

# *The Literacy Letter*

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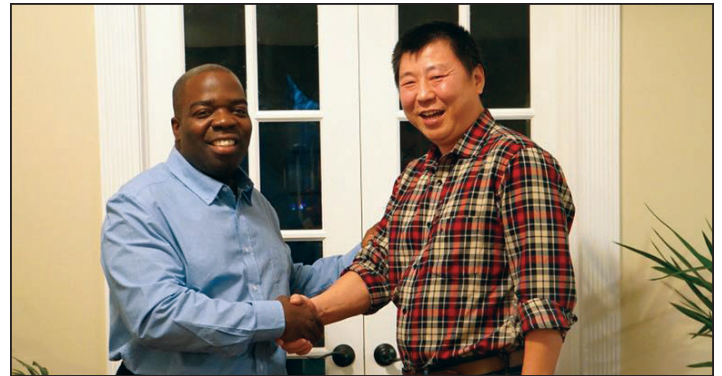
## Tutoring for a Year Turns into a Family Friendship

*By Walter Young*

It is a chilly December evening outside the Dong's residence, but you couldn't tell from the warm social environment fostered inside, where my former student, Jason Dong and his lovely family host a potluck lunch for me and my family. It has been over a year since I completed my tutor certification classes and set out in hopes of making a difference in the lives of the students that come through the literacy program that is administered by Literacy Volunteers of Somerset County (LVSC).

I knew that tutoring students from around the world would be a rewarding experience but I never thought that I would build a strong friendship with my very first student, Jason, and his family who came to the United States from China in hopes of participating in the American dream. When I, as an African American, first learned that I would be working with someone from China, I wasn't sure what to expect because I had never had an opportunity to connect with people from China on a personal level before. However, any reservations that I had quickly dissipated when I met Jason for the first time at the Bernards Township library. Jason was a very polite and respectful student who was eager to learn. Over a year's time, Jason and I met every week, spoke by phone several times a week and texted each other often, in order to rapidly improve Jason's understanding of the English language. During this time, I also helped Jason understand various documents and helped him prepare for job interviews through mock employer-employee skits, which eventually resulted in Jason landing a job.

These days, Jason is very busy working and providing for his family but every so often, Jason and I, and our families, get together and celebrate our friendship while discussing life events. Jason is happy for the time and commitments that I have shown towards helping him acclimate to life in the United States and we are both happy for our families' new friendship. I continue to make myself available to Jason for anything that he may need help with



*Tutor and student build a friendship through the gift of literacy.*



*Dong and Young families.*

and I am always glad to catch up with him and learn how things are going. Through our friendship, I have gained a deeper appreciation for what is possible when humans look beyond the superficial and work to help each other through life's challenges. But, most of all, we are both forever grateful to LVSC for making this difference in our lives.

The mission of Literacy Volunteers of Somerset County (LVSC) is to promote literacy throughout the community by providing student-centered tutoring and literacy programs for adults so that they may function more effectively in their daily lives. Our mission is founded on the belief that the ability to read and communicate in English is imperative to leading a productive and functional life, and is essential for the protection of individual freedom and equality of all people.



## Thoughts from Martha Davis, LVSC Board President

Really, where do I start to thank everyone who made 2017 such a significant year for Literacy Volunteers of Somerset County (LVSC)? I believe that I will start by thanking our volunteers, family foundations, banking institutions, community organizations, and private individual donors for their collective support of our organization and its programs.

Among LVSC's significant pluses on going forward this past calendar year was working with the Bound Brook Library to address the ESL needs of its community by offering a 10-week beginner's class, facilitated by Spanish-speaking tutor, Susan Pristas. The course was so successful that it is being offered again this spring.

Being constant watchdogs on the health of the organization, the LVSC Board of Directors thought it prudent to form three committees that will further secure the strength of its infrastructure while also working closer with the Executive Director.

### **Fundraising Committee - Steve Cummins, lead**

**Mission:** The Fundraising Committee is responsible for overseeing the overall LVSC fundraising strategy, and to evaluate and improve on the ongoing execution of that strategy. The Committee's role is not to actively run events or directly raise money.

### **Board Development Committee - Pat Flannery, lead**

**Mission:** The Board Development and Nominating Committee will make recommendations to the President to fill vacancies in the Board membership, will coordinate with the President to recruit and present the necessary slate of officers, will coordinate orientation for new members, and organize training of the entire Board as needed.

### **Programs Committee - Phil Armenio, lead**

**Mission:** The Programs Committee monitors the literacy programs and ensures that the LVSC programs are designed to the literacy needs of the demographics of Somerset County. The Committee also reviews the tutor training programs and ensures that tutors are recognized for their volunteer work.

We also formed an **Advisory Committee** that consists of two former Board members - *Alyssa Valenti, lead*, and *Helene Venizelos*.



