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Seniors head back to the classroom

Learning Buddies volunteers aged 55+ help students with classwork in more than 100 Minnesota classrooms

WEST SAINT PAUL, Minn. – This week, older adults are heading back to the classroom in 30 schools across the southeast metro. The [DARTS Learning Buddies](#) program, now in its 28th year, provides an intergenerational approach to learning by connecting older adult volunteers – many of whom are retired – from the local community with K-5 students in classrooms on a weekly basis. The West Saint Paul-based nonprofit [DARTS](#) offers this unique program which provides fulfilling volunteer opportunities, intergenerational community connections, and ongoing training and support to help older volunteers meet the needs of today’s youth. The Learning Buddies program is primarily funded by grants and sponsorships, and [Flint Hills Resources](#) is a lead sponsor.

Alongside Learning Buddies, DARTS also offers a Pen Pal program where students and older adults exchange letters throughout the year. Students get the chance to practice their writing skills while older adults are able to connect and volunteer from the comfort of their own homes. The Learning Buddies and Pen Pals programs have more than 160 volunteers serving over 100 Minnesota classrooms. Since it first began in 1997, the Learning Buddies program has served over 82,000 students and logged more than 115,000 volunteer hours.

“When a Learning Buddy enters a classroom or a child receives a letter, the kids’ faces light up,” remarked DARTS President Ann Bailey. “Similarly, the volunteers find meaning and joy in these connections. We’re immensely grateful to Flint Hills Resources for supporting this program from the very beginning.”

Studies have shown that intergenerational learning is beneficial to both students and adults. Interacting with adults other than one’s parents can enhance a child’s social and cognitive development. Because of the one-on-one setting, Learning Buddies help meet students’ individual needs, encouraging them to ask questions and develop a deeper understanding of what they are studying. In turn, older adults who regularly interact with children are more likely to show delayed mental decline, lower blood pressure and overall increased happiness. Year after year, Learning Buddies volunteers have said they feel fulfilled by the experience.

“Programs like Learning Buddies enrich the lives of everyone involved,” said Heather Rein, director of community affairs at Flint Hills Resources Pine Bend refinery in Rosemount. “From the volunteers who

generously give their time to the teachers who welcome the buddies into their classroom – and to the staff at DARTS who work tirelessly to run this program – thank you! We are proud to support this incredible program year after year.”

About DARTS

Since 1974, nonprofit DARTS has served seniors and caregivers in the southeast metro, empowering seniors to lead more independent lives. Services include home repairs, indoor and outdoor chore assistance, transportation services, caregiver support, and volunteer opportunities. For more information and to learn more about DARTS, call 651-455-1560 or visit dartconnects.org.

About Flint Hills Resources

Flint Hills Resources is a leading refining company with operations primarily in the Midwest and Texas. Flint Hills operates the Pine Bend refinery in Rosemount, Minnesota and two refineries in Corpus Christi, TX with a combined crude oil processing capacity of more than 700,000 barrels per day. The company produces, markets and transports refined products including gasoline, diesel, jet fuel, asphalt and heating oils. Flint Hills Resources also owns and/or operates more than 4,000 miles of pipelines that transport crude oil, refined petroleum products, natural gas liquids and chemicals that are delivered through a distribution system of more than 40 terminals throughout the Midwest and Texas. For more information, visit fhr.com.

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