



READING IS FUN NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY
2025

RIF's Retired Educators Help Support Volunteers

Starting last year, Library Coordinator Mary Batzinger gathered RIF volunteers who have worked in primary education to develop resources supporting RIF volunteers. Thus the Reading Skills Advisory Committee (RSAC) was formed. Members include Mary Batzinger, Vicki Bremer, Debra Carey, Marty Delmonico, Susanne C. Doyle, Linda Francois, Jude Gregory, Joan Labombard, and Anita Niezgoda.

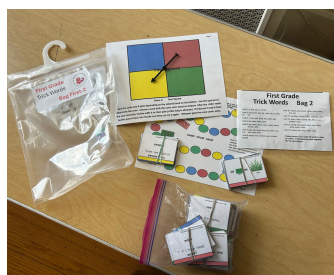
As volunteers visiting the RIF library have likely noticed, RSAC has been very busy. Hanging by the wall are "Trick Word" games. These were developed by Joan Labombard, who worked for 30 years as a reading specialist and teacher. As Joan explained, "The idea is to focus on trick words (aka "sight" words) by putting them into sentences for children to read. The game reinforces these words in a way that only using flashcards does not." Joan teamed with Linda Francoise, Susanne Doyle, and Deb Carey to make the games, which can be checked out of the RIF library. *Spoiler alert!* The group is finishing two new sorting games focused on the alphabet and sounds.

RSAC members Anita Niezgoda and Jude Gregory have also been hard at work. They created laminated alphabet cards based on Foundations®. Foundations® is a multisensory structured literacy program developed by Wilson that is used as part of Schenectady City Public School's curriculum. Anita and Jude's beautiful and colorful alphabet cards are identical to what teachers use in the classroom, so RIF's volunteers can maintain consistency with the curriculum.



On Monday, February 10th, the RSAC hosted its first Volunteer Support Meeting, attended by 36 reading volunteers (in-person and virtually). Volunteers shared ideas, discussed challenges, and celebrated everyday victories. Since RIF volunteers read in all 11 elementary schools on different days and at various times of the school day, they do not often get a chance to chat with others in their shoes. The roundtable meetings are designed for volunteers to share, collaborate, and add to their toolkits.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3





On January 28, 2025, Reading Partner Michele Kopp represented RIF at Van Corlear (at Fulton)'s Reading Night. She gave away about 200 books, noting that nonfiction books about space, earth, & other cultures were very popular. She said it was very well attended with great activities for kids & families. Well done Michele! (Photos of event above & below by Michele.)

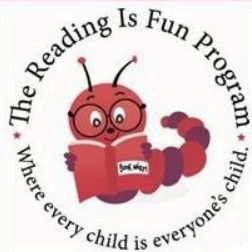


Howdy Reading Partner! New Name, Same Great Volunteers

The Reading Is Fun Program leadership has been active in expanding the organization. Establishing 501(c)(3) status, creating the Reading Skills Advisory Committee, building the library database, and developing the upcoming new website are a few of those initiatives. As RIF grows, RIF's team of dedicated volunteers remains the heart of the organization. Volunteers visit schools each week, meeting with students and instilling a love of reading by making reading fun. Up until now, these RIF ambassadors have had many monikers: "volunteer", "buddy", "friend", and more. RIF leadership decided that the relationship and commitment offered by in-school volunteers should be embodied in a specific title describing their efforts.

After discussion and deliberation, RIF leadership selected **"Reading Partner"** as the title for our in-school volunteers. The hope is this name encompasses the gifts that volunteers bring to their students every week. These include support, care, friendship, collaboration, sharing, kindness and dedication. Rather than a hierarchical position, the Reading Partner is a reliable teammate working together with the student to explore the adventure of reading. In addition, the name will be easy for a child to understand.

Volunteers each likely have their own ways that they and their student address each other, and that, of course, is wonderful. **"Reading Partner"** is the name RIF will use going forward to describe the reading volunteers in RIF's communications. RIF is extremely grateful for its **Reading Partners**, and look forward to continued growth and success of the program.



Save the Date!

It's a Scrabble-Rama!

