



# RIF/FYI

November, 2023

A newsletter for volunteers and supporters of **The Reading Is Fun Program**



**WELCOME AND/OR WELCOME BACK TO A NEW SCHOOL YEAR:** Yes, I know it's November already – heck, it's nearly Thanksgiving – and many of us have been reading with our students for a whole bunch of weeks. Before we get too much deeper into this school year, here are some opening remarks from the Executive Director of **The Reading Is Fun Program**, Al Magid:

*“A paeon of praise for **The Reading Is Fun Program (RIF)** which, by its labors over the past decade, has earned an important place in the civic firmament of Schenectady. **RIF** could not have achieved that stature without the robust support of a wide array of local and neighboring interests, among them its large cohort of volunteer reading mentors who work one-on-one with students in the lower grades in all 11 elementary schools in the **Schenectady City School District**, to help improve the youngsters' reading and conversational*

*skills; the many elementary-school teachers and principals in the district and its central administration and other staff, who continue to evince, by word and deed, their warm embrace of **RIF's** core volunteer-mentoring mission in support of the district's key educational goals; and, spearheaded by the **Wright Family Foundation** in Schenectady and the **Seymour Fox Foundation** in Troy, the many foundations and businesses and fraternal organizations and religious institutions and individuals that donate money and books and administrative and library and storage space that enable **RIF** to purchase and handle 10,000 books annually, to gift to hundreds of youngsters in the lower elementary-school grades to take home and enjoy in the company of family members and with which to build home libraries.”*

**RIF BY THE NUMBERS:** Although it's pretty much a moveable feast, at this writing RIF has **94** Volunteers working with **77** Teachers and **220** students in all **11** of Schenectady's elementary schools. That's more of each than we ended the last school year with – and I'm pretty sure those numbers will continue to grow.



**BACK TO SCHOOL EVENTS:** Thanks to the ongoing efforts of our Events Coordinator, Jan Gallas, and the encouragement of the **SCSD Parent Liaisons**, **RIF** was invited to participate in a number of Back-to-School events at several of the elementary schools, including Paige, Keane, Van Corlaer and Hamilton. Various volunteers brought a table and chairs, some signs, and a whole bunch of books to give away to any and all attendees. See **PICTURES AT ELEVEN**.

**SUPERINTENDENT'S DAY:** With the assistance and cooperation of **SCSD** Assistant Superintendent Joe DiCaprio and **RIF** Volunteer Coordinator Valerie Rivera, **RIF** volunteers were invited to attend the September 6<sup>th</sup> Superintendent's Day faculty meetings at each elementary school and give a

brief introduction to **The Reading Is Fun Program**, with the hope of reaching out to teachers, new and old, who may not have partnered with RIF before. Despite a glitch here and there, nearly every school heard from our volunteers and received flyers with contact information on an extremely hot late summer day.

**WELCOME/WELCOME BACK SOIRÉE:** On Monday, September 18<sup>th</sup>, the RIF Leadership Team hosted a “Thank You and Welcome Back” event at the **RIF Library** for returning and new volunteers to get together, meet new faces, listen to updates from Leadership Team members, and sample the “light refreshments”. Upwards of 30 volunteers attended, chatted, and sampled the goodies from Villa Italia and other local ‘refreshment-providers’. There was even a raffle, which was won by volunteer Martha Longo, now the proud owner of a fabulous tote bag! See **PICTURES AT ELEVEN**, but maybe not for the tote bag!



**VOLUNTEER SUPPORT FORUM:** The inaugural Support Forum for Volunteers for the 2023-24 school year was held on October 26<sup>th</sup>. This time, we ran a “Live/Remote” session – with reasonably decent results (hey, it was our first time!). Some Grant information, plus Volunteer and Library updates were provided, as well as a presentation about the importance of rhyming skills from volunteer Joan LaBombard, followed by an open discussion and feedback session. Stayed tuned for the next Forum date announcement.



**SUPERINTENDENT’S “SHOUT-OUT”:** In the November 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the weekly **Superintendent’s Brief** which discussed *“the good news.....that we (SCSD) showed growth across the board in English Language Arts....and Mathematics”*, Superintendent Soler included RIF in his remarks about the District’s progress, and he mentioned that **SCSD** is *“doing a call to action, ‘Schenectady’s Right to Read,’ to get as much support as possible to address literacy concerns and boost reading in our community. To this end, we appreciate the support we receive from volunteers like “Reading is Fun.”* In addition, there was a brief description of the work that RIF does and an appeal for volunteers! Remember – he’s thanking you, the **RIF Volunteers!** Here’s a link to the Brief: <https://www.schenectadyschools.org/page/superintendents-brief-november-03-2023>



**IN CASE YOU MISSED IT:** In the July 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of **The Daily Gazette**, the Opinion page’s *“High Notes”* feature included this recap of our ‘Spring Into Reading’ event:

*In Schenectady, The Reading Is Fun Program (RIF) recently completed its second annual weeklong Spring Into Reading Is Fun event. The event, made possible by a grant from the Wright Family Foundation, was organized around the 800 first-graders in 47 classes spanning the 11 elementary schools in the Schenectady City School District. Nearly 50 RIF volunteer reading mentors each met with a first-grade class to read a book. The Wright grant allowed RIF to provide each first-grader with five books to take home and enjoy over the summer break. Each youngster was also given a colorful imprinted tote bag and a T shirt. Each first-grade classroom library also received a book. Classroom teachers and their aides oversaw the event, and district facilities staff trucked nearly 100 cartons filled with books, tote bags and T-shirts for the event. To become a RIF reading mentor, contact Valerie at [rifvolunteerplacements@gmail.com](mailto:rifvolunteerplacements@gmail.com). To learn more about RIF and/or to donate to the program, visit <https://readingisfun.org/>.*



**DATES TO KEEP IN MIND:** One of these days, I will compile the **Reading Is Fun Calendar of Events** that I have promised to do for a while – but in the meantime, write these dates down:

- Week of April 22, 2024: “*Spring Into Reading Is Fun*”
- Saturday, June 1, 2024: “*Scrabble-Rama*”

More information will be provided as the events approach.



