speak the language of the country where an individual lives is almost as basic a necessity as food, shelter and clothing. He comes to each session with unparalleled enthusiasm, meticulously planned lessons and a great sense of humor. His unwavering commitment to tutoring was never as evident as when he was diagnosed with cancer, yet never missed a tutoring session throughout his lengthy treatment. John will meet with students on his own if they need a little extra help and in one instance, it took the form of skydiving. When one of his students suffered a great personal loss, he encouraged her to realize her dream of skydiving as a way of healing. John was with her when she made that dream a reality and took the plunge himself.

Sarah Poontong – South-East Asia Center, Chicago

After working in fundraising and corporate development, Sarah decided to change her career and devote time at the South-East Asia Center. Sarah’s passion for teaching English and working with new citizens to help them adapt and thrive inspires both the volunteers and staff. As an immigrant, Sarah feels it is important to help other immigrants and non-English speaking individuals with language acquisition. She has never forgotten her own family’s struggle when arriving in this country. Despite not being a teacher by trade, she has dedicated herself to developing teaching methods, adjusting curriculum to learner’s needs and catering to an individual’s learning level. Sarah has helped build bridges across cultural and social lines in the Uptown neighborhood of Chicago. She is most rewarded by seeing progress in her learners and the ownership they take of their education.

Edward Schultz – Howard Area Community Center, Chicago

In the not so distant past, Aline Schultz suggested to her husband, Ed, that he become a volunteer tutor with her at the Howard Area Community Center. Nervous and fresh from his tutor training, he met his first adult learner, Michelle Hernandez. Ed’s nerves soon vanished as he quickly discovered Michelle was an enterprising student delicately balancing her priorities of being a mother of three school age children and playing a major role in caring for other members of her family. He quickly applied innovative techniques that employed his theatrical skills to literacy lessons and used plays to engage Michelle. The dedication of Ed’s and Michelle’s efforts were recognized this year when each were honored with Spotlight awards. Ed is committed to continued sessions with Michelle to assist in her goal of obtaining a high school equivalency certificate.

Mary Vandervest – Oakton Community College, Skokie

Prior to volunteering as a literacy tutor 10 years ago, Mary would not have considered the word “passionate” when describing herself. Now she will contend that tutoring is her passion. She quickly discovered the joy of interacting with adult learners and feels she is helping them learn more than just school lessons. Mary incorporates a patient tutoring style and teaches multiple learners with similar ability levels, but differing literacy needs. Her devotion to the program and to her adult learners is strong and steady. She enjoys experiencing the successes of her learners and was astonished that some of her learners did not understand the concept of volunteering as it was not customary in their own countries. Because of Mary, they now want to do volunteer work.

ON THE HORIZON

- July 20-23 – International Literacy Association Annual Conference, Austin, TX, https://www.literacyworldwide.org/conference
- September – National Literacy Month
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than a year later. Susy and Darwin both work full time on opposite shifts to ensure that a parent is home with their children. They have increased their ability to read, speak and understand English. Darwin obtained his driver’s license and green card and has secured employment at a local company. Susy and Darwin have made positive changes to their lives as a result of participating in the YWCA’s literacy program. They firmly believe learning the language is important to being a citizen and is crucial in fulfilling their dreams and goals.

Rogelio Arce – Literacy Chicago, Chicago

After living in the U.S. for many years, Rogelio decided to become a citizen. When he first visited Literacy Chicago to sign up for citizenship classes and language assistance, he could not speak one word of English. Rogelio received little education in his native country of Mexico and was not literate in his native language. When he began his tutoring sessions, he would learn words simultaneously in Spanish and English. He met with a tutor twice a week in addition to his regular class. He studied English diligently and after nearly a year of tutoring, he was granted an interview with the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. He was allowed to have an interpreter for the interview, so he was accompanied by his English-speaking daughter. Rogelio breezed through the interview and passed the history test with flying colors.

It was the first time his daughter had heard him speak in English. Soon thereafter, Rogelio was sworn in as a U.S. citizen.

