

The Literacy Letter

The Mimi Ruch Memorial Literacy Office
120 Finderne Ave - Box #7, Bridgewater, NJ 08807

www.literacysomerset.org • 908.725.5430
email: lvscprograms@literacysomerset.org

Why Do I Volunteer?

By Rosa Merlo

I am an LVSC student and volunteer. I was born in Paraguay and arrived in New Jersey last year. I am 60 years old, I'm retired and I didn't speak English, but I never thought that meant isolation and loneliness.

I was sorry to leave my country, my friends, my family, and the people who found me to be important. I felt like a plant that was taken out of the ground and transplanted to another place. The plant looks like it is going to die...but then it grows strong.

I found the Conversation Group in the Hillsborough Library, for me it was much more than learning English, I started to exchange ideas with other people. The teacher told me about the LVSC Tutoring Program. I couldn't believe there was a person who would focus on my goals and abilities to make English lessons specifically for me! That was what I needed!

When I received the first call from my tutor I felt hopeful. She is the sweetest person I ever met!

She taught me patiently, she comes every week to the Hillsborough library only to help me learn English, but with her life example she has taught me much more than English. She taught me to fight for my life!

Everything is great in LVSC because this organization cre-



Pictured left to right, Executive Director Aimee Lam, Tutor of the Year Yolanda Rodriguez, Student Volunteer Rosa Merlo, Program & Events Manager Susan Engelstein.

ates opportunities. My tutor told me that she feels useful doing this volunteer work and that makes her very happy. LVSC is the channel that streams solidarity. That is the reason why I go every Wednesday to the LVSC office to help them as a volunteer. Thank you, Aimee and Susan for this opportunity, and thank you Martha and the board. And especially thank you, for you my English tutor Yolanda!

LVSC Represented at Statewide Conference

Congratulations to these LVSC student-tutor pairs who served as panelists at Literacy New Jersey's Literacy for Life conference in April: **Donna** and **Carolina** (pictured left) sat on the panel "Steps to Success," while **Esen** and **Kathy** (pictured center) discussed "Cross-Cultural Communication." **Esen** (pictured right) also presented at a student poster session.





Thoughts from Martha Davis, LVSC Board President

The Washington Ballroom of the historic Olde Mill Inn in Basking Ridge, NJ, was the venue for Literacy Volunteers of Somerset County's (LVSC) 'Garden of Literacy' Second Annual Brunch and Silent Auction on Sunday, April 30, 2017. Crisp, white-dressed tables with variously colored flowers and glittering chandeliers awaited guests welcomed by Executive Director, Aimee Lam, and long-time board member, Bob Kane.

Against this lovely setting, guests excitedly checked out auction items that included: a Manhattan apartment, a shore condo, photo of a Montana Supercell Thunderstorm by storm chaser Alex Fisher, and a mystery basket, while sipping mimosas and chatting with friends and other attendees. The Brunch and Silent Auction was an opportunity for LVSC to celebrate the generosity of the organization's donors and the dedication of tutors, tutor trainers, assessors, volunteers and the local libraries. All of these stakeholders, together, have created one unified organization enabling LVSC to continue to meet the needs of the Basic Literacy and the ESL population in our communities.

The highlight of the event was student speaker Daniela Valverde and nine-year old daughter, Ashley. Daniela spoke of her struggle to learn English until she came to LVSC and began to work with her tutor Amy Gole, whose patience and kindness has changed her life in a positive way; while at the same time, Amy finds it a rewarding experience. Daughter Ashley spoke of how proud she is of her mom who now speaks in English with her teachers.

The Outstanding Service Award was presented by Aimee Lam to Jessica Ngo, who gives freely of her time and of her talent as a graphic artist to our organization. We are grateful for Jessica's generosity and appreciate her support of our work.

Our Second Annual Brunch and Silent Auction was a huge success due to the time and effort of many; especially Susan Engelstein, who chaired the event, and Aimee Lam. Our 11 Board members who are extraordinarily generous with their time, wisdom, and financial support, and ensure that LVSC remains committed to our mission and guiding principles were tremendously engaged in the success of the event. The 133 guests who came in support of LVSC, and the Olde Mill Inn for the variety of delicious foods, and for their attention to detail that made it a joyful afternoon. My most heartfelt thank you to each and every one, and I'll see you at next year's event.



