



## PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:  
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### **Intergenerational Reading Program Marks King Birthday** *Vernon seniors and youngsters study "Martin's Big Words"*

**VERNON** – Children at all five Vernon elementary schools will learn important lessons about Martin Luther King next week, as they work with their tutors from the Community Renewal Team's Vernon Reads program. The popular literacy program, now in its 13<sup>th</sup> year, serves children who have trouble reading yet do not qualify for professional remedial services.

Volunteers from the Greater Hartford and Middlesex Retired & Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) and their students spend an hour each week reading aloud, playing educational games and working on their literacy skills. There are currently 52 Vernon children participating, identified by classroom teachers, reading specialists and school social workers. Children consistently gain reading skills and academic confidence by participating in this program.

During sessions scheduled for January 19-21, each child will receive a personal copy of "Martin's Big Words: The Life of Dr. Martin Luther King," a beautifully-illustrated age-appropriate picture book by Doreen Rappaport. The book ends with some of the "big words" for which Dr King is remembered: peace, love, freedom and dream. Children and their tutors will read the book aloud and (time permitting) use the discussion guide and activity sheet provided.

#### **MEDIA ALERT – Please join us at any of these Vernon locations:**

Thursday, January 20 – Center Road School 8:15-9:00 am

Thursday January 20 – Skinner Road School 2:00-2:35 pm

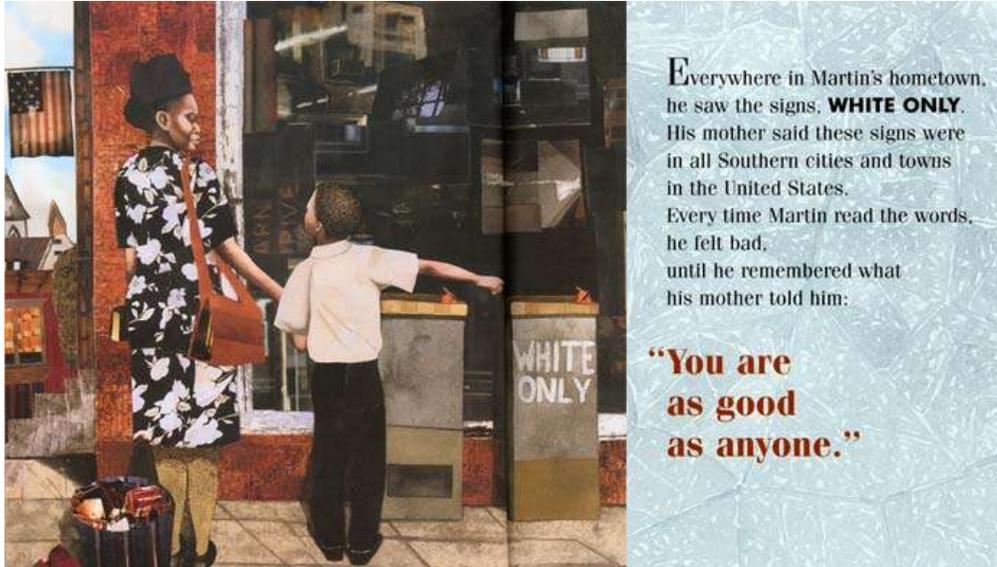
Thursday January 20 – Northeast School 2:05 - 2:55 pm

Friday, January 21 – Maple Street School 8:15 - 9:00 am

Wednesday, January 26 – Lake Street School 1:00-2:00 pm POSTPONED FROM JAN 19

**Call Nancy Pappas, 860-650-5689 for more details**

"We want children to learn more about King's life, and his love of learning," said Mary Wilcox, Program Manager of CRT's Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) which runs the reading program. Children will take home the King book and another volume chosen by their teachers after next week's tutoring session.



CRT has over 600 RSVP volunteers who are at least 55 years of age, serving in more than 50 sites throughout Hartford and Middlesex counties. In addition to this tutoring program, some of the largest projects are the Bradley Ambassadors at Bradley Airport, and two Foodshare sites operated by RSVP volunteers. Staff support for RSVP comes from the Corporation for National and Community Service, but most projects operate with private and community funding. Vernon Reads has enjoyed great community cooperation from the Vernon Education Foundation, Savings Bank of Manchester Foundation and local faith communities. For more information or to volunteer, please contact Mary Wilcox at 860-760-3088.

### **BACKGROUND:**

- Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) is America's largest volunteer network for people over 55, and is part of the Corporation for National and Community Service, a federal agency that also oversees AmeriCorps, VISTA and other programs. Tens of thousands of seniors participate in RSVP in every state of the nation.
- CRT is the sponsor of the RSVP program in Middlesex and Hartford counties. This year CRT has 611 RSVP volunteers who will serve a total of 58,228 to 59,000 at 61 separate program/locations.
- CRT's RSVP started Vernon Reads 13 years ago, building upon a model called America Reads. CRT is currently providing this one-on-one opportunity in all five Vernon elementary schools, as well as in Robertson and Bowers elementary schools in Manchester.
- The model involves approximately one hour of reading aloud – sometimes the child and sometimes the adult – as well as word games and other literacy activities. Children have written letters, composed poems and created cards – each project requiring thoughtful and careful writing.

- Several of the CRT reading companions have been with the program since its inception. They indicate that they get as much out of the experience as the children do. Many of them are willing to be interviewed for a feature story.

*CRT, a federally-designated anti-poverty agency, helps people in Hartford and Middlesex Counties become successful and self-sufficient. Founded in 1963, CRT touches more than 100,000 lives each year. Programs include Head Start, Meals on Wheels and Senior Cafés, Energy Assistance, homeless shelters and supportive housing, financial literacy and income tax preparation, affordable housing, employment services and many other services.*