After 12 years of living abroad, Sara Link and her husband moved back to Greater Richmond Region in 2010 to be near her parents and childhood friends.

With the community’s commitment of connecting people across generations, Link is convinced her family made the right decision.

With over 40 local intergenerational programs, festivals, events and leisure activities bringing together 1 million-plus residents of all ages, it’s obvious Greater Richmond Region thrives off meaningful connections between older adults, children and youth.

With all ages being an integral and valued part of the setting, they couldn’t wait to share their community pride by applying for the 2015 Best Intergenerational Communities Awards.

“I knew Richmond had a strong chance of winning,” said Sara Link, director of Greater Richmond Age Wave, a collaborative that includes philanthropists, local government, businesses, nonprofits and academia working together to maximize resources for all ages.

Link’s Age Wave manages CATCH Healthy Habits, designated as a Generations United Program of Distinction.

Through this evidence-based program – hosted by Senior Connections, The Capital Area Agency on Aging and Virginia Commonwealth University Department of Gerontology – older adult volunteers teach K-5 students the value of healthy eating and physical activity.

Programs like CATCH Healthy Habits stem from Greater Richmond Region’s intergenerational roots, which go back to 1984, when Westminster Canterbury Richmond became an intergenerational shared site after including a Child Development Center with its Continuing Care Retirement Community.

Today, Westminster Canterbury Richmond’s intergenerational programs bring together children and older adults for daily story time and annual events/performances.

A community jewel is the James River Park System, 600 protected acres of shoreline and river islands running through the community.

The River System functions as an outdoor classroom for all ages to learn and appreciate Greater Richmond Region’s history while enjoying mountain biking, fishing and kayaking.

Youth and older adults also engage through the YMCA of Greater Richmond’s Growing Younger program, an initiative of United Way of Greater Richmond & Petersburg (GRP) in partnership with Friendship Cafes.

“Elders in this program are actively engaged in physical exercise and projects with youth, as well as the arts,” said Lynn H. Pharr, United Way-GRP chief executive officer.

In addition to funding from United Way-GRP, Greater Richmond Region’s intergenerational programs receive nearly $1 million in combined support from county and city governments as well as public and private foundations.
As a mentor in the Richmond Area Foster Grandparent Program, Doris Hairston sees first-hand how those investments contribute to the community’s intergenerational success stories.

She and nearly 70 other older adults serve as mentors, tutors and caregivers for Greater Richmond Region’s children and youth with special needs.

“Many of the children served throughout the history of our successful program,” Hairston explained, “are now contributing adults themselves.”

“We are thankful for the opportunity to be involved, to learn, to celebrate and to strive for more.”

Sara Morris
CATCH Healthy Habits

The Greater Richmond Region is feeling the excitement after hearing the news they are a MetLife Foundation/Generations United 2015 Best Intergenerational Communities Award winner.

“We will continue celebrating with Chesterfield County and the City of Richmond as we present a flag and road sign, featuring our best intergenerational designation, to each locality to have on display,” said Sara Link, who shared the news with various media outlets and through social media.

Sadie Rubin, director of the intergenerational arts program PALETTE, hopes the award will attract new funding.

Sara Morris, coordinator of CATCH Healthy Habits and Greater Richmond Age Wave, is still ecstatic about the award.

“It will help break down barriers people may have about other generations,” she said. “It will foster [more] community collaboration and innovative thinking that is cross generational.”

Description of Community:
Greater Richmond Region is located in the central part of Virginia. It is comprised of 13 counties, including the principal cities of Richmond, Petersburg, Hopewell and Colonial Heights.

Demographics (Source: U.S. Census Bureau Estimated 2012 QuickFacts):
- Total population: 1,025,561
- No. under 24: 266,646
- No. over 55: 174,345


Current Program Examples:
- CATCH Healthy Habits
- James River Park System
- Growing Younger
- Richmond Area Foster Grandparent Program

Intergenerational Fact:
As a result of the GeroTrifecta (an intergenerational advocacy group of students, older adults and community leaders), the community developed the Age Wave Readiness Toolkit to empower businesses, local governments, organizations and individuals to provide broader awareness of available community resources for all ages.