



## News Release

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### **Grandmas and Grandpas prepare to go back to school**

*Learning Buddies volunteers mentor students in  
more than 200 Minnesota classrooms*

**West. St. Paul, Minn.** – Students in 47 schools and nine districts across Dakota, Scott and Ramsey counties will once again have the unique opportunity to benefit from the [DARTS Learning Buddies](#) program, now in its 22<sup>nd</sup> year. The Learning Buddies program provides an intergenerational approach to learning by connecting older adult volunteers – many of which are retired senior citizens – from the local community with K-8 students in classrooms on a weekly basis. Facilitated by the West St. Paul-based nonprofit [DARTS](#) and funded primarily by [Flint Hills Resources](#), the Learning Buddies program has 130 volunteers which serve 212 Minnesota classrooms.

“Learning Buddies are beloved members of the community, and the students eagerly look forward to their visits each week,” said Erin Walloch, Learning Buddies Program Manager. “Both the Buddies and the students gain so much from this program, and it is inspiring to see friendships form and a love of learning grow!”

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.

“The joy of working with young children and watching them grow in skills and confidence, the joy of hearing the laughter of young people, the grasp of a child’s hand – these are priceless

opportunities that I look forward to each week,” said Nancy Feltes, Learning Buddies volunteer for five years.

Learning Buddies also includes a Pen Pal program, which is expanding in 2018 to five schools. Students and older adults will exchange letters throughout the school year and get the chance to meet each other in person at a gathering in the spring.

“Programs like Learning Buddies are special and truly enrich the lives of everyone involved,” said Heather Rein, director of community affairs at Flint Hills Resources Pine Bend refinery in Rosemount. “We are grateful to the volunteers who generously give of their time, the teachers who welcome the buddies into their classrooms, and the staff at DARTS who work tirelessly to carry on this incredible program.”

[Click here](#) to download a group photo of the Learning Buddies volunteers.

### **About DARTS**

DARTS creates connections that enrich aging. We provide practical services for older adults in their home, answer questions through an information hotline, keep people mobile with accessible ride services, and support family caregivers of elders with resources, coaching, and education. We engage all ages in volunteering, moving passions to actions, and we build community through innovative partnerships. More information about DARTS is available at [dartsconnect.org](http://dartsconnect.org).

### **About Flint Hills Resources**

Flint Hills Resources Pine Bend refinery produces transportation fuels used throughout the Midwest, including most of Minnesota’s gasoline, diesel fuel, jet fuel, as well as other products people rely on such as propane and asphalt. Located 17 miles southeast of Minneapolis, Pine Bend has a capacity of 339,000 barrels per day and is among the cleanest, most efficient, and safest oil refineries in the country. Flint Hills Resources directly and indirectly supports more than 4,000 Minnesota jobs and has invested nearly \$1.7 billion on upgrades and improvements to its Minnesota facilities since 2010. With 1,000 full-time employees, the Flint Hills Resources Pine Bend refinery is one of the largest employers in Dakota County. More information about the company is available at [pinebendrefinery.com](http://pinebendrefinery.com).

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