A room full of guests in the beautiful Olde Mill Inn.



Student speaker Daniela Valverde, supported by daughter Ashley and LVSC tutor Amy Gole.



Jessica Ngo, Outstanding Service Award recipient, pictured left with LVSC's Aimee Lam.



From left to right, LVSC's Susan Engelstein, Martha Davis, and Aimee Lam give thanks to this year's sponsors: **Amboy Bank**, **Midwest Tape**, **PeopleCare Center for Nonprofits**, **Quest Diagnostics**, and **The Young Family**.

Would you consider a donation to support LVSC's growing programs? You can donate online at literacysomerset.org or mail a check payable to LVSC, 120 Finderne Avenue–Box 7, Bridgewater, NJ 08807. If you'd like to make a long-term gift, please call us for more information about including LVSC in your will. Thank you.

A Message from Aimee Lam, LVSC Executive Director



Summer has just begun, so it may seem unusual to be talking about year-end. But here at LVSC our fiscal year closes on June 30th, so now is the perfect time to reflect on the year in review and look forward to the year ahead. And we did just that at our festive Annual Meeting and Recognition Night on June 8th where I was pleased to present the past twelve months as a time of growth and engagement.

I say this because we trained 78 new tutors (vs. 42 last year), assessed 167 new students (vs. 93 last year), and offered 13 Conversation Groups (10 last year). Seventy-five students participated in five U.S. Citizenship Preparation classes (two last year). To date, at least six students completed the lengthy naturalization process and are proud new U.S. citizens — congratulations! In all, more than 500 students received LVSC's services.

Our programs have expanded to meet demand, and the prediction is that as government funding for adult education continues to decrease, there will be increased demand for nonprofit programs like ours. To cover the cost of increased programming activity our fundraising activities have grown. You, our volunteers and supporters, have come in record numbers to our events. As a result our two established events raised more

money than ever before: the fall Soiree and the spring Garden of Literacy Brunch. Our brand-new Community Spelling Bee surpassed all expectations on the "fun-meter" and the fundraising meter: we raised more than \$7,000 through this first-year event. In July, under the enthusiastic leadership of new board member Tho Ngo, we will host Golf Fore Literacy. I hope to see you there.

These numbers and facts are striking, but they do not convey the thriving, warm culture of our organization or the life-changing successes of our students. The numbers do not speak to the kindness of our volunteers who work diligently to make members of our community feel welcomed and assimilated. Nor do they address the tenacity of our students who want to improve their English literacy and participate fully in the community. To me, that is the information that matters most.

LVSC is helping more people than ever before. Our progress is the result of a joint effort of our volunteers, board members, partners, supporters and of course, LVSC's dedicated Program & Events Manager, Susan Engelstein. I cannot thank you all enough and look forward to working with you in the coming year.

Celebrating Success at the Annual Meeting & Recognition Night



*Pictured top left: (front row, left to right) Aimee Lam Executive Director & Susan Engelstein Program & Events Manager; Rosa Merlo Student Volunteer & her tutor **Yolanda Rodriguez Tutor of the Year**; Yorlenny Fuentes Conversation Group attendee & **Allison Caulfield Volunteer of the Year**; Tracy Ho Student of the Year & her tutor Andrea Swykowski. (Back row) **Carolina Mancilla Student Ambassador** and **Aparna Calambur Youth Volunteer of the Year**.*

Pictured bottom left: LVSC's devoted Board of Trustees announced the slate of officers for the coming year. (Left to right) Martha Davis President, Pat Flannery, Mary Riccardi Treasurer, Alex Fisher, Steve Koehler Secretary, Phil Armenio Vice President, Bob Kane, Raneen Elbakry, Eileen Roan, Tho Ngo, and Yvonne Selander. (Not pictured, Steve Cummins).



LVSC is grateful for a long-standing relationship with Spotlight Learning, which provides ESL classroom instruction. Pictured left to right, Malgorzata Wlodarska, winner of the Spotlight Learning Scholar Award, and Jackie Flamm of Spotlight Learning.

Who Says Spelling Bees Are Just for Kids?

