



# The Reading Is Fun Program Newsletter

September 2025



## RIF Launches First Community Fundraising Campaign: Literacy Match Challenge

RIF is pleased to announce its first community fundraising initiative: **The Literacy Match Challenge Campaign**. This campaign will help fund RIF's annual "Spring Into Reading Is Fun" event for the next three years. At "Spring Into Reading Is Fun", held during a week in May, every first-grade student in Schenectady is gifted several new, age-appropriate books, a t-shirt, and a cinch bag.

**Thanks to a generous grant from The Wright Family Foundation, every dollar raised by RIF will be matched, up to \$30,000.** The \$30,000 funds we aim to raise (plus Wright's \$30,000) will cover the "Spring Into Reading Is Fun" event for the next three years. All donations are tax-deductible, and any funds raised in excess of the \$30,000 match will be allocated to RIF's general budget for books.

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## RIF Founder Al Magid Garners "Daily Point of Light" Award

RIF is thrilled to share that our founder Al Magid, has been recognized as a #DailyPointofLight Award honoree! He was given the award in August 2025. The **Daily Point of Light Award** honors individuals creating meaningful change through volunteering and civic engagement all over the USA.

Al was selected for his outstanding contributions to Schenectady's young readers by creating RIF, and thus reflecting our shared commitment to making a difference. To read Al's story (Honoree #8,135), go to: <https://www.pointsoflight.org/awards/helping-schenectadys-children-reach-their-potential/>

Points of Light is 35 years old and was founded by **President George H.W. Bush**. Bush said, "The solution to each problem that confronts us begins with an individual who steps forward and who says, 'I can help.'"

Congratulations Al on this wonderful award! Also, kudos to RIF on garnering national attention for our efforts.





*Schenectady first graders enjoying Spring Into Reading Is Fun, in May 2025.*

## A Reading Partner Dedicates Her Birthday Gifts To RIF

In August, **RIF Reading Partner Paula Metzner** celebrated her birthday, gathering her friends and family. In honor of the special day, Paula requested that in lieu of gifts to her, they bring books to donate to RIF. They happily complied, donating **80 books**, with lots of popular titles, including Dog Man, Dr. Seuss, Pete the Cat, and other hits (see photo on right). Paula said she was inspired to do this based on an article in RIF's January 2025 newsletter, where another Reading Partner collected books for RIF at a holiday party. RIF thanks Paula and her friends for their generosity and support.

**Happy Birthday Paula!**



## Literacy Match Challenge

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The Wright Family Foundation has supported the "Spring Into Reading is Fun" event since the event's inception in 2023. Each year, the event receives very positive feedback from SCSD teachers, parents, Reading Partners, & students.

With "Spring Into Reading Is Fun", the goal is to put books into the hands and homes of young students **to provide reading materials for the summertime**. Research shows that having books in the home is a strong predictor of long-term academic success, and the community's support can help lay that foundation for hundreds of children in our community

Please donate to help us reach our goal, and spread the word to family, friends and employers! Every dollar counts. To donate to the **Literacy Match Challenge**, please visit: **[www.readingisfun.org/literacy-match](http://www.readingisfun.org/literacy-match)**.

There, sponsorship information and more details can be found. With questions, please reach out to RIF's fundraising team: Mary Lou Russo, Jan Gallas & Sabrina Ricci.

**Please help us reach our \$30,000 goal!**



RIF Events Coordinator Jan Gallas with Superintendent Cotto on August 27th. Jan attended **Keane Elementary School's** Welcome Back event, handing out free books to students.



RIF's Mary Batzinger & library team has spent the summer making the RIF Library look better than ever! (above & right)

## Reading Is Fun Program's Contacts

- **Founder & Executive Director:** Al Magid - [magid2@juno.com](mailto:magid2@juno.com)
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- **Reading Partner Training:** Deb Carey - [mydierks@gmail.com](mailto:mydierks@gmail.com)
- **Fundraising:** Jan Gallas, Sabrina Ricci, & Mary Lou Russo



**Note from RIF Library:** In taking inventory of reading games, we have found that quite a number of games are missing. Please double-check your closets & return any RIF games you may have to the library. Thank you!

## Reading Partner Spotlight



**Martha Longo**

**Where and with what age group do you work?**

I've been with RIF for six years, volunteering at Van Corlear. I have worked with Grades K-3, and with various teachers, all of whom have impressed me with their dedication, knowledge and love for their classes.

**Why did you join RIF?** I saw an ad in the Daily Gazette and thought it sounded like a great program. I was always active in my children's schools and even volunteered at my grandchildren's school, so I was excited to go back to school!

**How do you make reading fun?** In the beginning, I read a lot of rhyming books. My favorite book to read aloud is "Groovy Joe" by Robert Litwin. It has a refrain that I sing, and by the third repetition the students are singing along and wanting to read.

**What are your other interests?** My favorite hobbies are of course reading, quilt making and singing in the choir at my church. My husband and I live in Rotterdam, and have three children and twin boy grandchildren. Two of my children are educators, and we like to share our experiences! I thoroughly being a RIF Reading Partner and look forward to the start of the school year!



**Suzi O'Brien**

**In which school and with what age group do you volunteer?** I have worked at Yates and at Hamilton Elementary Schools; both with first graders.

**Why did you get involved with RIF? How long have you been involved?** A friend who knew Al Magid and also knew that I have done mentoring with Junior Achievement and Girls' Circle in the Schenectady schools thought I might enjoy it! He was right! I have been with RIF since before COVID, so I am guessing the 2018 school year.

**What is your favorite part of being a Reading Partner?** When a student rushes to me and gives me an enthusiastic hug, it is just the most rewarding feeling!

**What else do you do for fun?** Being the proud grandmother to 5 granddaughters & 2 grandsons (only 3 are local), I try to optimize our time together. I also enjoy paper crafts, Zumba, and am a certified Tai Chi for Health instructor teaching at the Glenville Senior Center.

**How do you make reading fun?** Along with the books and games provided by the library, I also try to bring some coloring pages and fun worksheets as a little extra.