



Fall/Winter 2009

Literacy Partners update

212.725.9200
www.literacypartners.org

Everyone deserves a chance to read.

Appreciating Volunteers for All They Give

Each year, at the end of the school year, Literacy Partners brings together students and volunteers to recognize and celebrate student achievement and the contributions of our volunteers. On June 24, 2009, several hundred students and volunteers gathered at the Oberia Dempsey Multi-Service Center, one of Literacy Partners learning sites, to hear students share their experience and to honor extraordinary volunteer service.

Many people meet the basic requirements for being a volunteer tutor at Literacy Partners. However, what it takes to be a tutor goes far beyond a list of criteria, as demonstrated by the winners of this year's Jonathan Levin Educator of the Year and Claire R. Gregorian Volunteer of the Year awards.

The Educator of the Year Award recognizes a volunteer who makes great contributions to the lives of our students. Robert Schwartzman, this year's recipient and a volunteer for the last five years, not only gives of his time each week to help students, he actively seeks new ways to improve his teaching methods to be more effective. This includes developing individual student assessments to analyze his stu-

dents' strengths and weaknesses, and introducing a variety of visual aids into the classroom to maximize learning. Every Wednesday, Robert arrives early and stays late at the Literacy Partners New York Life learning center, to have time to speak with students, and to understand their interests and concerns so that his lessons can be relevant and useful in students' daily lives. Studies have shown that students who use interest-oriented materials are better at recalling information and interpreting word meanings from context than students using traditional instructional materials. With his compassion, enthusiasm, creativity and dedication, Robert Schwartzman is a model tutor.

The Volunteer of the Year Award goes to a volunteer who makes a significant contribution to Literacy Partners and his/her community in education. Jill Kubit, this year's recipient, specializes in teaching math to our students. While most people don't equate math with literacy, without basic mathematical skills, adults can't perform simple tasks like balancing a checkbook or helping with their children's homework. Jill makes math come alive in the classroom, helping her students conquer the day to day math issues we all confront while honing students' computation and problem-solving skills. Her patience and effort to ensure that all her students understand, along with her dili-



Tutors work with a group

gence, dedication, and years of service in youth and adult education, make Jill a noteworthy volunteer.

While Robert and Jill were recognized this year for their extraordinary service, every Literacy Partners volunteer makes a major contribution to the organization. Some volunteers also support the organization financially, both personally and by reaching out to friends. Meghan McGurk, a volunteer at our Learning Leaders learning center, ran her first New York City Marathon and had her friends show their support for her achievement by contributing to Literacy Partners through firstgiving.com. And Margaret Wenig, who volunteers at Oberia Dempsey, did her own fundraising campaign to help Literacy Partners install Internet service at the center so her students can build computer literacy. With friends like these, Literacy Partners is assured of its ability to serve the thousands of disadvantaged New Yorkers who turn to us each year to help them turn their lives around by learning to read.



One on one at Time Inc.

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THE BOTTOM LINE: *Volunteering is a Win for Everyone*

Susan A. McLean, *Executive Director*



Susan A. McLean

“The heart of a volunteer is not measured in size, but by the depth of the commitment to make a difference in the lives of others.”

DeAnn Hollis

In January, President Obama kicked off a nationwide volunteer program with a strong message, “As Americans, each of us has a responsibility to do what we can for our community and fellow citizens.” In these difficult economic times, the need for volunteers is greater than ever and Americans continue to respond to the call: according to *Volunteering in America*, 61.8 million people nationwide volunteered in 2008, providing over eight billion hours in service !¹

In New York City, opportunities to volunteer are numerous, and the city has a long and distinguished history of volunteer service. When measuring volunteerism in the top ten large cities in the U.S., New York City has the largest number of volunteers in 2006, 2007 and 2008 – almost 2.4 million² – setting the standard for how other cities can tap the power of their people to tackle the challenges they face.

Literacy Partners has long recognized and benefitted from the power of volunteerism. Since its inception in 1955, thousands of volunteers have helped Literacy Partners carry out our important mission – to help illiterate adults in New York learn to read and write. In the last program year, 262 individuals volunteered at Literacy Partners to work with our students and help them achieve their goals, donating over 12,000 hours of service!