On a cold winter day in February, LVSC held its inaugural Community Spelling Bee at the Hillsborough Library. Ten teams of two adults engaged in friendly spelling competition, encouraged by an enthusiastic audience. During the final round there was an intense exchange between the last two standing teams when

finally, Double Nerd Score clinched first place by correctly spelling M-Y-N-H-E-E-R. It was close until the bitter end! Not only was the Bee great fun, it was also a very successful fundraiser thanks to an amazing committee, generous donors, willing participants, and our friends at the Hillsborough Library.



Top: 2017 Contestants and Team Sponsors (front row, left to right) Beelieve in Literacy sponsored by **American Legion Post #304**; Bird is the Word sponsored by **Brian & Sissy Davis**; Dictionary Divas sponsored by **Linde**; Double Nerd Score sponsored by **Bridgewater Scrabble Club**; (back row, left to right) Teenage Mutant Ninja Spellers sponsored by **Unity Bank**; Spotlight Spellers sponsored by **Spotlight Learning**; The Spellcasters sponsored by **Dr. William Jones**; The Scarlet Letters sponsored by the **Nover Family**; The Hearty Bees sponsored by **Dr. Patrick Saulino**; Word Nerds sponsored by **Edison Research**

Center: Final round and the crowd goes wild
Bottom: Congratulations to Double Nerd Score for taking first place



Save the Date!
Saturday
February 24, 2018
Hillsborough Library

Thank you to the Community Spelling Bee Round Sponsors:

Dean's Natural Food Market

MSPC Certified Public Accountants and Advisors

NRG Energy, Inc.

Somerset Pediatric Group



Bee Officials: (left to right) Brian Auger, Somerset County Library System; Brian Engelstein, Mars International; Audrey Levine Blumberg, The BReeze; Anda Cytroen, Rutgers School of Engineering

LVSC Board Appoints Two New Trustees



Tho Ngo came to the U.S. from Vietnam when he was not quite two years old. He holds a Masters in Actuarial Science from Temple University and currently works

as a Senior Actuarial Manager for the Re-insurance Division of Munich Re America. Tho is also a Fellow of the Casualty Actuarial Society (FCAS), the highest designation of the actuarial profession. Tho enjoys spending time with his family, including his large extended family. He also loves sports, especially the Philadelphia Eagles. He golfs as often as possible, shoots pool, and enjoys watching superhero movies. He is a self-professed Excel junkie who has fun making “cool” spreadsheets, and dabbles in cooking when time permits. While Tho is new to the board, he’s no stranger to LVSC: his talented wife Jessica volunteers as LVSC’s graphic designer.



Yvonne Selander is the Collection Development Manager for the Somerset County Library System NJ, which means a big part of her job is ordering new fiction and audiobooks for adults for ten libraries and two reading stations. This inevitably leads to a long wish list of books to read, and she reads (and listens) to more books than is considered healthy. Recently, she started taking classes at RVCC and is, by turns, enjoying challenging her brain again and stressing out about exams. Twelve years ago she took up tap dancing on a whim and has been tapping ever since. To round things out, she has taken up traveling, hiking and amateur photography as forms of relaxation.

*LVSC thanks retiring board member **Morris Balacco** for his many years of service and generosity.*

Shout Outs

So many people support LVSC in so many ways. Thank you to the following for their creative efforts:

- The **Engelstein Family** held an in-home game night and collected donations to LVSC.
- At their company Bowling Day, **MSPC Certified Public Accountants** held a fundraiser and made a donation to LVSC.
- During the holiday season, dozens of volunteers participated in our gift wrapping fundraisers at **Barnes & Noble** and the **Bridgewater Commons**, helping LVSC to raise nearly \$2,000.
- Through **Thrivent Financial**, tutor **Donna Sturm** has been directing donations and also securing seed money for LVSC’s events.
- Former board leader **Allison Kalban-Gernett** donated a used car; LVSC received a contribution.

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).

Notes from our Tutors

Thank you to our tutors for providing these great student updates.