A Scrabble Competition to Benefit
The Reading Is Fun (RIF) Program

Saturday, April 5
9:00 am—Noon
Schenectady High School
Cafeteria

- ◆ Teams of 2–4 people (ages 18 & up) compete
- ◆ Prizes awarded to top 3 teams
- ◆ Continental Breakfast & Raffle
- ◆ \$20 per person entry fee to support RIF's programs
- ◆ Registration opens in February

For Event Information, Registration, and Entry Fee:
<https://www.readingisfun.org/> - Call 518-388-8410

Important Dates

- Monday, March 10, 2025, 6:30 pm
 - RSAC meeting for Reading Partners at RIF library and on GoogleMeet
- Saturday April 5, 2025, 9:00 am at Schenectady High School
 - Scrabble-Rama RIF Benefit
- May 12, 2025
 - "Spring Into Reading is Fun!" week

RIF Newsletter Welcomes Ideas

If you have any suggestions for stories, RIF photos to share, or other ideas, please email Sabrina Ricci at sabrinaevericci@gmail.com.

RIF's retired educators.. continued from page 1

Some helpful takeaways include the following: Susanne Doyle shared that she structures her interactions "to help the child feel successful, since they may not always experience that in their classroom". Deb Carey noted that for younger children, using shorter books or even wordless books can help children use their imaginations, focus on the pictures, use their own words to tell the story, and start enjoying books. Meanwhile, Larry Pierce suggested role-playing to engage children who are older but hesitant to read aloud by themselves. When working with Kindergarten students, Sally Magid finds out which sight words are being introduced each week and helps students find them in the books they read together and play games focused on them. New volunteer Margaret Pearson said that she is overwhelmed by the scope of the RIF program and is grateful to have become part of such a dynamic group.

At the March 10th volunteer support meeting, RSAC will focus on games and various ways they can be used to support reading skills.



RSAC meeting for Reading Partners on February 10th, 2025

Please Support Us!

The Reading Is Fun Program, Inc. is grateful for tax-deductible monetary donations supporting our organization. A gift to RIF to honor someone or in memory of someone or to commemorate someone or something is a special way to show you care. **To contribute, please write your check to "The Reading Is Fun Program, Inc." , & mail it to The Reading Is Fun Program, PO Box 9437, Schenectady, NY 12309. Thank you for your consideration.**

Volunteer Profiles

**Frank Giordano****Where & with what age group do you work?**

Howe Elementary in Mrs. Baldwin's 1st grade class for 6 years. She is an amazing educator.

What brought you to volunteer with RIF?

Reading is my passion. My wife and I have two amazing daughters in their 20's, doing wonderful things in the world. One constant throughout our lives has been reading.

Fiction, non-fiction, newspapers, poetry - anything that sparked their interest was fair game. When I sought volunteer opportunities, it made sense to do something that I truly love and believe in. This is what led me to RIF. I am grateful to help bring the gift of reading to local youngsters.

How do you make reading fun? 30 minutes can be a long time for a first-grader. I make it fun by acting out characters or using funny voices. If all else fails, we take a little walk break (no running!) I loved to read Dr. Seuss books and Eric Carle to my girls at home, but I read to boys who love Legos, superheroes, and dinosaurs. Mo Willems books have been a real hit.

What else do you like to do? I am a chiropractor, & love my work. I like reading, traveling (Italy is an obsession), running, & cooking. I enjoy my involvement with RIF & plan to continue for years to come.

Margaret Novak**Where & with what age group do you work?**

Yates Elementary, with two 3rd graders.

What brought you to volunteering with RIF?

When I retired, I wanted to volunteer at Yates, where my kids attended elementary school. I spoke with (RIF volunteer trainer) Deb Carey, who was then teaching second grade there. She suggested I participate in RIF. My first student was from her class. That was eight years ago—this is my ninth year of RIF! I have since worked with one or two students from each third-grade class.

How do you make reading fun? I let the kids lead—each day different kids need or want different things. We read together, play with paper bag puppets, play Bananagrams (a favorite!), look at maps, and just talk.

What else do you like to do? Two dogs keep me busy. I knit. I have flower & vegetable gardens. I like to travel. I am in a book group. My children graduated from Schenectady High School—they are now 36 & 33 years old. Yikes!

What is your favorite book to read with the kids? "Me on the Map". It follows a girl who looks at her room, how it fits in her house, street, town, state, ...up to earth. To go with the book, I got world maps from AAA that have all of the country flags, which kids like. Geography is important!

*Margaret*