

The Daily News

Future Fund: Kindergartners in two counties get a jump on saving



NIAGARA SCHOOL DISTRICT kindergartners, from left, Damian May, Cater Cox, Lily Bell and Gabriel Ferguson recite a pinky promise with Paula Gruszynski, at center, the executive director of the M&M Area Community Foundation, during the kickoff event for the Marinette and Menominee Area Community Foundation Future Fund savings account program. (Theresa Proudfit/Daily News photo)

NIAGARA, Wis. — Like all financial transactions, this one ended with a gesture to seal the deal: Each student made a pinky promise with Paula Gruszynski.

The executive director of the Marinette & Menominee Area Community Foundation on Monday celebrated the official launch of the new Future Fund program with kindergarten students at Niagara Elementary.

The Future Fund is designed to encourage building savings, assist with career training and post-secondary education expenses and increase financial literacy among area youth.

To help do that, all kindergarten students in Marinette and Menominee counties, including those who are home-schooled and virtual schooled, will have a \$50 deposit-only savings account established by the Community Foundation at a financial institution in their community.

“A promise is a promise,” Gruszynski told the students, *“and we believe in you.”*



From left, Paula Gruszynski, executive director of the M&M Area Community Foundation, makes a pinky promise with Niagara Elementary kindergartners Damian May and Aryanna Pahl during the kickoff event of the Future Fund savings account program. (Theresa

Proudfit/Daily News photo)

Marinette and Menominee County kindergartners, their families, school staff, local financial institution leaders and the M&M Area Community Foundation came together Monday to kick off the Future Fund.

Goodman-Armstrong Creek, Beecher-Dunbar-Pembine, Niagara, Wausaukee, Crivitz, Coleman, St. Thomas Aquinas Academy in Peshtigo, Marinette schools and Peshtigo schools each had separate celebrations for the kindergarten classes.

In all, more than 700 kindergartners will receive the money this year and the program will continue with each new kindergarten class. In addition, the Community Foundation will continue to deposit in the students' accounts through 12th grade, plus they will earn interest during their time in school.

Other participating financial institutions include Integra First Federal Credit Union, Peshtigo National Bank, Nicolet National Bank, Delta County Credit Union and Stephenson National Bank & Trust.

“Last March we officially made the program public, but the board of the Community Foundation had been working for about three years on it. Every single kindergarten class going forward will get \$50 per student, then every school year after kindergarten they will get a couple more dollars in their account,” Gruszynski said. *“When they graduate, they need to use it for post-secondary education or some kind of training. We maintain it for up to four years after you graduate. So if you get out and you don’t know what you want to do, we will keep it for you and then if three or four years later you decide, we can give it to you,”* she said.

Shelly Lindner, Niagara mBank branch manager, also gave each student a piggy bank Monday to

begin saving at home. Niagara Superintendent Nathaniel Burklund dropped a quarter into each student's bank to get them started.

"The bank is super-excited to be part of this and to support our community; to support the kids for generations to come," Lindner said. "This will keep growing and we are proud to be part of it."

Gabriel Ferguson said he was happy about getting a new bank because he now only has a box at home. He wants to use his Future Fund money to *"be a fireman just like my dad and I'm going to work at my dad's fire station,"* he said.

Lily Bell said she initially plans to be a McDonald's worker because *"mom said it is a good starting job and you even get a lunch break if you work super hard. Then, I think I want to practice being a teacher."*

KK Integrated Logistics contributed \$176,750 for the first five years of the program.

Gold sponsors also include Bellin Health, Waupaca Foundry, R. W. Fernstrum & Co., Tom and Sandy Kuber, L.E. Jones Co., Tyco, Boyle Design Group and the MMACF Board of Directors.

Silver sponsors include Nicolet National Bank, Dave and CarolLynn Higley, Fincantieri Marinette Marine, and Ken Jones, CPA.

Bronze are Anchor Coupling, Northern Coatings & Chemical, Plutchak Fab, Hansen-Onion-Martell Funeral Home, PCM Credit Union, Greg and Beth Horvath, Evergreen Tool, First National Bank & Trust, The Harbors Retirement Community, Richard and Deb Fisher, Philip and Karen Zwergel, and Wisconsin Public Service.

Friend of Foundation include Culver's of Marinette; Northeast Wisconsin Technical College; Lloyd

Flanders; Winsert; Tony Furton Agency; JD First Real Estate; Papa Murphy's Pizza; Little River Country Club; Jeff and Karen Hines; Edward Jones in Marinette, Menominee and Peshtigo; Peshtigo Times; Ameriprise Financial-Mark Rasner; Menominee Granite Co.; North and Jan Shetter; UP Engineers & Architects; and Stellar Enterprise.

“As a school district that is partnering with them and kind of being a beneficiary of it, it’s great to provide kids with dreams, but also the outcome of what can become after 12 or 13 years of school. Kids need to understand that when they are done here there is another place for them whether it’s the job force or college readiness. This is exciting for our community and kids,” Burklund said.

Gruszynski appreciates all the area sponsors and said: *“Our goal is a million dollars in the fund and we are not there yet, so we welcome contributions to the fund.”*

Those interested in becoming a sponsor can call 906-864-3599.