

Literacy Links

Spring
2007

a newsletter for volunteer tutors

Tutors Gather at Reed College for Annual Tutor Conference

By Madeleine Von Laue, Adult Literacy Program Manager, Clark Community College



Student speaker Saara Hirsi with her tutor Mary Byers and her GED teacher Derek Oringer

Another March and another fine Tutor Conference at lovely Reed College. Many of us wait all year for this annual gathering sponsored by Portland Literacy, and we weren't disappointed. Attendees from as far away as The Dalles enjoyed a day full of learning, sharing and camaraderie.

Participants could choose from 14 different workshops - on grammar, reading, vocabulary development, pronunciation, ESL 'fun and games,' to name just a few. And for the second year, there were also workshops for learners including a showing of the poignant documentary *Lost Boys of Sudan*.

Over lunch, delicious as always, tutors discussed the morning sessions. "The big thing I learned," said Lee Gray, a Clark College tutor about the More Beginning Level ESL Activities workshop "is to make it fun. If students can laugh and have fun, it really helps relieve their frustrations."

The pronunciation workshop "changed my thinking," said Jane Avni, a volunteer at PCC's Capital Center. "Maybe I shouldn't be stressing it as much as I have been. I thought I was helping my students by emphasizing it, but I don't want to make them more self-conscious and afraid to speak. It's a fine line."

The student speakers at lunch were a touching reminder of why we do what we do. Even among the many hardships our students face, Saara Hirsi's story stands out. Saara was six when she left war-torn Somalia with her family and spent 10 years in a Kenyan refugee camp.

"There was no education. We were just fighting for our survival."

Saara began to lose her eyesight just before re-locating to Kenya and is now legally blind. She eventually came to the United States to find a cure, but was told her condition was genetic and nothing could be done. That didn't stop her though. "For most of my life, I've been told I couldn't do anything. But I found out I can. No matter what happens, the harder you work, the better it gets," she said.

Hard work she knows. With the help of her tutor, Mary Byers, Saara is finishing her GED at PCC's Cascade Campus and plans to attend college. She is also active in the community - working to improve services for the blind and serving the African diaspora. Eventually she wants to go back and help people in her native country.

Another speaker, Filiberto Santos, talked about his experiences when he first arrived from his native Guatemala. "I worked in a doughnut shop as a cashier, but I was scared to talk to people and just wanted to stay in back. I was so nervous; I would mix up orders, like coffee instead of coke."

He took ENL classes at PCC and worked with a tutor, and has been attending the Advanced class at St. Anthony's Catholic Church in Tigard. "Learning English has been great, but it's not over," he said. "I'm also learning something that is even richer than language, and that is culture. The more I learn, the more I ask."

see pg. 2



Filiberto Santos shares his story during a luncheon speech

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Thank You, Sponsors!

THANK YOU to these businesses for donating the wonderful gifts that were given away at the Tutor Conference:

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News from Rock Creek and Capital Center By Edit McDonald, VLT Coordinator, PCC Rock Creek

Winter Term 2007 at Rock Creek and Capital Center was a busy time. We had 8 small groups and several 1 on 1 tutoring sessions. At Rock Creek 3 very dedicated volunteers have been helping in the GED classes for more than 5 years. One of them is Pat Ellis who has been a great asset in Mary Shea's GED class. Pat is over 80 years young. A math tutor, Alicia Garcia, helped a student pass her GED. Math was the last test to take and she had put it off for sometime. Congratulations to Betsy on a great accomplishment in receiving a GED diploma.

Student attendance has been steady and high due to the quality teaching of our tutors. The ESL teacher-training program (TESOL) at Portland State University has been a great resource in finding volunteer teachers. For the past several terms Sarah Albers and Mollie Pollaro have taught small groups on Saturday mornings at Capital Center. Karoline Torrey, who retired from the Beaverton School District, has also given up her Saturday mornings to teach a High Beginning group for the last 5 years.

