

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



The happy faces of Takara Belmont ESL students, pictured with Takara Quality Inspector Bena Shah (far left) and LVSC tutor Susan Dodge (second from left).

Lunch and Learn: English in the Workplace

Bena Shah is the quality inspector at Takara Belmont in Somerset, a world leader in salon and dental equipment manufacturing. Responsible for sewing, upholstering and assembling, line employees are hard-working and skilled, but hindered on the job by limited English.

When Bena proposed offering onsite English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction, she garnered instant support from Takara management. A few phone calls with LVSC and several meetings later, a plan was hatched to offer class during lunch break. Because most of the intended participants leave Takara at day's end for a second job or to care for children at home, Takara management approved an extended lunch hour. LVSC volunteer Jennifer Kushinka provided onsite student assessments and a small group was formed, ready for ESL instruction.

Enter Susan Dodge and a quest for an engaging volunteer experience. A tutor since October 2017, Susan eagerly agreed to teach the Takara class. Susan's primary focus has been making students

feel comfortable with English, and more integrated within the workplace. Susan reports much classroom laughter and states that students' "eagerness to learn has been very rewarding." Says Takara's Manager of General Affairs, Alaina Plytynski, "We have six employees in the class and we feel they are really benefiting and learning. They are definitely enjoying and gaining confidence."

Susan creates detailed lesson plans, using *English for Everyone* (DK Books) for inspiration. Each class begins with an ice breaker, includes a combination of reading, writing, and speaking exercises, and always includes a bit of American culture. As every tutor knows, there is often diversion from the plan to discuss new vocabulary, idioms, and situations. Bena observes each class and then encourages English throughout the workday. Says Bena, "Working with Susan and LVSC has been a great experience. Employees are motivated and happy. They are doing homework and speaking more. Our Vice President of Operations noticed as well!"

Keys to Success: Goal Setting, Encouragement, and Determination

Several years ago, tutor Jim worked with beginner-ESL student Maria. During weekly tutoring sessions, the pair worked for two hours on English and two hours on math. Maria made great progress during her time with Jim. Although Jim moved out of state, his influence continues. Maria has been motivated to achieve life-changing goals: last year she became a U.S. citizen and earlier this year she obtained her high school equivalency diploma. In Maria's words, "all of these goals and achievements have been realized thanks to Mister Jim who has been a good tutor and good friend."





Thoughts from Martha Davis, LVSC Board President

As we start our 2018-2019 Fiscal Year we must sadly say goodbye to two individuals who have served on our Board of Trustees for the past several years, while enthusiastically welcoming a new member to the Board.

Farewell to Our Retiring Board Members

Steve Cummins served Literacy Volunteers of Somerset County (LVSC) in numerous positions during his six years of service; first as a tutor, then assessor, Board Trustee and Board Treasurer. Two years ago he took the lead and established the groundwork for a newly formed Fundraising Committee. Although Steve has resigned from the Board, I am happy to report that he will be staying on as a member of the Advisory Committee. Steve is currently Vice President of Marketing for Opengear, a technology company based in Edison, NJ.

Bob Kane is our other long-serving LVSC family member who joined the organization as a tutor in 2007. He served as Board Trustee, Board Vice President, and is the latest recipient of the "Outstanding Service Award." Bob was a Human Re-

sources (HR) Executive with a number of Fortune 500 companies during his career. He took an early retirement package from Quest Diagnostics in 2013 and moved into HR consulting. Bob and his wife Mary are in the process of moving to Arizona in order to be near their son.

We are grateful to both of you for your wise deliberations on matters before the Board, for your advocacy and support of LVSC, and for all that you have done to help us succeed.

Welcome to a New Board Trustee

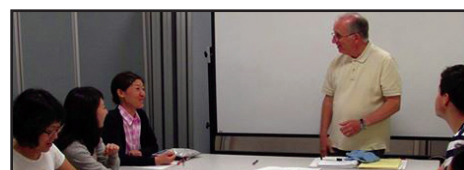
We are pleased to welcome **Scott Curtis** to the LVSC Board. Our new Board member is no stranger to our organization, as he has been a generous supporter and an enthusiastic attendee at our Annual Meetings. Scott is a Financial Consultant with Thrivent Financial who is certified by the CFP in Washington, D.C., and is licensed in several states. The Board and I were excited to have Scott join us for his first Board meeting in September, and we look forward to working with him as his skills and experience will be an asset to our Board.

Notes from our Tutors

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

- M. is returning to RVCC {community college} in September to complete her degree in accounting. This August was our last month of working together because she accomplished her goal with LVSC. *Tutor, Maria*
- H., who had never expressed interest in a job, has started working in a restaurant. She is working hard at communicating her responsibilities to me in English. She struggles but we laugh a lot. *Tutor, Bonnie*
- J. is working two jobs. He just got his GED {high school equivalency}! *Tutor, Ilene*
- I am continuing to work on S's confidence. She has been able to talk with other mothers in her children's classes. She is so confident she has already gone on weekend vacations to Philadelphia and the Amish country. *Tutor, Linda*

- C. is extremely motivated and has been focusing on communicating and being understood by his co-workers and English-speaking peers. He is eager to join in conversations and be included in lunch and break discussions. *Tutor, Bonnie*
- Y.J. used her new vocabulary to ask for assistance at Home Depot, and she is learning more about American culture. *Tutor, Meghan*
- Y. initiated a conversation with me. She talked about Costa Rican holiday traditions, food, and showed me pictures of familiar areas. Then she asked me questions about where I'm from, and my own holiday rituals. *Tutor, Nicole*
- R. loves to sing and has been singing in English. She is beginning to add words like "at", "to", "an", and "the" to her writing lessons. R. is watching some TV and reporting back to me weekly on what she has watched. *Tutor, Deborah*



Bidding Farewell and Best Wishes

Two long-term volunteers are moving from Somerset County:

For five years **Ken Strahs** has been a dedicated leader of the Bridgewater library Conversation Group and generous supporter. As one of LVSC's first group leaders, Ken helped to build and grow this wonderful program which now reaches 150 students each year.