- V improved speaking with customers at her job in Walmart. *Tutor, Loraine*
- T and I took a trip to Stop & Shop (where she works) and reviewed produce and other things to help with her job and vocabulary. *Tutor, Andrea*
- H and I worked on an email to send to the insurance company to sort out a payment issue. We also put together a dialogue for asking the teacher about

organizing a birthday celebration for her daughter. *Tutor, Marion*

- J is a great student to work with. During the time that I have taught him about America, he has taught me a great deal about China and his culture. He is positive and really great to work with. He has become so proficient at English that he has actually started classes at RVCC and has interviewed for several jobs. *Tutor, Walter*
- We discovered backpacking and biking magazines about places to travel in the USA which K has enjoyed reading and writing about. *Tutor, Katherine*

- I had a lovely lunch with J and her husband and daughter. J’s husband does not speak any English, but J served as the translator when I was speaking in English! It was nice to see her be able to explain to him in Mandarin what I was saying in English. *Tutor, Tara*
- S says, “I am not shy anymore, I try to talk even if I make a mistake.” *Tutor, Asha*
- T is amazing. She is so eager to learn and our time together goes by so quickly. *Tutor, Maryann*

✓ Upcoming Events

For more information, visit
LiteracySomerset.org or
call (908) 725-5430.

Golf Fore Literacy

Wed., July 19, 2017, 1 – 6:30 p.m.
Royce Brook Golf Club, Hillsborough

Fall Tutor Training

Thursdays, September 28, 2017 –
October 26, 2017, 6 – 9 p.m.
PeopleCare Center, Bridgewater

Sixth Annual Fall Soiree

Save the Date!

Friday, October 6, 2017, 7 – 10 p.m.
Bridgewater Library

2nd Annual

Community Spelling Bee

Save the Date!

Saturday, February 24, 2018, 2 – 5 p.m.
Hillsborough Library



Community Partner

Funding News

A heartfelt thank you for grants of 1,000+ from our corporate and foundation donors:
Billian Family Charitable Foundation • Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation •
Investors Foundation • Janssen Pharmaceuticals, Inc. • M&T Bank • Macy's
• Pheasant Hill Foundation • PSE&G Foundation • The Fred C. Rummel
Foundation • The Gannett Foundation and The Courier News • The Lowell
Johnson Foundation • The Provident Bank Foundation • Ullmann Family
Foundation • United Way of Northern New Jersey Community Investment Grant
• Walmart - Branchburg Store #5069

Did You Know?

The following companies have donated to LVSC through dollar-for-dollar matching gift programs: Chubb, Merck, Munich Re, NewsCorp, Novartis, and Prudential. **Retroactive to January 1, 2017 Johnson & Johnson companies will also match donations to LVSC.** Many companies support philanthropy and volunteerism through donations to charities of choice! It's an easy way to help; you can check with your Human Resources department for more information.

Congratulations to 49 Newly Trained Tutors

Winter 2017 Graduates

Deborah Rabinovich Ardans • Marian
Babiak • Diane Buckridge • Kathleen
Carbonetta • Lisa Conlon • Judi Jensen
• Elissa Lerner • Marion Cowan Loh •
Alka Luthra • Marion McGlynn • Louise
Miles • Girish Punjabi • Melanie Rinaldi
• Rosamaria Sostilio • Julie Staats •
Cathy Valencia • Zheng Wang •
Janet Witherspoon • Beth Youmans

Spring 2017 Graduates

Ruth Brebner • Thom Carroll •
Elizabeth Coccia • Karen Cunningham
• Barbara Digricoli • Georgette Gawlik
• Pamela Gendlek • Mary Jane Germek
• Robert Harris • Nanci Healy • Ivalis
Henderson • Hector Herrera • Kelly
Horel • Donna Jones • Abbas Kaffashan
• Michael Klein • Jennifer Lee • Sharon
Marro • Alexandria Newton • Debra
O'Mahony • Anita Pagano • Tara
Piagentini • Richard Pohli • Susan
Primmer • Andrea Rathjens • David
Robinson • Heidi Van Evera • Andrew
Wythe • Jeanette Yu • Debbie Weiner



Board

Executive Committee

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

Trustees

Steve Cummins
Raneen Elbakry
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



Wednesday, July 19, 2017
Best Ball Scramble with 1:00 p.m.
Modified Shotgun

Royce Brook Golf Club
201 Hamilton Road • Hillsborough, NJ
\$150/golfer

Don't golf?

Join us for the post-play party, only \$35.
Sponsorship opportunities available.

For more information visit
LiteracySomerset.org or
call (908) 725-5430.