



Herbert and Sarah M. Gibor
Reading Partners' Program

July 2019

Dear Reading Partners,



I hope you are all enjoying these long summer days! Our school year ended with a lot of excitement and celebratory parties for both students and volunteers. I tried to join in as many year end festivities as possible, and was delighted to see the different special touches that happened at each school. Some of the parties were outside, some had pizza, some had ice cream and often times the school administration managed to join for at least a few moments. While each school celebrated slightly differently, the enthusiastic and proud atmosphere was a common denominator! The students pride at their hard work and their connection to their Readers was tangible, whether they expressed it with cards, hugs or words. One first grader at Rogers stood up and made a speech thanking all of the Readers, saying "this is the best day ever at this school because of you." While it is hard to find a statistical measure to evaluate our impact, I do believe this is as valuable a measure as any mathematical equation.

Meanwhile, in the midst of the student parties, on June 3rd we celebrated our 20th annual volunteer appreciation breakfast. Almost 80 people attended and Elaine Erichson, one of the original founders of Reading Partners told the story of the organization from its early days. Deborah Freedman was our guest speaker and volunteers were recognized for their many years of service. It was a wonderful way to end the year, bringing all of our volunteers from different schools and after school programs together to mark 20 years of Reading Partners.

While school is out for the summer, I am busy preparing for next year. We already have several new recruits joining the program which is very exciting! Please keep sending friends and family who are interested my way. **I am also planning out our fall workshops. I hope to finalize the dates soon and will send out a save the date email once I have that information.**

Finally, I would like to make a clarification to last month's volunteer spotlight. Please see the final section in the newsletter below for follow up.

Happy Reading,
Lenore

20 YEARS OF READING PARTNERS



Reading Partners receive their 10 year pins at Volunteer Appreciation Breakfast

This year, Elaine Erichson, one of the original 3 founders of Reading Partners spoke about the history of the program. Below is her talk on the beginnings of Reading Partners.

It's amazing to be here, to help celebrate our 20th anniversary of Reading Partners.

Audrey Frankenberg and Susan Krieger send best wishes as well. When Lenore asked about the early days of our program, I was especially motivated for you to know about our founder and mentor, Leonard Fein, a name some old-timers will know, but maybe not so many.

We actually start with President Bill Clinton. In those long ago days, there was much talk about why Johnnie couldn't read. Clinton called for a million volunteers for reading help. Leonard Fein was a super activist especially in Boston Jewish circles. He founded Mazon (a Jewish Response to Hunger) and he and Elie Wiesel founded Moment Magazine. So Leonard, or "Leibel" as he was generally called, phoned the Secretary of Education and offered that the Jewish community would get, if not a million, then a hundred thousand volunteers. His thinking was that we like kids and we're even called "the people of the book". And so he founded the National Jewish Coalition for Literacy or NJCL, contacted all the National Jewish agencies he could think of, for their approval and participation, and proceeded to contact United Jewish Federations nationwide in hopes of starting chapters.

The notice was received in Stamford by our good friend and ever efficient Edith Samers, then executive Director of UJF, who happily knew that Audrey Frankenberg had just retired, and tapped her to start and direct such a reading program. Audrey started contacting likely friends, and then phoned me, who had just retired from the Greenwich School system. She explained the program and I responded, "I'll be glad to tutor". She responded, "No, you'll help me run it" and so it went. We began with 12 tutors, 2 students each, at 2 schools, Springdale, and Stark. Susan Krieger began with the first tutors, but as the group quickly expanded, we soon tapped Susan to make up the third of our troika, figuring it out as we went along. It was not until we got to the organized chapter meetings, in Boston, in NYC, and in Washington D.C., that we realized we were unique. The other chapters were all run by paid professionals. We worked hard, but were volunteers with basically no budget, and also basically no experience.

Along the way we simplified the name National Jewish Coalition for Literacy/ Stamford to Reading Partners.

Simpler and also better reflecting the diversity of our tutors and students. From Leonard Fein we learned the expression "tikkun olum", literally "repairing the world", but really meaning doing our best to make the world a better place; that became a kind of byword for us. By the way, he was our end-of-year speaker after a few years, in this room, when we were about 60 tutors, and he was quite charismatic, judging by the number of women who offered to take my place returning him to the train station.

