



June 2025

# The Reading Is Fun Program Newsletter



## Spring Into Reading Is Fun: Mission Accomplished!

During the week of May 12, 2025, RIF hosted the 5th Annual "Spring Into Reading Is Fun" (SIRIF). This event is again generously supported by the *Wright Family Foundation*.

During SIRIF, (1) RIF distributed a tote bag with 5 new books & a t-shirt to every Schenectady first grader, and (2) RIF Reading Partners read a book to each first grade classroom & gift that book to the teacher's classroom. Through SIRIF, RIF aims to place fun books in student's homes as summer break approaches. RIF is thankful to the Wright Family Foundation, as well as RIF Reading Partners, volunteers, & SCSD first grade teachers. In particular, kudos to Jan Gallas, Larry Pierce, Valerie Rivera, Al Magid & Mary Lou Russo for their hard work & leadership. On page 2, please find photos & more information about SIRIF.

## RIF Volunteers garner 2025 Capital Region Service Award

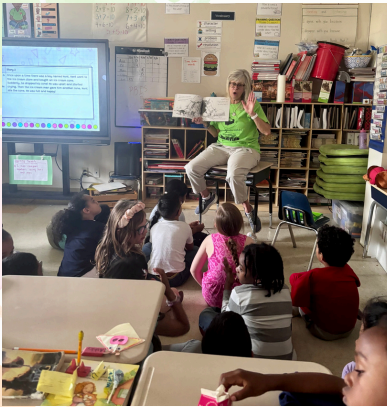
The Reading Is Fun Program is thrilled to be selected as an honoree for the **2025 Capital Region Gives Community Service Award**. This award recognizes RIF's volunteers for their dedication to community service. It also helps to tell RIF's story, aiming to inspire others to action. The **Times Union** newspaper recognizes RIF & the other eight award recipients over the course of several Sunday print publications & on-line at [timesunion.com](https://www.timesunion.com). RIF's story appeared in the Sunday, May 25<sup>th</sup> issue.

The Capital Region Gives Community Service Awards are sponsored by the **Times Union and St. Peter's Health Partners**. They "recognize volunteers who have contributed significantly to New York's Capital Region. Aiming to spotlight those whose dedication and generosity have fostered community growth and enhanced lives, these awards recognize individual and group volunteers making a difference in our region", according to Molly Renaud, Director of Community Engagement for The Times-Union.

RIF is grateful to the Times Union & St. Peter's Health Partners for this tribute. Also, RIF is proud of its volunteer Reading Partners & Leaders, and is excited to tell the organization's story to the Capital Region. Congratulations to all of RIF's volunteers and leadership who work to make a difference in Schenectady's young students' lives.



## 2025 Spring Into Reading Is Fun: Highlights and Photos



RIF Reading Partner Michele Kopp reading with Van Corlear (at Fulton) first graders.



RIF Reading Partner Ricki Shapiro with Howe first grade students showing off new t-shirts & books!



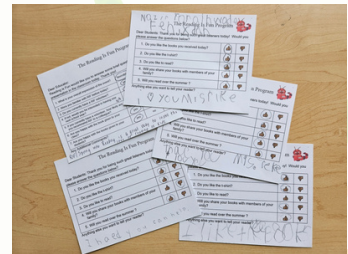
### 2025 SIRIF By The Numbers

**30** Reading Partners read to  
**30** Schenectady first-grade  
classes

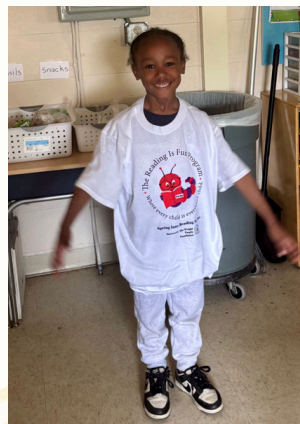
**780** First Grade students  
received **780** tote bags and  
**780** t-shirts

**3,930** Books distributed to  
students & classrooms

**310** RIF volunteer hours  
committed



Included among the SIRIF books was *Talking to the Moon*, (above) by DC Dunkel. From Schenectady, DC attended Elmer Elementary School. He wrote this book for his own children who also both attend Schenectady public schools.



RIF Reading Partner Tina Lee (below left) & her friend, author Gwen Fortune Blakely. Tina selected Gwen's book *Rex and the Band* to read & give to her SIRIF classroom at Hamilton Elementary.





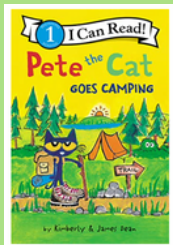
To right, Ricki's student Alina D. enjoying her Yasmin book. She loves this series and has almost every Yasmin book in the RIF library!



### Reading Partner Invited Young Readers to Go "Camping" with Pete the Cat

Reading Partner Paul Deltry made a favorite book come alive in a Hamilton Pre-K classroom. Paul, who reads every week with four children in the class, hosted an event for the entire classroom using the story of *Pete the Cat Goes Camping*. To begin, he played an animated video of the story, and then set up camp, with a tent, "campfire" and more. Paul said, "They liked the s'mores (Pete leaves one for Bigfoot). I watched over the fishing frenzy. When you have 6 poles going at once and some lucky anglers having 2 fish on the line at the same time, it is a wild scene." Hamilton Pre-K Teacher Holly Chiarmiello said, "A big thanks to Paul for organizing and setting this up - the kids had a blast!"

