



United Jewish Federation®  
OF GREATER STAMFORD, NEW CANAAN AND DARIEN

*BETTER TOGETHER*

## Reading Partners

June 2015

### Marlyn's Message

What a year we had! So many exciting happenings for our program and I am proud that we are Moving and Shaking! Part of our goals needs to be adaptability to the changing landscape of education and this year proved that we can do it.



#### MOVING:

Stamford has experienced a huge influx of children entering K who come from bi-lingual families. These children are behind their peers not only in basic reading skills but in vocabulary recognition. In response, I asked you to voluntarily move your grade assignments to work more with K and 1st graders. This was not easy; I know it takes time to get to know each teacher and the specific grade literacy skills needed. But YOU did it! This year we DOUBLED the number of K children we served and made a huge impact in their literacy comfort. The response from the teachers was extremely positive.

#### SHAKING:

We are thrilled with the addition of the 12th and remaining elementary school to our partnership--- Westover Magnet Elementary School. In March, we were presented with an opportunity that we couldn't pass up. So now I am proud to say we can reach the children in ALL of our elementary schools. See more details below.

Lastly, this year we welcomed teens from Greenwich Academy into the program. I wrote about this in the January newsletter. They formed strong relationships with the kids at the Boys and Girls Club of Stamford and look forward to coming back next year. It's great to have this after school option for teens who want to participate in our program. In addition, it's gratifying to hear from teens who've made strong connections with kids and find the teaching experience rewarding.

The Volunteer Recognition Breakfast on June 3 was a big success. We had 70 guests, including you, our partners, 11 staff liaisons from our partner schools, and UJF staff. The speaker, Fran Manushkin, delighted us all with her warmth and stories

about publishing and being an author. See more below.

I'm going over all the Feedback Forms and appreciate your input. It's one of the concrete ways I can improve the program not only for you but for the students as well. If you haven't sent it in, please do so now! Scroll down to the end to see it.

I hope this summer you can kick back and enjoy the warmth and beauty all around us. I give thanks for your being a part of this program and for giving me the opportunity to work with such a devoted, committed group. I'm in the office all summer. Come by and say Hello!

Warm regards,

*Marlyn*

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## **Sustaining Our er Base**

Our volunteer base is a constantly changing number due to new tutors coming on board and old ones leaving. Many of our tutors have been with us for 5-15 years and we have a stable core but we always need new blood!

Here's where you come in----YOU are the best recruiters for the program, because you know how much good we do and how rewarding it is.

Can you reach out to your "community" and

## **Volunteer Recognition Breakfast June 3, 2015**



Fran Manushkin (left), featured speaker at the breakfast with Reading Partners Director, Marlyn Agatstein

Children's author Fran Manushkin charmed the 70 attendees at the annual volunteer breakfast. She brought along examples of her books translated into various languages and held up an enormous

## **Special Book Delivery**



Marlyn Agatstein, left and Lois Dreyer at the JCC

Each year we gift each of our student reading partners with a book at the end of year school parties. And each year,

tell them about us? Here's where you might find interested people:

1. Right in your own home!
2. How about next door?
3. In your exercise group.
4. Sitting next to you at religious services.
5. In your book group.
6. At your art class.
7. After your discussion group.
8. During intermission at the symphony.
9. At the water cooler after your tennis game.
10. Your recent empty-nester friend.
11. A Grandparent who loves reading to little ones.

I love talking to prospective volunteers and welcome your referrals or their personal calls. It's never too late to sign up!

sample of a book manuscript page prepared for printing. We were delighted with her reading of "The Tushy" book and it was sold out at the book sale table.

Another highlight of the breakfast was the mini-drama, "How Westover Came on Board, or, It's a Small World." Authored by Marlyn Agatstein, the drama featured the real participants who made it possible for Westover School to join our partnership. A good laugh was had by all!

The breakfast room looked beautiful and I want to thank our volunteers again for the creative pink themed table settings, Happy Sweet 16 balloons and the book sellers table. Thank you! to Ronni Ginsberg, Ena Sarkar, Asha Gupte, Marge Pavlov and friend Andrew and Meg Mooar

somebody has to order all those books. This year we gave out 250 books!

Lois Dreyer, Team Leader at KT Murphy and Roxbury Schools has been in charge of this enormous effort for many years and we're giving a huge shout out here for her dedication and management of this piece of our program. She works with the booksellers at Scholastic and is always looking for input on new series of interest and what the kids are enjoying.

## How Westover School Came on Board, Or It's a Small World

In March Jim Benjamin, one of our seasoned tutors at Stillmeadow, called to tell me he was reading with one of his employee's daughters at their home as they only speak Polish. Jim just couldn't turn him down and he was going to their home once a week. But he told me he'd prefer to go to her school, Westover Magnet. I was a bit

skeptical if anything could be done because we didn't have a team there and it was quite late in the school year. But, it didn't hurt to try. I called Jen Grant, our staff liaison at Stillmeadow, who did a workshop for us last Fall and asked her if she knew anyone at Westover.

She referred me to Amy Neer, her counterpart there, and I called Amy to introduce myself. When I mentioned Reading Partners, she said she was aware of us because her Mother, Susan Kolbrenner, has been a Reading Partner at Toquam for three years. Small world!

The principal was on board, Amy was willing to work with us, now I had to put a team together--no small feat this late in the year. I called Carolyn Bonheim, a partner who'd left us a couple years ago and asked if she'd be willing to come back just 'til the end of the year. Yes! Then I enlisted Tom McEvoy, a new sub who hadn't been called at all and was wanting to participate. Yes! So, with the 2 of them plus Jim Benjamin and me, we put together a team and started in April.

Amy asked us all to read with 1st graders and she found a room in the 1st grade wing that was empty during the kids' PE time. We saw those kids weekly and were able to see them 11 times through the middle of June. Every single one of them made improvements in their DRA scores and was eager to see us.

I'm thankful that it's a small world and that with the input from all these "players", we were able to enlarge our program and bring Westover into the fold. We're excited to start anew in the fall. We'll be needing to start another team there from scratch, so if you know of anyone who lives near Westover, has a child there, or wants to get involved, please have them get in touch with me. Thanks!

Are you free Sunday, August 9?

The Back to School Shop, a UJF program that provides economically disadvantaged children with new clothes and school supplies, needs volunteers to help children "shop" at a Stamford elementary school on August 9. While they are busy, their parents can receive health screenings and information on community services. To volunteer, contact Lorraine Kweskin at [Lkweskin@gmail.com](mailto:Lkweskin@gmail.com).

Looking ahead on our calendars:

We'll begin tutoring again the last week in September/first week in October, depending on the school.

[Click here](#) for Reading Partners Tutor Feedback Form.

So glad summer's here! Stop by anytime to say Hello....

Marlyn Agatstein

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