our volunteer readers](#)

Administration for Children & Families - Chicago -	Allstate Insurance - Northbrook -
Barrington Area Public Library - Barrington -	Booz Allen Hamilton - Chicago
Chicago Center for Early Childhood Education - Chicago - Nora Stillwell	Chicago School of Professional Psychology - Chicago -
Chicago White Sox - Chicago -	CME Group - Chicago -
Certif-A-Gift - Arlington Heights -	Credit Suisse Securities - Chicago -
Cook County Boot Camp - Chicago -	Equity Office Property - Chicago -

Hewitt Associates - Lincolnshire -	KPMG LLP - Chicago -
Open Books - Chicago	Scottish Rite Medinah Shrine Center - Addison -
Transwestern Investment Co - Chicago -	Union League Club of Chicago - Chicago -
University of Phoenix - Schaumburg -	

Each year, our essay winners often get significant media coverage – even having appeared on Oprah – but the big news is really the many father/kid connections made as a result of our work. Before submitting their essays, all students are given a chance to review what they wrote with their father or father figure. Just imagine the thousands of meaningful conversations that take place across the state each year! This year over 18,000 essays were submitted and over 800 volunteer readers read the essays. The final reading was held at Metropolitan Family Services.

Any questions about the essay contest and other IFI programs can be addressed to: **Email** - 4fathersifi@sbcglobal.net I

IFI also celebrates fathers at the annual IFI/Fall Fatherhood Celebration Luncheon. Past Recipients of the Ricky Byrdsong Award include Mike Singletary, Bob Muzkowski, Dr. Harold Davis, Philip Jackson, Johnny Zayas, Carlos Burns, Joseph Whittington, and Fernando Carrasco. Ricky Byrdsong was a dedicated husband, father of three, Northwestern University basketball coach, AON employee and man of deep faith and convictions. This award was created in 1999 in response to the hate crime that took his life and is intended to recognize men who are good fathers, have reached out and made a difference in the lives of youth, and have a demonstrated spiritual dimension to their lives

For more information about all of IFI programs and events please visit our website:

<http://www.4fathers.org/>