Deborah A. Buckner – Baby TALK, Decatur

When Deborah began the program at Baby TALK, she lacked confidence and questioned her ability to reach her goal of obtaining a high school equivalency certificate. She also doubted her chances of ever enrolling in a college. Deborah did not want to raise her child on government assistance, so she found support and motivation to succeed. She progressed from a fifth-grade reading level to a 12th-grade reading level and received her high school equivalency certificate. She plans to seek a college degree and is proud of her accomplishments. Building her literacy skills has increased her confidence and enriched her family.

Deborah became a U.S. citizen.

Lourdes Castelan – Literacy DuPage, Naperville

Lourdes came to the U.S. from Mexico 25 years ago. She met her husband and had five children. She was determined to be an active participant in her children’s education, so she decided to improve her English-language skills. Although her family members were all U.S. citizens, she was not and was not permitted to be home with her children. She began to invest in her education and saw results. She decided to become more active in her children’s education and also desired a high school equivalency certificate. Her son and brother struggle with disabilities that compound the responsibilities and stress of Michelle’s daily life. Rather than allowing these challenges to prevent her from being a fierce advocate for her family and a fierce advocate for them, she has fought for early intervention and accommodations for both disabled family members. She has persisted in her studies and made great strides toward her literacy goals with the support of her tutor, Edward Schultz – a Spotlight on Service Award recipient. One of her favorite learning exercises is reading theatrical plays with her tutor. She enjoys his explanation of how everything would look on the stage and loves imagining what it would be like to be a different person in these different places. In the last year, she has taken on a leadership role in her community, has proactively managed her finances and has enrolled in employment classes.

Martha Reyes – Joliet Junior College, Joliet

Martha wanted to increase her English reading and speaking ability in an effort to better communicate at her two jobs and with her two sons. Her children were born in this country. “They speak Spanish the way I spoke English,” Martha explains. She discovered the tutoring program at Joliet Junior College, but the tutoring sessions had to align with her work schedule. She employed her tutor as her lawyer. For four years, she made the decision to sacrifice the income and stability of that job in favor of her education. Martha’s family supports her educational efforts. She has worked diligently on her literacy and has had significant increases in her reading scores. Martha feels capable of communicating with family, friends and co-workers. Most importantly, Martha has improved relationships with her family life because she better understands her sons. With part of her dreams accomplished, she plans to enroll in high school equivalency certificate classes.

Photographs of all the award winners, as well as a listing of the conference sessions and presenters, can be found at the Literacy Volunteers of Illinois website: http://lvillinois.org/otr_2015_thank_you1.
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Maria G. Bazan Guillen – Corazón a Corazón, Blue Island

Maria had many responsibilities that could have prevented her from improving her knowledge of the English language. She worked two jobs and acted as a caregiver to her parents. Maria learned to manage her time well and never missed a tutoring session. She wanted to be comfortable when she found herself in situations where she could only communicate in English. Through her study of English, Maria gained confidence and the ability to speak clearly, read proficiently and understand dialogue. When driving out, she is able to read and understand the menu and place her order without any assistance. She is better able to interact with doctors and understand their recommendations.

Michelle Hernandez – Howard Area Community Center, Chicago

When Michelle first started in the program at Howard Area Community Center, she lacked confidence and a sense of direction. She began to invest in her education and saw results. She decided to become more active in her children’s education and also desired a high school equivalency certificate. Her son and brother struggle with disabilities that compound the responsibilities and stress of Michelle’s daily life. Rather than allowing these challenges to keep her from her goals, she became a fierce advocate for her family and has fought for early intervention accommodations for both disabled family members. She has persisted in her studies and made great strides toward her literacy goals with the support of her tutor, Edward Schultz – a Spotlight on Service Award recipient. One of her favorite learning exercises is reading theatrical plays with her tutor. She enjoys his explanation of how everything would look on the stage and loves imagining what it would be like to be a different person in these different places. In the last year, she has taken on a leadership role in her community, has proactively managed her finances and has enrolled in employment classes.

