Skyline Furniture Manufacturing is a unique Illinois company that for more than 65 years has manufactured upholstered furniture in Thornton. The company has seen continued growth in recent years and has expanded its product line to more than 1,000 different items. With these expansions, the company’s workforce has grown from around 50 employees in 2002 to more than 250 employees today. These employees are as diverse as the company’s product line.

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Many of these employees would not have the opportunity to attend classes if they were not offered here at work due to the many family and personal commitments they have,” said Dianne Needles, manager of South Suburban College’s Workforce Development Program. “These classes reflect a financial investment by the company since as part of the grant program they must match dollar-for-dollar the amount of grant money awarded. The classes most assuredly benefit the company as part of their employee retention strategy, but they also create more opportunities for advancement as well as providing them with the ability to communicate outside of work.”

Sky’s the limit at Skyline Furniture Manufacturing

Jesse White
Secretary of State & State Librarian

“Helping your fellow man” is a way of life that I have always tried to live and stress to others throughout my career as both an educator and a public servant. In this issue, you will discover an Illinois business that continues to enable their workers to learn English in order to help them succeed in both their careers and personal lives. You also will read about the Spotlight on Service winners who have dedicated their time to help their fellow man, and the Spotlight on Achievement winners who have benefited from those volunteers who have provided this invaluable service.

Skyline Furniture Manufacturing

A Skyline employee assembles furniture at the company’s facility in Thornton.
2014 Spotlight on Achievement and Service Awards

Secretary of State Jesse White along with Dennis DeRossett, executive director of the Illinois Press Association (IPA), presented awards to adult learners and volunteer tutors at the annual Spotlight on Achievement and Service Awards ceremony held in Springfield in May. Spotlight on Achievement Awards are presented to adult learners who have shown tremendous growth as they work to improve their reading and math skills or learn the English language. Spotlight on Service Awards are presented to adult literacy volunteer tutors who have chosen outstanding dedication as they assist adult learners in reaching their reading goals.

Adult learner winners received $200 from the IPA Foundation and a plaque and personalized Illinois Blue Book from Secretary White. Volunteer tutor winners received $200 from the IPA Foundation for the literacy program where they tutor as well as a plaque and personalized Illinois Blue Book.

State Sen. Mattie Hunter from Chicago joined Secretary White at the awards ceremony and honored her local winners. Following are highlights from the award-winning stories, which are available online.

Adult learner winner highlights:

Sabra Dawson, Frontier Community College, Fairfield — Having Down’s Syndrome, Sabra has struggled to learn her entire life. She earned a special education high school diploma but is still challenged with certain everyday life skills in addition to reading and writing. Sabra works every day while also meeting with her tutor weekly, which is the highlight of her week because her tutor makes her feel special and encourages her to learn. Sabra is learning to do things that most of us take for granted like handling her own money. As a learning exercise, her tutor takes her shopping and they practice with “take money” to increase her money management skills. She can do some of her own shopping now and continues to improve her reading skills and overall confidence. When Sabra achieves a goal she immediately sets a new one. Her goal this year was to work hard and win the Spotlight on Achievement Award.

Amy Golke, De La Salle/Tolton Center, Chicago — Amy was born with cerebral palsy and though she was mainstreamed in school, her teachers did not encourage her. Eventually, at age 16, she dropped out of high school. Several years later, she began attending GED classes at an adult education center and passed all but the math section on the GED exam. She joined the Tolton Center a year ago to improve her reading and math skills. Amy’s story is inspirational to her mother’s help with her reading and writing. She has earned a special education high school diploma and has learned to read and spell words with her mother’s help. In her last year of college, the education staff told her that she could not be a teacher because of her deafness, but she was determined. Her first connection with Prairie State College was organizing the BIG READ Project. She devised a plan that included reading Ray Bradbury’s Fahrenheit 451 and watching the movie to accommodate various reading levels. Thanks to Dr. Kampe, the BIG READ Project was a huge success. After the project ended, she was asked to work with a small group of adult learners with special needs. More than three years later she has worked with 180 students and has recruited five volunteer tutors to assist her in providing literacy services for adult learners with special needs. A 62-year-old man joined Dr. Kampe’s Life Skills Reading class, and he learned to print his name and recognize the alphabet and vowel sounds for the first time in his life. Dr. Kampe inspires, motivates and empowers her students to succeed.

