

For Immediate Release
March 6, 2025
Media Contact: Tracie Killar, (518) 275-8890



South End Children's Cafe Opens New Expanded Location to Serve More Albany Families

*Relocation Triples Program Capacity and Supports Additional Enrichment Services
through Generous Support of Public and Private Donors*

ALBANY – The South End Children's Cafe, a community resource dedicated to addressing food insecurity, equity and justice and supporting local children and families, today recognized the opening of its newly expanded location at 33 Rensselaer Street in Albany's South End neighborhood. The move will allow the organization to triple the number of children and families it serves, and was made possible through the generous support of local individuals, businesses, public officials, and its many community volunteers.

For the past decade, the Children's Cafe has served as a crucial resource for area children and families in the South End of Albany facing food insecurity and other challenges by serving free, healthy meals, assisting with homework, coordinating enriching activities, and providing a safe and joyful afterschool space.

With this move, the organization returns to its original home where it was founded in 2015 when Tracie Killar began using space in the former Reining Life Family Church's kitchen to serve healthy meals to a small group of children. In 2017, the Children's Café moved to 25 Warren Street, supporting more than 500 individuals with expanded programming.

"We were bursting at the seams and had moved to a waiting list for our services," said **Founder and Executive Director Tracie Killar**. "We offer so much more than food, so we were maximizing every inch of space we had available. We knew an expanded facility would allow us to reach more families and grow our offerings to meet the community's needs. We dream big alongside the children."

In 2022, the South End Children's Cafe applied for and received a \$1 million American Rescue Plan Act grant through the City of Albany to acquire their new building on Rensselaer Street, moving from 3,000 square feet to 10,000 square feet of space. The organization's track-record of success and results earned an additional \$750,000 in financial support from the Dormitory Authority of the State of New York (DASNY) through the advocacy of Governor Kathy Hochul, Senator Patricia Fahy, and Assemblymember John T. McDonald III.

Local companies and individual donors rounded out the resources needed to renovate the space and create a joyful, inviting and child-friendly environment. Beyond ensuring local children and families continue to receive nutritious meals the move also allows the organization to expand its wrap-around services and enrichment activities which include mentoring, academic assistance, physical activities, cooking and arts programs.

"Every child deserves to thrive and access to healthy food and a supportive educational environment is a proven tool to help kids succeed," **Governor Kathy Hochul said.** "The South End Children's Cafe is a perfect example of this and I was proud to advocate for this funding to expand their reach and impact, ensuring more children have the foundation they need to grow. When we invest in our children and the organizations that support them, we're investing in New York's future."

The renovation included the creation of a state-of-the-art commercial kitchen, dining room and other specialty spaces for the children to nurture every child's creativity and interests – all significantly larger than in the previous space. New offerings for the Children's Cafe in the new space include a gym, dedicated space for teens, a "Zen Room" for quiet time, dedicated spaces for academic assistance, and a stage for performances. Partnerships with local organizations also allow for counseling and other support services.

The dining room is large enough to serve 80 children each day, and with the ability to provide to-go meals for families, this will result in up to 1,000 meals being served from the Children's Cafe's kitchen each week. With its new walk-in refrigerator and freezer the program is able to expand its partnership with the Regional Food Bank of Northeastern New York to order and store more food, resulting in ongoing savings and efficiency.

The Children's Cafe currently has a staff of 20 with a network of more than 50 volunteers. Each weekday at least 40 children – ages 5-14 – attend programming, and approximately 150 meals are served.

Children arrive between 2:30 and 4 p.m. from school and are greeted with a welcoming environment. First, they enjoy nutritious snacks (fresh fruit and vegetables), games, participate in enrichment activities and receive homework help from retired educators. Between 4:30 and 5:15 p.m. youth participate in recreational activities like sports, music, arts or outings offered to local attractions like parks and libraries. At 5:30 p.m. youth assist with serving and everyone sits down together to share a healthy balanced meal including salad, protein, a vegetable, starch, and dessert, prepared by volunteers. Children are picked up at 6 p.m. by parents or caregivers.

The Children's Cafe's expansion also marks a significant milestone in its recovery following challenges wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic. In March 2020, the organization adapted its operations, shifting to an Emergency Delivery Program. During this time, the organization continued serving 500 healthy meals per week, along with groceries delivered to around 150 families. In March 2021, the Children's Cafe safely resumed in-person operation, but with a significant increase to its waiting list for services. As it grows into the new space, the Children's Cafe plans to incrementally triple the number of participating children and address this additional community need.

Many long-standing supporters make the Café's ongoing work possible through annual philanthropic gifts and thousands of volunteer hours. Donations can be made directly through the Children's Cafe's website, and volunteers are always welcome to help with meal preparation, enrichment, homework help, and other services. Learn more at <https://southendchildrenscafe.org/> or contact the Children's Cafe at (518) 275-8890.

