

Program helps parents plant 'Seeds for School Success'

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By Elliot Mann

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The Rochester Area Foundation and Sunstone Hotels are trying to plant the seed of early childhood education.

The groups are teaming up to offer "Seeds for School Success" to all of Rochester's parents, grandparents or child care providers. The program helps young children from birth to 5 years old with writing, reading and communication skills.

Students who enter kindergarten need to know 10,000 to 12,000 words in order to successfully read, according to statistics provided by Rochester Area Foundation First Steps.

When children start school behind the ability of their peers, they have a hard time catching up, said Raelene Ostberg of Rochester Area Foundation First Steps.

The program started last year, but was limited to Sunstone employees. This year, organizers opened it up.

"We believed that it was such a beneficial program internally, that if we have the capacity and ability to benefit the community, why on Earth wouldn't we share such an exceptional program?" Rochester Marriott Hotel General Manager Scott Youngblood said. "You can't overstate the impact of early childhood development."

Ostberg said all parents, regardless of background, should consider coming out. She said the program also helps children develop emotional and social skills, too.

The four-part series involves teaching parents simple games and methods.

"For working parents, it's really stuff you can do day today," Ostberg said.

'Seeds' in session

The four, one-hour "Seeds for School Success" program will be offered from noon to 1 p.m. on July 29, Aug. 5, Aug. 19 and Aug. 26. Parents are supposed to attend each session, which carries a different focus. The program is co-sponsored by the Rochester Area Foundation's First Steps Initiative and Sunstone Hotel Properties through the First Steps Business Alliance. The one-time \$25 cost includes all four sessions. For more information, call 282-1027 or e-mail rsvp@rochesterarea.org.

Sunstone Regional Director of Human Resources Yamini Jagannarayanan said the classes aren't meant to make lives more difficult for working parents, but instead help them with tips in educating their children.

The classes are held over the lunch hour, to allow for working parents.

Jagannarayanan said they hope working parents will create a network of their peers through the sessions.