The recession has seen charitable giving decline for the first time in many years, challenging non-profits to continue to provide necessary services with smaller budgets. Literacy Partners alone saw a 38% decrease in foundation and corporate giving. As a result, volunteers are even more crucial to the success and strength of our organization. The ratio of volunteers to paid staff has increased, we now have

volunteers working in almost every aspect of the organization, and we foresee an even greater need for volunteer engagement in the year ahead.

But volunteering isn't just good for us; it's good for you too! In addition to the personal rewards, a considerable body of research indicates that volunteering provides individual as well as social benefits: those who volunteer have lower mortality rates, greater functional ability and lower rates of depression;³ and volunteers who devote a considerable amount of time to volunteer activities each year (100 hours +) are most likely to exhibit positive health outcomes. The bottom line: volunteering is a win for everyone – the organization, the individuals you help, and you.

Help us spread the good news about volunteering and Literacy Partners: Tell a friend!

¹ Volunteering in America Research Highlights, June 2009

² Corporation for National and Community Service, Federal OMB, September 2008

³ The Health Benefits of Volunteering – A Review of Recent Research, April 2007

Many Ways to Give in the Season of Giving

There is quite a bit of giving going on at Literacy Partners and we invite you to be a part of it

Our volunteers give of themselves everyday to help our students achieve their goals. If you have the time and commitment to be a volunteer tutor, please contact our volunteer coordinator, Susan Sieverman, at 646.237.0120 or susans@literacypartners.org.

It costs \$150 to train a tutor and a \$1,000 per student to provide a year of learning, but gifts of any amount are welcome to help Literacy Partners fight the hidden epidemic of illiteracy

in New York City. Visit literacypartners.org to contribute online or contact Barbara Perlov, external affairs coordinator, at 646.237.0122 or barbarap@literacypartners.org.

You can also benefit by making a donation of appreciated stock to Literacy Partners. By doing so you may receive a charitable tax deduction for the fair market value of the stock and avoid capital gains taxes, helping illiterate adults learn to read without having to write a check. For information on donating appreciated stock, please contact David Nathanson, director of finance at 646.237.0123 or davidn@literacypartners.org.

STAFF PROFILE: Laura Dotterer, Family Literacy/ESOL Coordinator



Laura Dotterer

The classroom used for Literacy Partners Family Literacy/English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Program is small and easily filled to capacity. Every chair holds an adult student or small child, and some parents clutch children on their laps. On a typical day, everyone gathers together around two tables in the center of the room. Sometimes they work together to complete an assignment. Other times, mothers read to their children. The class can be noisy and there is a great deal of movement in such a limited space, but site coordinator and instructor Laura Dotterer's presence puts to rest any notion of chaos. Her gentle but commanding nature brings organization and tranquility to the room. The program boasts the highest averages for student attendance of all Literacy Partners programs, and Laura's engaging personality and instruction is undoubtedly one of the main reasons for the program's success.

The students are mostly women who are recent immigrants, mainly from West Africa, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic. These women have varying levels of illiteracy in English, and come to class with a wide array of experiences and cultural backgrounds. Laura is keenly aware of this diversity and makes certain to respect traditions and customs while ensuring that students have a clear understanding of what is expected of them. "Many of my students have never set foot in a classroom and just aren't aware of what is expected," notes Laura.

Creating a welcoming learning environment comes easy to Laura. She simply reflects back on her own experience studying abroad and traveling throughout Europe. "My experiences living abroad really helped me understand how isolated one can feel by not

knowing how to speak, read or write the language." Originally from Albany, NY, Laura received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Photography and Sociology from the State University, Postdam College. After graduation, she set off to York, England where she continued pursuing her love of photography, receiving her Master of Fine Arts (MFA) in Photographic Studies from the University of Westminster. She also completed the Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults (CELTA) at The Cambridge School in Verona, Italy.

Since coming to work for Literacy Partners in 2003, Laura has helped hundreds of women acclimate to life in the U.S. and achieve their literacy goals. Early on, Laura recognized that poor English language skills made students hesitant to share stories and express themselves. Laura looked to her photography background for assistance and created an exercise where students place family photos or pictures cut out of magazines on a board to help them talk about their lives with their classmates. Creating the vision boards puts students at ease and creates a better frame of mind to learn: "Visual cues are important to ESOL students. It helps them feel more connected."