An LVSC volunteer for 14 years, and a familiar face at many LVSC events, **Kathryn Weidener** has tutored small groups and individual students alike, sharing her interest in the spoken and written word.

While we will miss working with these exceptional volunteers, we are pleased that both are looking to continue tutoring in their new communities.



A Message from Aimee Lam, LVSC Executive Director



We closed our year on June 30th and all I can say is “Wow!” Thank you for another great year impacting so many with the gift of literacy, communication, and connection to community. This past year we continued to expand our cornerstone tutoring program with full Tutor Training classes. Conversation Group activity has been enhanced with guest presentations on topics of health literacy and transportation. Additional tutors have been trained on U.S. Citizenship Preparation to help students on a one-to-one basis, as needed. And, we developed and implemented a Beginner ESL program targeted specifically for underserved populations.

Our work is made possible by volunteers who are the backbone of our organization, and those who provide financial support to ensure our office is up and running. Also, we have a dedicated Board of Trustees and great staff supporting the organization on the front line and behind the scenes. New this year is Adriana Rojas who will be working part-time as our Student Coordinator during her first year of college.

I hope you’ll enjoy reading more about our past year in this edition of the *Literacy Letter*, and that you’ll join me in reflecting on how much we’ve accomplished together on a lean annual budget of approximately \$150,000. We are small but mighty.

Fun Events, Great Cause

Thank you for supporting LVSC’s recent fundraising events

To see more event pictures, please Like Us on Facebook.



Golf Fore Literacy, July 2018

Sponsors:

- *Bag Tags \$500:* Law Office of William T. Cooper
- *Triple Hole \$300:* Atlantic Track and Turnout, The Sweeney Group at Morgan Stanley

Pictured: (Top) The weather was threatening, but cooperative, for our 66 golfers. (Bottom) Top Team Prize: (l to r) Paul Malinske, Tho Ngo, Cameron Vogt, Steve Wilson.



Garden of Literacy Brunch & Silent Auction, April 2018

Sponsors:

- *Rose Garden \$1,500:* Amboy Bank
- *Zen Garden \$1,000:* Midwest Tape
- *Herb Garden \$500:* PeopleCare Center for Nonprofits, PSEG, Quest Diagnostics

Pictured: (Top) Outstanding Service Award presented to Bob Kane, outgoing Board trustee. From l to r: LVSC executive director, Aimee Lam; Mary and Bob Kane; LVSC board president, Martha Davis; LVSC program & events manager, Susan Engelstein.

(Bottom) LVSC tutor Elissa Lerner (r) and student speaker Jacque Mendez.

✓ Upcoming Events

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

Fall Tutor Training

Wednesdays, October 3, 2018 –
October 24, 2018

“How’s It Going?”

with Jackie Flamm

First Thursday of Every Month,
October – May

Annual Fall Soiree

The Sweet Sounds of Jazz
Friday, October 12, 2018
Bridgewater Library

3rd Annual Community Spelling Bee

Why Should Kids Have all the Fun?
Saturday, February 23, 2019

Garden of Literacy Brunch & Silent Auction

Sunday, April 7, 2019

LVSC Annual Meeting and Recognition Night

Wednesday, June 12, 2019



Community Partner

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).

Congratulations and Welcome to 24 Newly Trained Tutors

Spring 2018 Graduates

Kiki Anastasakos • Tricia Caliguire
• Raj Das • Eileen Friel • Carina
Goldbach • Jyoti Gupte • Alicia
Harabin • Rajah Karrar • Barbara
Lawler • Elaine Marshall • Raji Mohan
• Carol Nerenberg • Jose Paulino •
Eddie Rodriguez • Steven Rosenberg
• Debbie Rosenthal • Nirmala
Shivakumar • Andrea Stathatos •
Ravi Subramanyam • Shanthi Sundar
• Meinske van de werf-de Bie • Amy
Watkins • Evan Wells • Farhan Zaidi •

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.

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. 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!

LVSC Literacy Volunteers of Somerset County

Board

Executive Committee

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

Trustees

Scott Curtis
Alexander G. Fisher
Patricia Flannery
Tho Ngo
Eileen Roan
Yvonne Selander

Advisory Board

Steve Cummins
Alyssa Valenti
Helene Venizelos

Staff

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

LITERACY VOLUNTEERS OF SOMERSET COUNTY PRESENTS

THE SWEET SOUNDS OF JAZZ

FEATURING THE MUSIC OF
JAN FINDLAY AND HER TRIO



ADMIT ONE **\$60** PER PERSON

SCLSNJ'S BRIDGEWATER LIBRARY BRANCH
1 VOGT DRIVE IN BRIDGEWATER

OCTOBER 12

7-10 P.M.

OPEN WINE BAR | DECADENT DESSERTS

TO PURCHASE TICKETS, VISIT LITERACYSOMERSET.ORG OR CALL 908.725.5430