As our numbers grew, primarily by word of mouth, we expanded to additional schools, now I believe covering all the Stamford elementary schools plus some other settings. Along the way there were wonderful trainings and "continuing ed" sessions, and any number of exciting breakfast speakers. And you may have wondered how much good you actually do. The year we finished running the program, Judy Martin, then Reading Specialist at Northeast School, helped design an evaluation, based on expected growth at each grade on the standardized DRA test. Our students, who by definition would not be expected to reach that level, in almost all instances significantly exceeded expected growth. And teacher comments about attitudes and work habits were enthusiastic. Many of these youngsters were on free or reduced lunch, the usual measure of economic demographics, which usually depresses achievement. So our model certainly appears effective! I'm sure you see that without the complicated statistics.

In sum, Reading Partners has come a long way. Our first end-of-year breakfast was in the UJF boardroom. Audrey and I went marketing for orange juice and donuts. In later years, with expanding groups, we had a small budget from UJF, Audrey designed cost-free centerpieces and Susan created fruit platters, cutting up fruit in a tiny kitchen. As our eyes and imaginations got bigger, wanting games, white boards, tote bags, etc., Audrey would pay a visit to Joel Fierst of the Jewish Community Endowment Fund, a collection of family funds, to make the case for what we had to have.

Also, from the beginning, we had end-of-year celebrations for our students at each school. The tutors brought the refreshments, but in addition to a certificate, each child received an appropriate book, of course, and where to get the funds was a challenge; somehow we pulled that off each year. We had staff liaisons at each school, usually the reading specialist, and as we grew, we had team leaders, bless them, to do the organizing at every school. By the way, the RP libraries, which I hope are available at our schools, were initially funded by \$1000 from the school system and carefully selected by a committee of tutors.

But then, after seven years as volunteers, it was time to hand the program to a professional. Where to find the money? Coming to the rescue, Ed Smith, a trustee of the Herbert and Sarah M. Gibor Foundation, felt that the Gibors would be pleased to have their names associated with such a worthwhile program. Thank you. And so the scrounging for help that was so much a part of our job now may be a thing of the past, not only for the youngsters' educational needs, but even, I believe, this celebratory breakfast. We know you've earned it, but don't let anyone know how much fun it is to be with the kids. I know. I tutored for 17 years. And I miss it.

Elaine Erichson June 3, 2019

End of Year Parties 2019



End of Year Party at Hart Elementary

Students at year end parties throughout the schools and after school program enjoyed special recognition with their Reading Partners. Each student received a certificate for their participation in the program and a new book to take home for the summer. Staff and parents often joined the parties to celebrate the children's progress.

Volunteer Spotlight

Sawyer Price

This month's volunteer spotlight focuses on a younger volunteer who does not tutor students! Sawyer is in school during tutoring hours, because he is a student himself and a rising 8th grader this year. Sawyer was referred to us through one of the librarians at the Ferguson, who used to be a reading partner years ago.

Sawyer loves to read. He recently celebrated his Bar Mitzvah in March. For his philanthropic project he wanted to give back to the community in a way that promotes access to reading to everyone. The first step he took was to volunteer at the Stamford Library. While doing this, he learned about the Reading Partners Program and reached out to United Jewish Federation to see how he could make an impact. He worked hard to gather new supplies for us to use in the schools, including games, books and more. He also raised money to donate to the program as well.

When Sawyer is not reading, he can be found swimming on the Newfield Club team, as well as with Chelsea Piers. He also plays basketball, video games, spends time with friends and reads. Thank you Sawyer for taking time out of your busy schedule to give back to the community and share the joys of reading with all children!



Clarification of Barbara Rosenberg's Volunteer Spotlight

When discussing Barbara Rosenberg's greatest moment of pride, it was unclear that I was referring to the work she did on behalf of her first husband, Stanley Rosenberg who died in 1980 as a result of his exposure to asbestos working in the Brooklyn Navy Yard. Barbara lobbied for 6 years alongside the New York Public Interest Group, to change the status quo that unfairly restricted lawsuits because of asbestos exposure. When her husband became ill they were unable to sue, because it was the law that suits had to be brought within 3 years of exposure to asbestos. This did not address diseases such as asbestos which have a long latency period, or drugs such as DES which caused cancer years later in the children of the pregnant women who took it.

Because of Barbara and the other lobbyists' hard work, one can now sue up to two years after the time that you discover you are ill and the cause has been identified. This bill was signed on what would have been Barbara and Stanley's 25th Wedding Anniversary.