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Eugene Street – The Literacy Council, Rockford
Eugene had a simple goal: to be able to read to his grandson. Eugene is severely dyslexic and his upbringing in the segregated South did not provide him with special education services. With the use of specialized dyslexia education strategies and repeated readings, he has learned to cope with his learning disorder. Eugene now reads at a second-grade level and is capable of reading simple stories to his grandson. He operates his own lawn care business and with the help of his tutor has developed his skills and estimate forms. Eugene is active at his grandson’s school and looks forward to participating in events. After suffering from health issues last summer, he returned to sessions with his tutor in a matter of weeks. Eugene feels that tutoring has aided his focus and curiosity. He feels that his thoughts and feelings, no matter their age or literacy level, are still valid.

Ruben Vega – Morton College, Cicero
Ruben arrived in the United States as a child. His English skills were limited. Initially, he had not planned on staying in the U.S., but he met his wife and they started a family. They lived in a predominantly Spanish-speaking community, and he worked in an environment where his co-workers spoke languages other than English. When he retired in 2015, he decided to take the time to learn English. Ruben only completed six grades of schooling in his native country, which made learning English even more challenging. Ruben overcame his fear with the assistance of his tutor and fellow students. He regularly participates in program activities and has become an involved member of his community. Prior to participating in the literacy program, he was not comfortable answering the phone or talking with his English-speaking neighbors. Now he is confident going to a grocery store or talking with his doctor on the phone. He also understands his English-speaking friends and loves to practice speaking with his grandchildren.

Adriana Zarate – PODER Learning Center, Chicago
Growing up in Mexico, Adriana’s family and work were her priorities. She earned a bachelor’s degree in law and was accustomed to being surrounded by people who shared common interests. When she moved to Chicago, she realized that she needed to become more involved in her new culture. Her mother, who had previously attended PODER Learning Center, encouraged her to attend. Adriana quickly stood out as an extremely dedicated and focused student and was hired into a receptionist/data entry position at PODER. She signed up for a library card and has enrolled in workshops on interview and improving customer service skills. Her long-term goal is to attend college and secure a job related to her degree. Adriana learned that if she invests time and energy into her academic and personal development, she is concurrently investing in a better quality of life for herself and her family.

Marlene Greenberg – Township High School District 214, Arlington Heights
Growing up, Marlene was raised by grandparents who could not speak or read English. Acting as their interpreter, she wrote notes for the milkman, which her grandmother then copied. In a sense, Marlene has been a tutor all of her life. After raising her family and the loss of her husband, she recalled her grandfather’s struggles and felt the best contribution she could make in this world would be to volunteer as an adult literacy tutor. Marlene has devoted 25 years to tutoring adult learners, and her passion speaks volumes to her extraordinary dedication. As her 85th birthday approaches, she warmly recalls how she innocently walked into the Palatine Library to “help” one day and how that started a 20-year journey of helping others. Marlene takes tutoring beyond the classroom and supplements her lesson plans with materials, such as menus from restaurants and medical forms. She role plays with her students to help them with potential day-to-day experiences. As of this past December, Marlene has tutored almost 800 hours. She also spends extra time researching topics and communicating with her students outside the classroom.

Shelly Hanson – The Hana Center, Chicago
Shelly believes all learners are unique and have something special that they can bring to their own education. Learners deserve the opportunity to build their confidence and feelings no matter their age or literacy level. Shelly serves as a volunteer tutor, bringing opportunity and joy to adult ESL learners who have less mobility and interactions with others. She designs lessons based on the needs of her students so that they may better express themselves in difficult situations. She has also been a family member or colleague. She pushes learners to reach beyond their comfort level and discuss their opinions and emotions on American culture, current events and daily experiences. She empowers learners by teaching them to utilize free resources, including those that learners can practice daily on their own. Staying current with learners and giving back to her community by making herself available and attentively listening when learners open up and trust her with difficult personal stories. She believes to learn a new language is to learn a new way to think about the world.

Phil Hjemboe – The Literacy Council, Rockford
Phil has been tutoring for nearly 20 years and has made a significant difference in the lives of each of his adult learners. His background is in education, first as a Peace Corps volunteer in Ethiopia, then as an elementary school teacher and later as a college librarian. Returning to Rockford in 1998, Phil sought out volunteer opportunities in the community and found The Literacy Council. He works almost entirely with ESL learners and views tutoring as his chance to be a part of something important for both the individual learners and the community. Phil does not shy away from anything he thinks would help his learners and goes above and beyond to help them, even after program completion. His learners recruit their friends and family to sign up for literacy help. He believes tutoring provides a rewarding way to teach. Phil has dedicated more than 1,500 tutoring hours to adult learners.