*Conversation Group at the Hillsborough library.*

**Mission:** The LVSC Advisory Committee is established to advise and make recommendations to the LVSC Board on issues related to the operation of the LVSC organization. The Committee functions in accordance with LVSC By-laws and in support of its Vision, Mission, and Goals.

During the course of 2017, it was gratifying to see our Conversation Groups increase to fourteen and that we had record-breaking participation in our spring, fall and winter tutor training sessions instructed by ESL expert Lauren Randolph with warmth and a lot of nurturing. Our fundraising events were also tremendously successful including our first-time July 19 golf outing at the Royce Brook Country Club organized by Th Ngo; great job!

As I reflect upon the passing year, I want to be sure to also thank a deeply invested Board and an equally committed Executive Director, Aimee Lam and Program and Events Manager, Susan Engelstein to LVSC.

The "Appreciation Tea," on Sunday, March 25, was again a wonderful afternoon that among other things chased the winter doldrums. This fun get-together gives tutors, volunteers, and friends a chance to reconnect while bringing us together in heartfelt camaraderie, and in the knowledge that our selfless efforts do make a positive impact on the lives of our adult learners.

## Funding News

A heartfelt thank you for grants of \$1,000+ from our corporate and foundation partners:

- Billian Family Charitable Foundation
- Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation
- Investors Foundation
- Janssen Pharmaceuticals, Inc.
- M&T Bank
- Macy's
- Pheasant Hill Foundation
- PSE&G Foundation
- Shapiro Family Foundation
- The Boye Foundation
- The Fred C. Rummel Foundation
- The Gannett Foundation and The Courier News
- The George H. and Estelle M. Sands Foundation
- The Lowell Johnson Foundation
- The Provident Bank Foundation
- Ullmann Family Foundation
- Walmart - Branchburg Store
- Wells Fargo Raritan Valley Branch
- Wish You Well Foundation

# A Message from Aimee Lam, LVSC Executive Director



As you may gather from the pages of this newsletter, the LVSC office has been a busy place. Any number of people pass through our doors in a given week: tutors, students, assessors, group leaders, and board members. Tuesday through Friday afternoon our delightful high school intern, Adriana, arrives with a smile and a breath of fresh air. We love the variety and the face-to-face connection with our community.

You never know, however, when it will be someone's last pass through your door and when you learn they have passed on, it comes as a shock. This past year LVSC lost two kind people, so I would like to take the opportunity to remember them.

**Peter** was a student who made an immediate positive impres-

sion. When he came to the office to apply for a tutor, I was struck by his enthusiasm, gratitude, and gentle manner. His tutor agreed, calling Peter a "gentleman" and "enthusiastic conversationalist" who came to each tutoring session ready to learn.

**Sheila** was an energetic volunteer, dedicated to her Wednesday afternoon Conversation Group in the Franklin Township Library. When she learned that office clean-up was in order, she offered many hours of her time to organize LVSC's files as well as our Literacy Library. Sheila appeared each week with a snazzy outfit that matched her sparkling personality.

It was an honor to know both Peter and Sheila. They, like you, define the warmth of the LVSC community. Thank you.



## Notes from our Tutors

*Thank you to our tutors for providing these inspiring student updates.*

- C. is a great young man who has shared his passion for trucks. He desires to be a truck driver one day. We are working through CDL (Commercial Driver's License) workbooks, focusing on the reading and test questions. *Tutor, Walter*
- M. works at a restaurant six days per week and has little free time, but is highly motivated to learn. We



are focusing on basic and practical language skills. While it is slow going because she has little time to practice, I see that she is making progress and increasing her confidence. *Tutor, Ursula*

- R's employer recognizes his English language ability and wants to make him a manager over other workers. *Tutor, Peter*
- Y. is an excited learner. She writes lovely stories about the activities she and her family do. She is able to explain more clearly the meanings of words and sentences. She makes sure we always have a dictionary to use. *Tutor, Joanna*



- It is a pleasure to work with K. and H; I think I learn as much in our sessions as they do. The two women are very supportive of each other and their efforts in learning English. On K's birthday, H. surprised her by stopping at her house with a gift. *Tutor, Amy*
- H. is becoming more confident in her speaking skills. She continued to take water-color classes and really enjoys the experience. Prior to this, she did not have any activities that she did by herself. *Tutor, Marion*

**Did you know that LVSC doesn't receive any government funding?** Our organization is supported by volunteers, individual donations, grants, and event proceeds. If you would like to make a financial contribution, the easiest way to donate is online at [www.literacysomerset.org](http://www.literacysomerset.org). Or you can mail a check payable to LVSC, 120 Finderne Ave – Box 7, Bridgewater, NJ 08807. If you would like to make a long-term gift, please call us for more information about including LVSC in your will. Thank you for your support!