Laura believes that learning a new language requires constant study and practice, and her lessons engage students in a great deal of conversation. But she also encourages students to tap into resources outside the classroom. Laura has established relationships with the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the New York Public Library, and local theaters and schools. She makes certain her lesson plans cover the many activities and events taking place in and around the city, including those in her students' neighborhood. As Laura notes, "Learning another language is not just about being able to speak, read, and write in a language outside your own. It gives you insight into different ways of seeing the world."

Upcoming Events



2009 Gala Honorees, Readers and Gala Chairs: (l to r) Parker Ladd, Barbara Goldsmith, Christopher Buckley, Barbara Walters, Marie Brenner, David Wroblewski, Arnold Scaasi, Liz Smith

2010 Gala Evening of Readings

The 2009 Gala Evening of Readings, held on May 11, 2009, raised over \$1.2 million for Literacy Partners, a great accomplishment given the current economic climate. **The date for the 2010 Gala is May 10th** and we are already working on a great line-up of authors for the event. Save the date and check our website in the coming months for more information.

Food for Thought... Authors on Reading and Writing

Jon Meacham was incredibly amusing and informative as he shared stories about the life and presidency of Andrew Jackson at the launch of Literacy Partners luncheon series, Food for Thought, on November 12th. **Tickets are still available for Jeannette Walls on January 27th and Elizabeth Strout on March 23rd. For more information and to purchase tickets go to <http://www.literacypartners.org/events>, or call 646 237-0105.**



Jon Meacham on stage with Lesley Stahl, who introduced him. (Photograph by Allison O'Keefe)

Dow Jones and McGraw-Hill Boost Their Giving to Literacy Partners

The Dow Jones Foundation and The McGraw-Hill Companies have made major, multi-year gifts to help Literacy Partners build financial literacy education for more students. The \$160,921 a year for two years from Dow Jones supports the development of Literacy Partners new curriculum, *Economics for Life*, and its implementation in our learning centers, including hiring a Financial Literacy Coordinator and providing training for our staff and volunteer tutors. *Economics for Life* helps students gain the critical skills they need to make informed decisions about everything from creating a family budget to saving for retirement.

With the McGraw-Hill grant of \$83,631 a year for three years, Literacy Partners has re-opened its learning center at the Henry Street Settlement, which was closed last fall due to budget cuts resulting from the economic crisis. Students are benefitting from the important lessons that *Economics for Life* provides, including the advantages of opening a bank account and learning how to be a savvy consumer.

Research shows that financial education is an important strategy in helping families move out of poverty. Thanks to the generosity of the Dow Jones Foundation and The McGraw-Hill Companies, Literacy Partners is empowering more students to make better choices for themselves and their families.

New Supporters in the Fight Against Illiteracy

June 2, 2009 marked the first annual Literacy Associates Benefit – a resounding success for the organization. Chaired by Stefan Friedman and Andrea Rosen, 163 influential young executives from fashion, design and media gathered at the Meatpacking District hot-spot Tenjune, raising over \$42,000 for Literacy Partners. Caroline Kennedy opened the event, sharing startling statistics about illiteracy, and noting that, “Learning to read and write can change the future of an entire family for generations. By breaking the cycle of illiteracy, parents can greatly increase their earning potential, provide better healthcare for their families and create a brighter future for their children.”



Caroline Kennedy, longtime education advocate

An appearance by *Real Housewives of New York* star Bethenny Frankel added to the festive atmosphere. Members of the Literacy Associates Committee, recently created to help engage a younger demographic in Literacy Partners work, mingled with friends and co-workers late into the evening.

Half the proceeds for the evening came from an online auction, with bids from across the country for over fifty items, including the opportunity to name a character in one of James Patterson’s bestselling *Maximum Ride* books and a one week stay at a Jamaican villa. The event also benefited from food and drink donations from Imperia Vodka, Brooklyn Brewery, Bedell Cellars, O.N.E., Red Bull, Baked by Melissa and Aunt Ruby’s Peanuts.



Literacy Associates raise their glasses for the cause



Literacy Partners, Inc.

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