John Ostergren – Oakton Community College, Skokie
John began tutoring for Oakton Community College’s VITA program in 2004. He also tutors at the Des Plaines Public Library because “I want to do something worthwhile with my life, something that would help people.” He also firmly believes that the ability to read, write and
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Ruben Vega – Morton College, Cicero
Ruben does not speak English, and his family keeps meals, friends, and jobs simple to ensure the family’s survival. His dreams were limited until his great-grandmother passed away, leaving him and his siblings with a sudden influx of money. With the help of a tutor, Ruben began to learn English. He now reads books on his own and helps his family with daily tasks. Ruben believes that tutoring provides a rewarding way to teach. He has dedicated more than 1,500 tutoring hours to adult learners.

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Jesse White
Secretary of State & State Librarian

2018 Spotlight on Achievement and Service Awards

Secretary of State and State Librarian Jesse White honored the winners of the 2018 Spotlight on Achievement and Service Awards in May. Spotlight Achievement Awards are presented to adult learners who have demonstrated tremendous progress as they worked to improve their reading and writing skills or to learn the English language. Spotlight on Service Awards are presented to 10 volunteers who have shown great dedication as they assisted adult learners to reach their goals.

I am honored to congratulate and recognize these outstanding adult learners for their hard work and determination to attain lifelong learning and reading skills,” said Secretary White. “I am also proud to recognize the outstanding volunteer tutors for their selflessness and encouragement in helping adult learners achieve their utmost potential.”

This year, 89 programs that support adult, family and workplace literacy programs are operating with funding from the Illinois State Library’s Adult Literacy Grant Program. Last year, literacy programs served 5,941 adult students, and 3,278 tutors volunteered to instruct students.

At the ceremony, Secretary White presented each winner with a commemorative plaque and a personalized Illinois Blue Book. The following stories are highlights of the winners’ experiences.

SUMMER 2018

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- September – National Literacy Month
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More literacy event information is available at www.cyberdriveillinois.com/departments/library/literacy/home.html (click Calendar of Literacy Events).

Marti Vandervest – Oakton Community College, Skokie
Prior to volunteering as a literacy tutor 10 years ago, Marti would not have considered the word “passionate” when describing herself. Now she will contend that tutoring is her passion. She quickly discovered the joy of interacting with adult learners and feels she is helping them learn more than just school lessons. Marti incorporates a patient tutoring style and teaches multiple learners with similar ability levels, but differing literacy needs. Her devotion to the program and to her adult learners is strong and steady. She enjoys experiencing the successes of her learners and was astonished that some of her learners did not understand the concept of volunteering as it was not customary in their own countries. Because of Marti, they now want to do volunteer work.

Sarah Poontong – South-East Asia Center, Chicago
After working in fundraising and corporate development, Sarah decided to change her career and devote time at the South-East Asia Center. Sarah's passion for teaching English and working with new citizens to help them adapt and thrive inspires both the volunteers and staff. As an immigrant, Sarah feels it is important to help other immigrants and non-English speaking individuals with language acquisition. She has never forgotten her own family's struggle when arriving in this country. Despite not being a teacher by trade, she has dedicated herself to developing teaching methods, adjusting curriculum to learner's needs and catering to an individual's learning level. Sarah has helped build bridges across cultural and social lines in the Uptown neighborhood of Chicago. She is most rewarded by seeing progress in her learners and the ownership they take of their education.

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Director of Volunteer Services, Aline Schultz

Susan Majka – Chicago Public Library
Recognized at the 2018 ceremony at the Illinois State Library.

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Spotlight on Achievement winners:
Jaqueline “Susy” Aparicio and Darwin Amaya – YWCA, Pekin
Susy came to the U.S. alone and pregnant, leaving behind her husband, Darwin, and young daughter, Sophia. With the help of a member of her church and a tutor, Susy was able to navigate currency and the U.S. healthcare system. Darwin, Sophia and Susy’s younger sister arrived in the U.S. more

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