The Gift of Reading, the Gift of Giving

Meet STAIR Supporters Jim and Linda Humphrey

By Eileen Cortese | STAIR Board Secretary

The adage “it takes a village” is often overused but when it comes to the STAIR program, it could not be more true. The underpinning beneath the five STAIR employees and almost 300 volunteers who keep STAIR running is a cadre of donors who provide the fuel that keeps us running strong.

As a nonprofit that receives very little public funding, STAIR relies heavily on the generosity of individuals and family foundations who believe, as we do, that every child deserves the opportunity to become a successful reader. Thanks to the extraordinary commitment of our volunteers and the in-kind support of our community partners, STAIR keeps its overhead remarkably low, directing 91 cents of every dollar to our program and the children we serve.

Among those who have embraced STAIR’s mission with exceptional generosity are Jim and Linda Humphrey, whose family foundation has been a steadfast supporter of our work. Their commitment goes far beyond financial support—it reflects a deeply held belief in the power of education to change young lives. I spoke with Jim and Linda about what inspires their generosity and why STAIR holds such a special place in their hearts.

Long time Anne Arundel County residents, the Humphreys believe in giving back to the community and generously donate to numerous causes. When I asked how they came to support STAIR, Jim’s face lit up with a big smile and he answered, “Jo Ann Mattson, of course!” Turns out, the Humphreys have known STAIR’s Executive Director for decades. “She’s a dynamo,” Jim exclaimed and sang her praises as a leader in assisting the county’s underserved population. After Jo Ann joined STAIR, Jim and Linda began donating to the organization, certain it would continue to succeed under her leadership. They wanted to help! Linda even became a tutor. But that is just part of the story. As we talked further, Jim shared his own grade school experience and why he believes that reading mastery is critical to any student’s path to success. In Jim’s own words:



Jim and Linda Humphrey

“When I was growing up, my dad was a builder and we moved all the time. I changed schools every year until 5th grade. When I got to Pinecrest Elementary School in Montgomery County, Mrs. Patterson, my teacher, discovered my secret. I couldn’t read. She told me to tell my mom that she would stay after school to help me for thirty minutes each day until I caught up. And she did.

On Christmas morning I received a Roy Rogers book and was elated that I could read it. I was so proud of myself! Thus began my academic career and, with confidence, I succeeded. I was in the Honor Society in high school as well as President of the student government. I attended the University of Maryland and became the VP of Student Government there. It all started with reading! I never forgot Mrs. Patterson. In fact, I met Mrs. Patterson’s daughter through friends near the end of high school and she took me home to see her mom. It was a wonderful reunion. I sent her a bottle of champagne at Christmas for years.”

What a testament to the power of individualized help and consistency—cornerstones of the STAIR program!

STAIR would not exist without dedicated donors like the Humphreys. When asked why he would encourage others to donate to STAIR, Jim answered that, “education is the key to success and reading is crucial to obtaining that education.” The lifelong impact of learning to read cannot be overstated and every dollar donated helps STAIR get closer to its goal of helping every child learn to read, read to learn, and become a lifelong reader.