Victor Zamora, YWCA of Pekin — After retiring from Caterpillar, Vic was looking for something constructive to occupy his time. Through a newspaper article about the Retired & Senior Volunteer Program, he learned that volunteers were needed to tutor reading and math at the YWCA in Pekin. Vic received training and began tutoring in both reading and math. His first learner was Julie Andrus, who was a Spotlight on Achievement winner this year. Julie struggled with math but began to gain more confidence as her grasp of math concepts became easier and she retained what she learned. Another adult learner sent Vic a picture of herself holding her GED diploma with a smile that said it all. To see and hear their happiness when they achieve their goals is very rewarding for Vic. He is always ready for a new assignment and has driven 32 miles round-trip to tutor making sessions more convenient for his learners. He doesn’t wait to be paired with learners who live close to his home. “Let’s get them going,” he says and then they begin.

John and Marilyn Walker, Township High School Dist. 214 Community Education, Arlington Heights — John and Marilyn are a husband and wife team who joined the Read to Learn program in 1997. Before Marilyn retired, she worked in the educational field for more than 40 years as a teacher, counselor and administrator. Marilyn has continuous communication with her students throughout the week by email or telephone, and supplements lesson plans with other resources to ensure her adult learners’ success. John focused on helping her improve her reading and writing skills to become better prepared for college.

(continued on page 3)

IACEA CONFERENCE SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS — Five Secretary of State Literacy Office scholarship winners attended the Illinois Adult and Continuing Education Association conference in Springfield in May. Winners from left are: Karen Avakos, Carl Sandburg College, Meghan Green, Aquinas Literacy Center, Karen Pamilio, Albany Park Community Center, Cecilia Hernandez, Polder Learning Center, and Melanie Sampson, Howard Area Community Center. Another round of scholarships will be offered in the fall for the March 2015 IACEA conference.

Illinois Adult Learning Hotline

Connecting volunteers to literacy programs

According to the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey, an estimated 2.2 million Illinois adults, or 18 percent of our population, have poor skills in reading, writing, math or English proficiency. Thankfully, throughout Illinois there are adult literacy programs that provide services to help adults improve their reading, writing, math and English language skills. These programs need volunteer tutors to help adult learners reach their goals. Volunteer tutors are trained and support- ed by their local adult literacy programs. Volunteers may be retired people who want to keep active, stay-at-home parents who want to keep their skills sharp, college or university stu- dents building résumés, or working people who want to give back to their communities. Volunteer tutor opportunities are available weekdays, weekends and evenings.

You can help an adult learner reach their academic and life goals. Pick up the phone and call the Illinois Adult Learning Hotline toll-free today at 800-321-9511, or visit www.thecenterweb.org/alrc/hotline/index.html.
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Corey Hibbler, Southwestern Illinois College, Belleville — When Corey was growing up his mother was an addict and his father was not around so he was raised by his grandmother. He had learning disabilities. While he objected to the diagnosis he stayed in school where he was able to play high school sports. Although his teachers “pushed him aside” he was determined to graduate and he did. After high school Corey began working in a hotel laundry department. Despite being unable to read, he became known as one of the hotel’s most hard-working employees. In 2011, he learned of the St. Clair County Adult Literacy Program and began studying at the Belleville Public Library. His inner drive and determination continued to grow despite the daily challenges he faces. In addition to studying, he works full time and helps his sister with her young children. Corey’s success is due to his relentless pursuit of self-improvement and his contagious positive attitude.

Volunteer tutor winner highlights:

Dr. Carolyn J. Kampe, Prairie State College Adult Literacy Institute, Chicago Heights — As a deaf child, Dr. Kampe learned to read and spell words with her mother’s help. In her last year of college, the education staff told her that she could never be a teacher because of her deafness, but she was determined. Her first connection with Prairie State College was as an intern organizing the BIG READ Project. She devised a plan that included reading Ray Bradbury’s Fahrenheit 451 and watching the movie to accommodate various reading levels. Thanks to Dr. Kampe, the BIG READ Project was a huge success.

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Another adult learner sent Vic a picture of herself holding her GED diploma with a smile that said it all. To see and hear their happiness when they achieve their goals is very rewarding for Vic. He is always ready for a new assignment and has driven 32 miles round-trip to make tutoring sessions more convenient for his learners. He doesn’t wait to be paired with learners who live close to his home. “Let’s get them going,” he says and then they begin.

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Awards (continued from page 2)

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Jesse White
Secretary of State & State Librarian

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Skyline Furniture Manufacturing is a unique Illinois company that for more than 65 years has manufactured upholstered furniture in Thornton. The company has seen continued growth in recent years and has expanded its product line to more than 1,000 different items. With these expansions, the company's workforce also has grown from around 50 employees in 2002 to more than 250 employees today. These employees are as diverse as the company's product line.

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For more information on how you can support literacy efforts in Illinois, visit www.illinoisliteracyfoundation.org.