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## **Rotary Club partners with United Way of Muscatine to benefit Jefferson Elementary Kindergarten students**

**MUSCATINE, Iowa** — Rotary Club of Muscatine partnered with the United Way of Muscatine to assemble literacy kits for kindergarten students at Jefferson Elementary School. Hilary Henke, United Way of Muscatine's Community Engagement Manager, attended the Rotary Club's weekly meeting Monday (April 29) to provide information about the importance of achieving literacy benchmarks in early elementary school and to lead the kit-packing event.

Rotarians assembled and delivered 61 literacy kits to kindergartners at Jefferson Elementary on Monday.

Literacy Kits deepen children's reading experience and help them build their personal library at home.

"It's incredibly rewarding when we can bridge Rotary's global focus on literacy with local impact, reaching students right here in Muscatine," Megan Francis, President, Rotary Club of Muscatine, said.

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Each kit included a book, a personalized note of encouragement, and an activity to make reading interactive and to bring the book to life for the children.

"We are incredibly grateful to the Rotary Club for their generous donation of new books and activities for our Kindergarten students," Kandy Steel, Ed.D, Principal at Jefferson Elementary School, said. "Their support will undoubtedly inspire a love of learning and help our students continue to thrive, even while learning remotely. Thank you for your commitment to education and for making a difference in the lives of our Jefferson students."

United Way of Muscatine's goal is that every child succeeds academically through support in and out of school. Data show that 3rd grade reading proficiency scores in Muscatine County dropped by 19.2 percent post-pandemic and have still not returned to pre-pandemic levels. Research found having books in the home correlated to higher academic performance and children who are reading proficiently in 3rd grade are five times more likely to graduate from high school. United Way strives to increase 3rd grade reading proficiency rates through literacy kit packing events and programs like Imagination Library, Reading Buddies, and Reading Mentors.

"We are grateful to Rotary Club of Muscatine for their ongoing support of community initiatives," Henke said. "Their efforts through this kit-packing event will help ensure ALL kindergarten students at Jefferson Elementary School have a book of their own and book-related activities to enhance their learning."

Currently, 77.2 percent of Jefferson Elementary School students qualify for free and reduced lunch, which is the highest rate in the Muscatine Community School District.

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"The partnership with Rotary to get books and literacy kits into the homes of these students ahead of summer break is an important piece to increasing the number of children who are reading at or above grade level—a core piece of United Way's efforts to increase household independence through education and training," Henke said.

"Instilling a love of reading in children is critical to ensuring more children are reading at or above their grade level—a core piece of United Way's efforts to increase household independence through education and training," Henke said.

For more information, please contact Hilary Henke at [hilary@unitedwaymuscantine.org](mailto:hilary@unitedwaymuscantine.org) or 563-263-5963.

#### **About United Way of Muscatine**

United Way of Muscatine has been serving the community for 70 years. The mission of United Way of Muscatine is to mobilize resources to empower the greater Muscatine community to improve the lives of people in need. Our goal is to increase household independence through education and housing. Together, we are United to Thrive.

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