Honoring Veterans (Cont. from pg. 1)

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Gert Votz — Literacy DuPage, Naperville

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Following his honorable discharge in 1964, Gert earned an MBA and enjoyed a long and successful career in technology sales. Upon retirement, he wished to spend his time giving back to the community and helping those who struggle to live in a country where their birth language is not primarily spoken. Gert had lived through this experience and wanted to connect with those who sought understanding and wisdom he had to give. He chose to devote his time and skills to Literacy DuPage as a volunteer tutor to help recent immigrants improve their English language skills.

Gert found himself teaching an adult learner named Eva, who was struggling with learning English. “Eva epitomizes the barriers that many immigrants face while trying to settle in the U.S. She experienced a lack of tolerance and acceptance and was bullied for not speaking English well,” he explained. After working with Gert, Eva has achieved goals of improving her writing skills and confidently conversing with others without fear. She has made extraordinary strides and even passed her GED exam. Gert and Eva continue to meet regularly as their tutor/student relationship has blossomed into a lasting friendship.

The country honors our veterans each year on Nov. 11 with ceremonies, public events and parades to commemorate and demonstrate gratitude for their service. Secretary of State and State Librarian Jesse White, as well as the Illinois State Library Literacy Office, would like to recognize select individuals who not only served our country through active service, but also contribute selflessly to their community by volunteering to educate the next generation of Americans.

Active military personnel and veterans are the backbone of our great nation. Their service to our country provides us the many rights and freedoms we enjoy each day. As a fellow veteran, it is my honor and privilege to recognize those who have served our country and those veterans who continue to serve their communities. I am proud to share the stories of some exceptional veterans in this issue of Illinois Literacy.

The FY16 Adult Literacy Grant projects throughout the state provided necessary and valuable education to adult learners. I am pleased to include remarkable stories of groups and individuals who benefited from these projects in this issue.

Jesse White
Secretary of State & State Librarian

Left: Paul Wilson, volunteer literacy tutor at Spoon River College Center, Canton. Center: Marilyn Shalloo (left) with one of her adult learners. Right: Gert Votz, volunteer tutor at Literacy DuPage.

Honoring veterans who serve their community

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Adult Volunteer Literacy — $722,769 was awarded to 24 family literacy projects to provide parents and children, both individually and together, instructional services that enhance their basic reading, math, writing and/or language skills. Grants are given to partnerships that include an adult literacy provider, a public library and a child-at-risk organization.

**FY16 Success Story: Richland Community College's Project READ, Decatur**

An adult learner explained to the staff of Project Read that she felt as though she was “dangling from the end of a rope, tying knots and trying to hang on.” She had experienced years of teasing and being called names because of her abilities and had ultimately accepted this characterization. The years of being told that she was not intelligent — even by members of her own family — had an adverse effect on her psyche, and manifested into nightmares, an inability to maintain a job and eventually divorce.

Christine made the decision to improve her life and enrolled in a high school equivalency class. Unfortunately, she soon found that she had trouble understanding the material because she could not read or comprehend a bulk of the language that was used in her classes. She worked hard in an attempt to keep up with the lessons, but soon dropped out due to the embarrassment of her perceived failure. Christine was later introduced to a program at the Decatur Public Library for adults wanting to learn to read and improve themselves through education. She joined Project READ in May 2015 and met with the program’s literacy specialist who noted that Christine was insecure about every subject, particularly math. Christine did not lack the intelligence necessary to succeed but the knowledge of how to attain success.

She was soon matched with a tutor named Theresa and started her journey of learning. She began with math, but her learning began with basic addition. Theresa soon noticed that Christine loved working with numbers. Despite her initial struggle, she quickly advanced into more complex math problems such as percentages, ratios and proportions. Her success with math changed her educational perspective, and Christine decided to continue with her high school equivalency class upon her completion of courses at Project READ.