Fall 2017 Bound Brook beginners class.

## The Program Place

By Susan Engelstein, Program & Events Manager

LVSC is always looking for ways to improve the tutoring experience and to better address the needs of our students. To that end, we are excited by some of the changes we have implemented and some of the new programs we are piloting, much of it based on tutor feedback!

### Tutor Training

We streamlined our Winter Tutor Training Class; meaning shorter, more focused sessions and less homework! In order to make the training less theoretical, we decided to match tutors with their students in the third session rather than the last, so that trainees can plan their lessons with their actual students in mind.

### Citizenship Preparation

We have three Citizenship Preparation Classes scheduled for students so far this year, two in the spring and one in the fall. We know that many of our tutors are working with students who are either in the process of getting their citizenship or have citizenship as a goal. We were thrilled to offer an in-service session for tutors that explained the citizenship process and how to work with students to help them prepare for both the civics test and the interview.

### Bound Brook Beginners Class

Last fall, we began a pilot program with the Bound Brook library offering a free, ten-week class for beginner learners and we are very pleased to be offering it again this spring. We have found a number of our Bound Brook students are very beginners, and not yet ready to work one-on-one with a tutor. Going through this class gives the students an introduction to basic English and prepares them for weekly tutoring. After ten weeks, the class is divided into small groups, and assigned to a tutor, to continue their learning.

### “How’s It Going?” and In-Service Day

We want to support our tutors as much as possible, and to that end, we have made our “How’s It Going?” session a monthly event. This is a chance for tutors to share their experiences, both good and challenging, with their fellow tutors, and get advice from ESL expert, Jackie Flamm. In addition, we plan to offer a half day in-service training on two topics that are of most interest to tutors. Look for a survey on topics of interest coming soon.

Continuing to improve our program is our top priority and we want to hear suggestions from you. Please feel free to call, email, or come by the office any day.

## A Typical Day at the LVSC Office

By Adriana Rojas

Well here’s the thing...I can’t really tell you what a typical day at the LVSC office is like because there’s no telling what’s going to happen. Every day is a new day BUT one thing’s for sure — every day we’re changing someone’s life.



As an intern here at LVSC I’ve been able to observe how our services help others and the long-term effect it has on their lives. It all starts with a student’s motivation and then we, with the help of our volunteer tutors and supporters, are able to do our part. Students are always thankful when they’re matched with a tutor. I remember making a phone call to a student very well because as soon as I said I was calling from the LVSC office she squealed with delight! She mentioned how LVSC contacted her friends about their new tutors and how excited she was to receive her own call too. She continued on to say how grateful she is to be able to receive a tutor because she believes English is a necessity in this country. I could hear how ecstatic she was and even imagine the smile she had on her face from the call alone. She repeated how thankful she was and how she couldn’t wait to start.

This is what we do here at LVSC. We bring this feeling of joy into someone’s life and it expands into our lives as well because we’re proud to know we’ve contributed to someone’s happiness; to think of how it’ll help them in the future is just amazing. It was such a great feeling that continues to warm my heart.

Every day I step into to LVSC office I know it’s going to be a good day. Although every day is a new day, our mission is always the same — to change lives through literacy.

# It's Been an Eventful Few Months

Thank you to all who supported LVSC's recent fundraising events

To see more event pictures, please like us on Facebook.



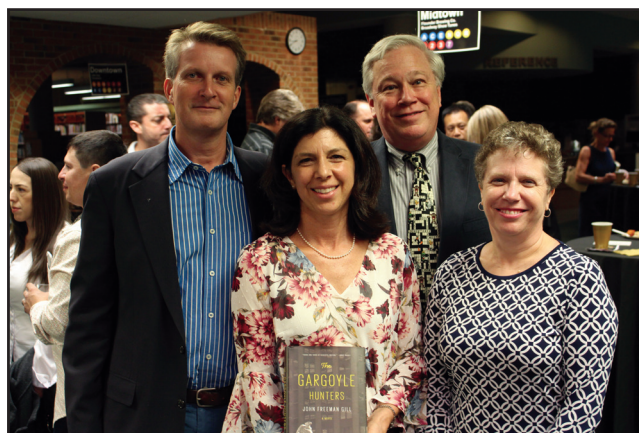
## Golf Fore Literacy, July 2017

### Sponsors:

- Bag Tags \$500: PSEG
- Triple Hole \$300: Unity Bank

Pictured: (Top) 53 golfers, ready to play! (Bottom) Top Team Award: (l to r) Sarina Puccio, Tho Ngo, Steve Wilson.

Join us for golf on Monday, July 23, 2018. Save the date!



