

Energizing Stepping Stones

First County Bank helps out children's museum and other Norwalk nonprofit organizations

NORWALK
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Stepping Stones Museum can count First County Bank in as the children's museum launches a new campaign to raise the final \$2 million for its 22,000 square foot expansion.

The museum's "Count me in!" campaign will take various forms over the next several months. First County Bank's partnership will include the bank's branches throughout Fairfield County selling "energy balls" at \$2 each. The balls will be sold from July 15 through Nov. 20.

According to Stepping Stones officials, the brightly colored balls are "symbolic of the numerous ways people in the community can be counted and be involved with the museum."

First County Bank's involvement became official during a ceremony held at the museum last week when Stepping Stones' executive director Rhonda Kiest turned over a giant container of energy balls to Rey Giallongo, president and COO of First County Bank.

"This is an extraordinary time for Stepping Stones as



Contributed photo
Rhonda Kiest, executive director of Stepping Stones Museum for Children, and Tony Bosco, chief relationship officer of Stepping Stones Museum for Children, present a container of energy balls to Rey Giallongo, president and chief operating officer of First County Bank, during a recent event at Stepping Stones.

we approach the completion of our new facility," Kiest said. "The Count me in! Community Campaign is designed to engage the entire community in helping us build exceptional learning experiences for children. We are thrilled to have First County Bank on board for what is the beginning of the museum's future."

Stepping Stones Museum's expansion is slated to open in November. The expansion will include larger infant and toddler areas, art and science labs, a traveling exhibit gallery, an expanded café and community garden.

The energy balls may also be purchased at Stepping Stones online at www.steppingstonesmuseum.org

On Thursday, First County

Bank will play host to "My Money Matters" at its 660 Main Ave. branch in Norwalk. It is a workshop designed to teach children about earning, spending and saving money. The bank will also sponsor a "Get Into It! Free" night at the museum with a similar theme.

"First County Bank is very proud to say, 'Count us in!'" Giallongo said of the energy ball project. "The campaign is exciting, it's fun, it's inspirational. It's indicative of the creativity that Stepping Stones is bringing to our children every day. We can't wait to get started."

First County Bank helps other nonprofits, too

The First County Bank Foundation last week announced the distribution

of \$44,620 in grants to Norwalk-based nonprofit organizations devoted to helping children and families cope with unemployment, housing and child safety.

"There has been an overwhelming demand to translate Courage to Speak — Courageous Parenting 101 into Spanish and this generous award from First County Bank Foundation is very timely," Ginger Katz, founder of Courage to Speak, said.

The Norwalk Hospital Foundation, whose mission is to generate philanthropy, received \$5,000.

Also, Family & Children's Agency received \$10,000; Norwalk Emergency Shelter (Open Door Shelter) received \$10,000; Child Guidance Center of Mid-Fairfield County received \$5,000; and STAR Inc. received \$4,500.

Established in 2001 in honor of the bank's 150th anniversary, the First County Bank Foundation was created to distribute funds annually to nonprofit organizations that support community and economic development for children and families.

"This tough economy has had a serious impact on many families in Fairfield County," First County Bank Foundation Vice President Katherine Harris said. "As part of First County Bank's efforts to give back to the communities we serve, these grants represent a small portion of what's needed on a regular basis to help the people of Norwalk."