



for immediate release

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**Salem Co-operative Bank Awards Merrimack Valley YMCA
\$10,000 Grant to Fund Achievement Gap Programs**

The Merrimack Valley YMCA has been awarded a grant for \$10,000 from Salem Community Benefit, Inc. through Salem Co-operative Bank. This generous grant funding will support the YMCA's efforts to close the achievement gap for low-income children in the Merrimack Valley through its Summer Learning Loss Prevention and Early Learning Readiness programs.

The Merrimack Valley YMCA has partnered once again with the Francis M. Leahy Elementary School in Lawrence to provide this Summer Learning Loss Prevention (SLLP) program to 1st and 2nd grade students for five weeks this summer. The program is designed to help children from low-income households improve their academic success during the summer months. This program, taught by certified teachers, offers morning educational instruction and afternoons full of enrichment activities that include art, music, science, and weekly swimming lessons at the Lawrence YMCA. The goal of the program is to prepare students for the upcoming school year by building confidence, reading skills, and problem solving skills.

On Thursday, Sarah Rastello, Senior Vice President of Retail and Business Development and Glenn Strauss, Senior Vice President of Commercial Lending at Salem Co-operative Bank, visited the Leahy School to see the Summer Learning Loss Prevention program in action. "We are thrilled to provide a donation to such a worthwhile program which allows the families of these children know we are investing in their future," said Sarah Rastello, of Salem Co-operative Bank.

The Early Learning Readiness Program (ELR) is a relationship and play based program for informal caregivers caring for young children (ages 0-5) while their parents are at work and school. This program provides caregivers and children with a set of experiences and the knowledge necessary to ensure children arrive at the steps of kindergarten ready to learn. ELR serves predominantly low-income families with the intent of reaching children with unequal access to high quality early education. The program activities help to develop improved caregiver behavior, improved caregiver knowledge, and reduce the isolation of informal caregivers, allowing them to connect with other adults and share ideas about early learning and parenting.

"Through partnerships with the Lawrence Public Schools and local businesses like Salem Co-op, our YMCA is making significant strides in reducing the achievement gap for many local children," said Gary Morelli, CEO and President of the Merrimack Valley YMCA. He added, "We have worked to support the success of children from low-income families by helping caregivers develop skills to support the development their children and by ensuring school-age learners stay on the path to success by providing high quality summer learning activities."

Salem Community Benefit, Inc. is a philanthropic organization that was established in 1997 to commemorate the 75th anniversary of Salem Co-operative Bank's dedicated service to the Greater Salem community. Since the foundation's inception, the bank has contributed annually to this fund. The foundation considers all worthwhile community needs and participates in direct giving to both projects and organizations.

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About the Y

With its headquarters located in Lawrence, Massachusetts, the Merrimack Valley YMCA is represented by the Andover/North Andover YMCA, the Lawrence YMCA, the Methuen YMCA, Camp Lawrence and Camp Nokomis on Lake Winnepesaukee, and Day Camp Otter in Salem, New Hampshire. Each of these branches and camps serve the needs of distinct and unique communities, making the Merrimack Valley YMCA an organization rich in cultural, social, and economic diversity. The Merrimack Valley YMCA involves more than 30,000 members and participants in more than 2000 different programs. Emphasizing the four core character development values of caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility, we are committed to strengthening our communities by nurturing the potential of kids, promoting healthy living and fostering a sense of social responsibility.

Attachments

Photo 1 (l-r) Anne Whalen, Executive Director of Methuen YMCA, Sarah Rastello Senior Vice President of Retail Banking & Business Development at Salem Co-operative Bank, Gary Morelli, CEO & President Merrimack Valley YMCA and Glenn Strauss, Senior Vice President of Commercial Lending at Salem Co-operative Bank

Photo 2 (l-r) YMCA Teacher Caitlyn Hanefant explains the curriculum and goals to Salem Co-operative Bank's Sarah Rastello Senior Vice President of Retail Banking & Business Development, Glenn Strauss, Senior Vice President of Commercial Lending and Kim Sullivan.

Photo 3 Students complete their work at the YMCA's Summer Learning Loss Prevention program.