Paul said, "Pete is such a great character and has many adventures. I read the story and thought 'I have all the gear that Pete had on his first camping trip so let's try to recreate as much as possible what he did.' I hope they will remember their camping adventure and how much fun camping and being outdoors is."



### The Difference We Make: Through a Student's Eyes

by RIF Reading Partner Ricki D Shapiro

Recently, when I was with my third-grade student at Paige Elementary, she told me that she lost one of her *Uni the Unicorn* books, but it had a happy ending. Her younger sister had taken it to read, and it was under her bed as it was her favorite book.

I responded that I had two thoughts: first, that her sister should have asked if she could borrow the book (and my student said she would have told her sister it was OK), and, second, that it was wonderful that her 6-year-old sister wanted to read the book.

The student replied, "Before I started working with you, I had no books at home - only 'learning books.' Now I have 99 books." (A bit of an exaggeration, as it's closer to 35 since I started working with her two years ago, but it seemed like that many to her). She said she reads every night to her sister and 5-year-old brother when they go to bed. She told me that her brother is scared and wants to snuggle with her and have her read to him, and that by the time she gets to the last page both her brother and sister are asleep.

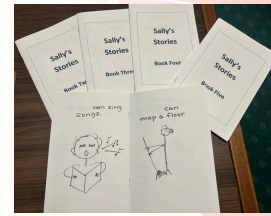
She also said her brother's favorite book is *The Not Very Pout-Pout Fish*, which we read earlier in the year, and *The Book with No Pictures*, which I had given to her two weeks earlier. She absolutely adored it, and it made her laugh out loud.

After she told me how much the books meant to her, she asked matter-of-factly, "Now can we get back to reading?"

We may sometimes wonder about the impact that RIF makes. This girl's story exemplifies how we make a difference for students, and how that, in turn, ripples out to their families and touches them as well.



## Reading Partner Spotlight: A Special Salute to Sally Magid



This month we feature Sally Magid, RIF Reading Partner, & wife of Al Magid, Founder & Executive Director of RIF. After 9 years, Sally has decided that this is her last year working with the RIF students. The RIF team appreciates Sally's wonderful service and honors her!

### Sally in her own words

**Tell us about your involvement in RIF?** I retired from teaching 8th grade English at Mont Pleasant in 1997, took a year off, & came to Pleasant Valley the next year. I worked there with 5th and 6th graders on writing skills. Eighteen years later RIF began, so I joined. I have put in about 9 years with RIF, working with more than thirty K, 1st & 3rd graders at PV over that time.

**How do you make reading fun?** I give each student a notebook at the start of the school year, to bring to reading time. Each week, I take a word from their reading book and show them how "if you can read THAT word, you can read so many others, just by changing the first letter sound" (ie: book/look, took, hook, or cat/hat, mat, rat, sat). I write those words in their notebooks. Then, students copy them, say them, and feel a sense of satisfaction of being able to read a whole list of words!

**What is your favorite RIF memory?** When any child sounds out a word that is new and 'gets it!'

**Describe your professional background.** I have taught for 35 years, with 25 of them in Schenectady. I am a trained teacher of the blind & taught legally blind (partially sighted) kids for 4 1/2 years, mostly in Michigan at the State School for the Blind (now a minimum security prison!). Stevie Wonder was a student while I taught there, but I was not his teacher.

**What are "Sally's Books"?** When I first began mentoring, I was frustrated with the almost NON level of reading with the students I had. I decided to make my own books (now in the RIF library as "Sally's Books.") Each one requires the student's name be a part of the story, and I found that kept them interested. I would draw on a ponytail or long hair or short hair to fit the student who was reading. For me, these were a great help in drawing kids into a REAL book during the lesson.

**Tell us about your pastimes.** I have been 'working' at Schenectady Day Nursery for 27 years, reading to three classes, doing exercises with them, and teaching them songs. Traveling abroad has always been a joy, but harder to do as one gets older and plane rides seem longer. Now we will be traveling to Boston, Minneapolis, and Phoenix to see our children.

I have loved working with RIF and the teachers and students along the way. I will still be active, putting labels in books, doing a reading if there's a need for SIRIF, and working always for Scrabble Rama, our one RIF fundraiser. Oh, and getting all of those books, bags, and t-shirts ready for SIRIF!

### Please Support Us!

**The Reading Is Fun Is Program, Inc.** is grateful for tax-deductible monetary donations supporting our organization. A gift to RIF to honor someone, in memory of someone, or to commemorate something is a special way to show you care. To contribute, please donate on RIF's website, or 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!

### From RIF newsletter's editor

*Dear Readers,*  
*This is RIF's last newsletter of the 2024-2025 school year. I hope you enjoyed reading them as much as I enjoyed writing them! If any Reading Partners would like to join me to create the newsletter in the coming year, please let me know. Wishing you all a fun and relaxing summer, and see you in September!*  
*Sincerely, Sabrina*  
*RIFoutreach@gmail.com*