## An Evening in LVSCity Fall Soiree, October 2017

### Sponsors:

- Midtown \$1,000: ADESA NJ; Amboy Bank; Baker & Taylor
- Downtown \$500: Savo, Schalk, Gillespie, O'Grodnick & Fisher; Weidel Community Partners Program

Pictured: (Top) From l to r: New York Times Contributor & Author, John Freeman Gill; LVSC executive director, Aimee Lam; Somerset County Library System NJ county library administrator, Brian Auger; LVSC program & events manager, Susan Engelstein. (Bottom) LVSC volunteer Allison Caulfield and student speaker Yorlery Fuentes.



Pictured: Spelling Contestants and Bee Champions (inset), Team Let It Bee – Geoff Engelstein & Liz Nover.

## 2nd Annual Community Spelling Bee, February 2018

### Sponsors:

- Event Sponsor \$1,000: NRG
- Round Sponsor \$500: Steve & Deb Cummins
- Team & Prize Sponsors \$300: American Legion Post 304; Bridgewater Scrabble Club; Bryan & Sissy Davis; Dean's Natural Food Market; Edison Research; Harlingen Veterinary Clinic; Investors Bank; PrintPOD Publishing; Somerset Pediatric Group; Spire Group

## ✓ Upcoming Events

For more information, visit  
[LiteracySomerset.org](http://LiteracySomerset.org) or  
call (908) 725-5430.

### **"How's It Going?" with Jackie Flamm**

*First Thursday of Every Month,  
October – May, 7 – 8:30 pm*  
PeopleCare Center, Bridgewater

### **Garden of Literacy Brunch & Silent Auction**

*Sunday, April 22, 2018*  
Olde Mill Inn, Basking Ridge

### **LVSC Annual Meeting and Recognition Night**

*Thursday, June 7, 2018*  
PeopleCare Center, Bridgewater

### **Golf Fore Literacy**

*Monday, July 23, 2018*  
Royce Brook Golf Club, Hillsborough

### **Fall Tutor Training**

*Wednesdays, September 26, 2018 –  
October 17, 2018*  
PeopleCare Center, Bridgewater

### **Annual Fall Soiree –An Evening of Jazz**

*Friday, October 12, 2018*  
Bridgewater Library



### **Community Partner**

*Newsletter design provided by  
Jessica Ngo, freelance designer,  
609.922.2848*

## **Congratulations and Welcome to 50 Newly Trained Tutors**

### **Fall 2017 Graduates**

Patricia Albers • Peg Amorosa • Julissa  
Auffant • Nicole Burney • Akisha  
Canty • Ann Beth Constad • Maryellen  
DeCoster • Bonnie DiBlasio • Susan  
Dodge • William Dodge • Bonnie  
Elbaum • Fran Ellis • Sara Hirisave •  
Delores Jackson • Sara Koshy • Paul  
Matukaitis • Cindy Percario • Tena  
Radliffe • Selby Rodriguez •  
D. J. Sanders • Christopher Sommers  
• Sreepada Sastry • Shelby White •  
Kathleen Wurster

### **Winter 2018 Graduates**

Deb Alexander-Mank • Emily Atkinson  
• Paula Atkinson • Laura Kaiser  
Campanella • Shalini Das Chaudhuri  
• Que Dang • Dennis D'Arienzo •  
Robin Dolinsky • Robin Farner • Elma  
Fernandes • James P. Flynn • Meghan  
Forte • Patricia Fox • Beth Friedman  
• Linda Hudson • Alison Koo • Ashley  
Kotarski • Laureen MacEachern •  
Bonnie McAreavy • Julie Melik • Ana  
Mendez • Rebecca Pickens • Yvonne  
Rude • Beth Sargen • Marie Sereno •  
Edith G. Tolchin

### **Auto Donations**



Donate your used automobile to  
support literacy! It's quick and easy,  
and LVSC will receive a financial  
contribution as a result of your  
donation. To learn more, please call  
the LVSC office at (908) 725-5430.

### **Clothing for a Cause**

Through Carecycle Inc., LVSC raises  
thousands of dollars every year  
with clothing donation bins. Please  
consider dropping your used clothing  
in our bin at **ShopRite in Bound  
Brook** (West Union Ave).



### **Board**

#### **Executive Committee**

Martha Davis, *President*  
Phil Armenio, *Vice President*  
Stephen A. Koehler, *Secretary*  
Mary Riccardi, *Treasurer*

#### **Trustees**

Steve Cummins  
Alexander G. Fisher  
Patricia Flannery  
Robert Kane  
Tho Ngo  
Eileen Roan  
Yvonne Selander

#### **Advisory Board**

Alyssa Valenti  
Helene Venizelos

### **Staff**

Aimee Lam, *Executive Director*  
Susan Engelstein,  
*Program and Events Manager*  
Adriana Rojas, *Intern*