Albany Mayor Kathy Sheehan said, "The South End Children's Cafe is a tremendous asset for our entire city, especially for our youngest residents. It was an easy decision for the City of Albany to award the

South End Children's Cafe \$1 million, making them one of our largest Albany For All ARPA grantees, and I am so grateful that the Governor has added to that investment. This is yet another example of government working at the local and state level to make our community a stronger, safer place."

"Congratulations to Tracie Killar and the entire South End Children's Cafe staff on this well-deserved expansion," **said Senator Patricia Fahy (D--Albany)**. "Their new, expanded location will boost their ability to serve our community, grow their footprint, and set them up for even more success in the future. The South End Children's Cafe is addressing major needs in our community; afterschool programming and the provision of nutritious, fresh food for families and children. I've been proud to work with Assemblymember John T. McDonald, III, to secure funding that supports this expansion and am thrilled to see it come to fruition."

"Since 2015, the South End Children's Cafe has done invaluable work in our communities making sure kids have access to healthy food, engaging activities, and extra help with homework," **Assemblymember Gabriella A. Romero (D,WF-Albany, Guilderland, New Scotland) said**. "I'm so happy to celebrate this expansion! The Children's Cafe will be able to serve twice as many kids, giving them meals and enrichment that set them up for success. Having more capacity means the South End Children's Cafe can have an even larger impact on more kids and families in Albany, and I'll keep working to invest in families in the South End and across the Capital Region."

Assemblymember John T. McDonald III said, "I am excited for the opening of the new home of the South End Children's Cafe. It has been an honor to support and participate in the growth of this critical provider since it's earliest days. The work that Tracie and her team accomplishes day in and day out is making a tremendous impact on all who participate in the program and is in turn having a positive impact not only on these young person's lives but on the community as well."

Dormitory Authority of the State of New York (DASNY) President and CEO Robert J. Rodriguez said, "DASNY is proud to administer this critical funding that will strengthen an organization dedicated to addressing food insecurity and providing educational support. This \$500,000 investment aligns with our mission to build stronger, more resilient communities across New York State. The South End Children's Cafe's expansion will create lasting positive impacts for countless children and families in Albany's South End."

Albany County Executive Daniel P. McCoy said, "The South End Children's Cafe combines all the ingredients kids need in a nurturing environment. The menu includes good food, mentoring and individual attention. That is why Albany County invested ARPA funds into the Cafe's Youth Workforce Development Plan to continue this recipe for success. Governor Hochul's investment will provide even greater support."

Media Logic Founder and CEO David Shultz said, "The magic of the South End Children's Cafe lies in its understanding that nourishment comes in many forms. As they triple their capacity in this beautiful new space, I'm inspired by how they've created an ecosystem where food security, educational support, and creative expression work together. Media Logic is proud to support an organization that recognizes the full spectrum of what children need to thrive."

Broadview Federal Credit Union CEO Michael Castellana said, “The South End Children’s Cafe is more than a place of respite and nourishment; it is a beacon of hope for the children and families living in Albany’s South End. The Children’s Cafe’s new, more expansive location allows that beacon to shine brighter, and its impact to grow larger. My family and Broadview employees have had the honor of helping Tracie and the Children’s Cafe team provide meals and deliver enriching programs and supports to those in need for the past decade. Now, we are looking forward to deepening our partnership and strengthening our investment in this incomparable community resource to give future generations the help and hope they need to learn, grow, and succeed.”

Ostroff Associates President and CEO Rick Ostroff said, “As someone who grew up in Albany, the South End Children’s Cafe holds a special place in my heart. From the very beginning, it has been about neighbors coming together to make sure every child has a warm meal, a safe space, and the support they deserve. At Ostroff Associates, we are incredibly proud to be a long-time partner of Tracie and the Children’s Cafe. We look forward to continuing to stand beside them as they support and nurture even more children and their families in our community.”

CDPHP President and CEO Brian O’Grady said, “From employee volunteer opportunities to making valuable connections with numerous Capital Region organizations, CDPHP is proud of the relationship we are fostering with the South End Children’s Cafe. This exciting site expansion will positively influence the physical and mental health of the many children and families they serve. CDPHP is grateful for the opportunity to support this truly amazing organization.”

“We are grateful to everyone who has worked so diligently to open our new building, which will allow us to serve even more children and families in our community,” **said South End Children’s Cafe founder and executive director Tracie Killar.** “Since opening in 2015, we have served over 300,000 free healthy meals to children and families, and the only reason we have been able to do this is because of the support of our community. This expansion represents a commitment to providing more opportunities and resources to the South End of Albany, and throughout our city. At the South End Children’s Cafe, cooking IS love made visible every day.”

###

About The South End Children’s Cafe

The mission of the South End Children's Cafe is to impact food security, address food equity and food justice, enhance academic success, and positively influence the physical and mental health of children by offering free healthy meals along with homework help, academic enrichment, mentoring, exercise, and the arts. Since opening in 2015, the South End Children’s Cafe has served hundreds of children and over 300,000 free, healthy meals, has offered volunteer opportunities and created employment opportunities.