Many waiting list students from the Rock Creek Campus ESOL program are happy that PCC VLT offers a great variety of ESL classes. They appreciate the chance to be able to learn integrated language skills and become familiar with American culture as members of the greater community. Our volunteers are learning, too, about different countries and customs from around the world. More than 15 languages are spoken in our ESL classes.

Thank you, volunteers in West Washington County, for a wonderful winter term and a great start to spring term.

TUTORS *Continued from pg. 1*

Filberto has obviously overcome his nervousness. He volunteered to speak at the conference because learners "owe so much to you tutors that we want to be able to thank you and pay you back." He's also become proficient enough help in the Beginning ESL class at St. Anthony's. He jokes that he told his mother "Mom, I'm teaching English now!"

New Clark tutor Lisa Mitchell said she "thoroughly enjoyed hearing the students' stories. Their determination was awesome, and the skill with which they grasped the English language in such a short time was impressive. They made me proud of being part of ESL tutoring and inspired me to continue." *see pg. 3*

Hurtado Center Welcomes New Citizens! *by Chely Castillo, Washington County VLT Coordinator, PCC*

The Hurtado Center at Jesuit High School (Beaverton, Oregon) welcomed its first two new American citizens at an end-of-term party on March 14, 2007. Florey Morales and Joel Lopez passed their US citizenship test recently and their classmates, other students, and instructors wanted to honor them and applaud the effort Florey and Joel put into preparing for the test.

After passing the test, Joel returned to his citizenship class the next week and described the testing process for his class. He inspired the other students to continue to work hard when he told them his preparation made the test much easier than he expected.



Volunteer teacher Carmela Bowns with students Florey Morales and Joel Lopez at the Celebration Party on March 14

The Hurtado Center is sponsored by Jesuit High School and focuses on adult and youth English language acquisition, citizenship test preparation, computer literacy, and youth mentoring. The program began in 2001 with a focus on offering English as a Second Language for adults. It began offering citizenship test preparation in the fall of 2006. Approximately 150 people from the surrounding Washington County area come to participate in evening ESL classes each year. The citizenship class started with 10 students and is expected to have about 30 students enrolled in the spring 2007 session. Language classes are twice weekly and citizenship preparation is once a week, both for a 10-week term, with each class lasting two hours.

In addition to teaching the civics and US history needed to correctly answer the test questions, citizenship preparation emphasizes the importance of being an active participant and knowledgeable consumer in our democratic society. The class also prepares students for the written and oral components of the test by including dictation, reading, and pronunciation work each class session.

Besides the ESL and citizenship classes, this year the Hurtado Center added a Homework/Mentor component to the Center's programs for the children of parents attending language and citizenship classes.

The Hurtado Center is organized and directed by Ms. Chely Castillo. While Chely is present at the evening sessions, the classes themselves are taught and tutored by adult and student volunteers. Chely conducts orientation and training sessions for all volunteers regarding teaching methods for working with English language learners. If you are interested in volunteering, please call Chely at 503-291-5482

The Hurtado Center is proud of Florey and Joel and looks forward to welcoming many more new citizens at future parties!

TUTORS *Continued from pg. 2*

At the end of the day, tutors left with heads and hearts (and stomachs) full. And full of praise for the conference. "I liked meeting other people doing the same thing I am," said Loren Cummons, a Clark volunteer. "Most of the time, we're like 'lone rangers,' doing our own thing. It was great to learn that other tutors face some of the same challenges and difficulties I have." Another Clark tutor, Rebecca Boyer, said she had a wonderful day. "I came away really appreciating the teachers who took time to come here today. They are obviously invested in helping tutors and students learn."

Mark Your Calendar! The Chalk It Up Celebration is August 4

Oregon Literacy, along with other local literacy groups, is organizing the Chalk It Up For Literacy Celebration to be held Saturday, August 4 in downtown Portland at Pioneer Square.

There will be artists creating chalk drawings on the sidewalk, music, storytelling, face painting, lots of information about services available and opportunities for everyone to be involved.

If you would like to participate in the event, or want more information, contact Elizabeth@oregonliteracy.com.



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