First United Methodist Church  
Schenectady

**BURNT HILLS UNITED  
METHODIST CHURCH**

**GRANT & DONATION RECAP:** On the monetary front (sorry, is that a bit crass?), we want to acknowledge the extraordinary generosity of several local organizations who have supported **RIF's** mission over a number of years and in a number of ways, and have contributed to **RIF** yet again this year. A very special thank you to the **First United Methodist Church of Schenectady** who, in addition to supplying us with office space over the years, donated a significant sum recently for the purchase of books for our library. We also want to acknowledge the ongoing support of the **Burnt Hills United Methodist Church** and its **Lord's Acre Fair Committee**, and thank them for their recent donation to **RIF**, which we've used to acquire even more books to read with and give to the students we mentor. Lastly, but not leastly, we doff our hats to **Stewart's Shops** whose generous grants this year have allowed us to add books to our Library and, as we mentioned in our last Newsletter, to purchase office equipment to help **RIF** develop better methods of acquiring and tracking our valuable literacy resources. Thank you, one and all!



**LIBRARY NEWS:** The **RIF Library** is located on the second floor of the **Faith United Methodist Church** at 811 North Brandywine Avenue, in office space that the Church donates to us, and which has been expanded in recent months to include a Library Office outfitted with Information Technology equipment, including things like a computer, a printer/scanner/copier, internet connectivity, a projector, a hand-held scanner, a laminator, and other pieces of 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century artifice. We employ said devices to help train our new volunteers, and we are developing methodologies to enhance our literary acquisitions, hoping to track the types and titles of books that our volunteers and, especially, our students find the most successful for helping with their love of reading. This is exciting stuff for us and we're grateful to **Stewart's Shops** for contributing to our burgeoning technological advancements.

If you have any questions about or suggestions for the library, contact Library Coordinator Mary Crimp-Batzinger at [RIFLibrary@gmail.com](mailto:RIFLibrary@gmail.com).

**THE VIEW FROM HERE:** A volunteer at Hamilton Elementary School told us that, on his first day back with his new second grade students, he walked into the classroom and several of the kids saw his **RIF** badge and immediately told him how they got these really cool bags and t-shirts and books last year when they were in first grade and did he read a book to a first grade class and how great it all was!! And when he went out into the hall to read with one of his new kids, a couple of third graders

passing by remembered him from when he read a book to their second-grade class at the end of the year and that he gave them all a copy of the book he read for them to keep and how cool that was! Makes you realize that, yes, we do make a difference!

**FINALLY:** Do you love volunteering with RIF? Do you have family or friends who would like to join you? Ask them to email Valerie Rivera at [rifvolunteerplacements@gmail.com](mailto:rifvolunteerplacements@gmail.com). Also, if you'd like to contribute some words, thoughts, observations or suggestions for the next RIF Newsletter, email them to [RIFLibrary@gmail.com](mailto:RIFLibrary@gmail.com).

**PICTURES AT ELEVEN:** Here's a sampling of the photographs we've collected from some of the events and happenings RIF has been involved in recently.

**From the BACK-TO-SCHOOL EVENTS:**



from the WELCOME/WELCOME BACK SOIRÉE:



....and, yes, here's a sample of what the Tote Bag looked like:



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- **Schenectady School Calendar:**

Here's a link for the **2023-2024** School Calendar (check back during the year – it can change):

[https://core-docs.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/asset/uploaded\\_file/2760/SCSD/2924561/2023-2024\\_SCSD\\_Snapshot\\_Calendar.pdf](https://core-docs.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/asset/uploaded_file/2760/SCSD/2924561/2023-2024_SCSD_Snapshot_Calendar.pdf)

- **Whom Do I Contact?**

If you need help with anything, the general rule of thumb on where to go to with questions is:

- *Mary Lou Russo:* [russo5times@gmail.com](mailto:russo5times@gmail.com) with grant contacts or fundraising ideas;
- *Valerie Rivera:* [rifvolunteerplacements@gmail.com](mailto:rifvolunteerplacements@gmail.com) for teacher contact & volunteer info;
- *Deb Carey:* [mydierks@gmail.com](mailto:mydierks@gmail.com) for ideas on how to work with students;
- *Mary Crimp-Batzinger:* [riflibrary@gmail.com](mailto:riflibrary@gmail.com) for book and library assistance.
- *Larry Pierce:* [riflibrary@gmail.com](mailto:riflibrary@gmail.com) for newsletter and techie questions and comments;
- *Jan Gallas:* [rifeventcoordinator@gmail.com](mailto:rifeventcoordinator@gmail.com) for community event info & assistance.

- Visit **RIF's** webpage at [www.readingisfun.org](http://www.readingisfun.org) for up-to-date information about **RIF**;

- Follow us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/ReadingIsFunProgram/>. Share your experiences, tips and best practices as a seasoned or brand-new volunteer.

- If you haven't done so already, ask to be added to the **RIF** Volunteers Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1644298179159483>

- Get to know our leadership team and contact them at any time by going to:

[www.readingisfun.org/contact-us](http://www.readingisfun.org/contact-us)

- Send us an email at any time with questions or comments to [readingisfunabc123@gmail.com](mailto:readingisfunabc123@gmail.com). We also welcome your feedback about this newsletter to [riflibrary@gmail.com](mailto:riflibrary@gmail.com). Let us know what kind of information you'd like to see in future editions.

