



News Release

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Learning Buddies Program celebrates 20 years of connecting older adults with young students

50,000 students served in Dakota and Scott counties

Rosemount, Minn. – Teachers, volunteers, parents and students in Dakota and Scott counties are gearing up for the 20th anniversary of the [DARTS Learning Buddies Program](#), a successful intergenerational approach to education that connects older adults with K-5 students in classrooms to improve proficiency in reading, math and science.

During the past 20 years, the Learning Buddies Program, facilitated by West St. Paul-based nonprofit [DARTS](#), has grown by leaps and bounds. Beginning with a single volunteer in 1997, the program today has more than 130 active volunteers in 46 Dakota and Scott County elementary schools. In total, volunteers have devoted more than 88,000 hours and served approximately 50,000 students since the program's founding.

“Learning Buddies volunteers are an extremely valuable asset to my classroom,” said Sheri Brown, second grade teacher at Cherry View Elementary School in Lakeville. “The one-on-one time these caring, kind individuals spend with my students makes a positive difference in kids’ ability to learn and reach their full potential. I can’t imagine not having a Learning Buddy in my classroom.”

Academic studies have shown that intergenerational learning is mutually beneficial for both students and adults. Working one-on-one with adults other than one’s parents can enhance children’s social and cognitive development. Older adults who interact with children are more likely to experience increased happiness, delayed mental decline, and lower blood pressure.

“Seeing students’ faces light up when they learn something new is the best part of my day,” said Maureen Cannon, who has been involved in the Learning Buddies Program for 19 years. “The kids are so appreciative of what I do, and I learn a lot from them too!”

The Learning Buddies Program marks its 20th anniversary in the 2016-17 school year. The program has been funded from the start largely through generous donations from [Flint Hills Resources in Rosemount](#).

“The Learning Buddies program has contributed to the learning experience of so many young people in a very meaningful way over the past two decades while also enriching the lives of older adults who give so generously of their time to help kids learn,” said Heather Rein, community relations director at Flint Hills Resources’ Pine Bend refinery in Rosemount.

“Congratulations to the entire team at DARTS on 20 impressive years; it has been a joy to watch the Learning Buddies program flourish to what it is today.”

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 and moving passions to actions, and we build community through innovative partnerships. More information about DARTS is available at 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 1,300 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.

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