Teresa says that “She [Christine] has blessed me and I love watching her grow. She has always been open, eager and ready, but I can’t believe how far she has come in one year. I love seeing how her problem-solving and critical thinking skills have developed and her success with math has changed her whole being.” Thanks to Project Read and the opportunity to get the one-to-one tutoring she needed, Christine has progressed nearly three and a half grade levels in a single year.

**FY16 Success Story: Asian Human Services, Chicago**

A Pakistani mother and first-grade son enrolled in the School Age Family Literacy Program. They each have been positively impacted by the program throughout the course of the year. The mother was enrolled in morning intensive ESL classes, striving to improve her reading and writing skills. She has made great progress since she enrolled and raised her performance on the CASAS a SPL level, to a high beginning from an intermediate low.

The son entered the Family Literacy Program with academic and behavioral challenges. He was reading below grade level and the tutors of the program, as well as his elementary school teacher, struggled to manage his behavior so that he could begin to improve his reading skills. The tutors, program coordinator, his teacher and mother all worked together during the school year to share teaching strategies and provide consistent expectations for his work and behavior. The program coordinator even assisted the mother in starting the process of tracing her son evaluated by his school for special education services. Throughout the process his mother remained engaged in every way possible in order to act as advocate for her son. She researched private tutoring options, asked her teacher questions and was involved with conferences with the program coordinator. Both mother and child have engaged in each of the five components of the School Age Family Literacy Program.

Due to the relationships built and partnership formed from the different stakeholders in this case, the mother and child have made great changes. The child’s teacher and tutors now report that his behavior has improved and he is reading basic early fluency books. He is excited about reading. The mother continues to improve her reading and writing skills, as well as supporting her son.

**FY16 Success Story: Carl Buddig and Company, South Holland**

For more than 75 years, Carl Buddig and Company has been a family-owned company. Today it ranks as the third largest selling brand of luncheon meat with distribution in the U.S., Canada and Puerto Rico. In collaboration with its educational partner South Suburban College, the company has participated in the Secretary of State’s Workforce Skills Enhancement program consecutively for the last 11 years.

The company’s objective is to offer consistent and continued training and education to its associates in an effort to increase communication skills and opportunity for advancement. The company continues to expand its workforce and adds additional product lines on a regular basis. This expansion is contributing to an increased need for training, especially from non-English speaking associates.

Carl Buddig and Company employees who attend the ESL class are joined by their supervisors and the class instructor. Penny Severns Family Literacy — $772,769 was awarded to 24 family literacy projects to provide parents and children, both individually and together, instructional services that enhance their basic reading, math, writing and/or language skills. Grants are given to partnerships that include an adult literacy provider, a public library and a child-at-risk organization.

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FY16 grant project highlights

Carl Buddig and Company continues to expand and adds additional product lines on a regular basis. This has allowed the company to continue to expand its already diverse workforce. A majority of new hires of this year come from ESL classes at work and also in their personal lives. They have shared that their ability to help their children with homework, attending doctor’s appointments and other life events has greatly improved. Many of them have expressed the profound difference it has made in their lives and are appreciative for the opportunity to participate in the classes.

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Paul Wilson — Spoon River College, Canton

Paul served in the U.S. Navy from September 1964 to August 1968. He is a retired teacher who tutors at the Spoon River College evening Adult Education Class. He also teaches reading and English at the Western Illinois Correctional Center in Mt. Sterling.

Paul demonstrates generosity and flexibility with his time and talents by volunteering to teach a variety of subjects and works one-on-one with an adult learner or tutors a group of learners. His wealth of knowledge allows him the ability to specialize in dividing concepts into smaller segments. This allows subjects, especially math, to become much less intimidating and easier for students to understand.

Gert Vutz

http://www.familyreading.org

Based in Ithaca, New York, the Family Reading Partnership is a broad-based, locally driven coalition of individuals, businesses, schools, libraries and other organizations that joined forces to “create a culture of literacy” by promoting family reading practices throughout the community. The partnership has created more than 12 programs and initiatives aimed at connecting children with the joy of reading.


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This article gives tips on ways to encourage reading at home as well as some things to avoid. It also includes a list of book titles on how to “raise a reader.”