



Word on the Street

Newsletter
Summer 2011

Lincoln Literacy Council • 745 South 9th Street • Lincoln, NE 68508 • 402-476-7323
www.lincolnliteracy.org • info@lincolnliteracy.org

Afghan Widow Receives Mayor's Award

When Mahjan Azizi arrived in Lincoln in 2000 as a refugee from the harsh Taliban regime in Afghanistan, she had nothing, not even the ability to communicate with the people around her. Today, she has a job, a home, and a certificate declaring her the 2011 winner of the Mayor's Award for Literacy Achievement.

Azizi received it from Mayor Chris Beutler himself at Lincoln Literacy Council's annual Awards Luncheon on Saturday, June 25th. In presenting her with the award, Mayor Beutler declared Ms. Azizi "an inspiration to us all."

"I've never had to face the kind of challenges you've overcome," he told her, "but you inspire me to work even harder at what I do."

At the time Mahjan Azizi fled her native land, the Taliban had banned women from learning to read, work, or even

See Afghan Winner on p. 3.



Board of Directors

David Bargaen , *President*
 Cynthia Martinez, *First Vice President*
 Kelly Neill, *Second Vice President*
 MJ Humphrey, *Secretary*
 Dave Barnhouse, *Treasurer*
 Nikki Bates
 Judy Ellingson
 Mike Eppel
 Carolyn Gregorius
 Brett Harris
 Linda Hoke
 Kristin Jakub
 Catherine Lang
 Stephen Leeper
 Denise Mainquist
 Lance Odom
 Marlene Perkins
 Sheppard Perkins
 Joanie Perry
 Vicki Powell
 Laura Salem
 Yuhui Shen
 Don Spinar
 Tonya Vyhldal
 David Williams

Great Tutors, Students, & Business Honored

The 2011 Lincoln Literacy Awards Ceremony had a record number of winners, following a record number of outstanding nominations. For the first time ever, the Learner of the Year award went not to an individual but to a trio of siblings. Candida, Eduardo, and Gloria Alvarez were recognized for their outstanding diligence in studying English at LLC's Monday evening classes at American Lutheran Church. After maintaining perfect attendance, all three advanced by at least one level on the yearend Basic English Skills Test. Their father, who provided rides to and from class, looked on proudly as they claimed their awards.

Lisa Tolliver took top honors as Tutor of the Year. She was cited for her wide range of tutoring volunteerism. In addition to taking on a one-to-one student, in the last schoolyear, Tolliver has taught a class and served as a substitute for conversation groups and other classes. When budgetary difficulties curtailed LLC's van service, Tolliver stepped in and helped students get to and from classes. After all that, she could have taken a well-deserved break during the summer, but Tolliver volunteered to teach in LLC's summer session as well.

Another volunteer who gave above and beyond the call of duty was recognized with Lois Poppe Award for outstanding volunteerism. Katherine Najjar was recognized for her willingness to take on the leadership of a class when

See Honored on p. 3.



The Alvarez sisters flank their tutor, Joyce Hahn, with their father at right.



Inside This Issue

Afghan Widow	1
Awards	1
Work Readiness Classes	2
Tutor Town Hall	2
Refugee Learns to Read	4

Workforce Readiness Classes Prepare Refugees for Jobs and a Little Fun

Lincoln has long been a major site for refugee resettlement. After displacement from their countries followed by long waits in refugee camps, most are eager to get to work and start a new life. But it's not easy, especially for those with young children at home.

Refugees who need childcare and transportation to be able to study English and prepare for entry into the workforce turn to Lincoln Literacy Council for help. Our Workforce Readiness English (WRE) classes provide the close attention, specialized curriculum, and support services refugees need to vault the hurdles they face.

In partnership with organizations such as Goodwill Industries and the Community Action Partnership, LLC is able to launch refugee students into a whole new life.

As the schoolyear came to a close in May, more than a dozen workforce readiness students landed jobs. Ten succeeded in gaining full-time employment. Four others obtained part-time employment, and one class member, Manal Karam, from Sudan became a U.S. citizen.

To celebrate their successes, the classes ended with a day of pure joy. On May 19th the students and their children, tutors and childcare providers took a trip to the Lincoln Children's Zoo. Despite varying levels of English proficiency and differing language and cultural backgrounds, students and their children had a good time sharing the names of animals in their native tongues and practicing those names in English.

This memorable occasion was made possible as a result of free admission passes provided by zoo's Children at the Zoo (CATZ) program. Soon, it was back to work, however. Summer WRE classes are in full swing, with 64 adults enrolled at St Paul United Methodist Church



and First Plymouth Church. Students come from a wide array of countries, including the Congo, Sudan, Burma, Afghanistan, Liberia, Iraq, Ukraine and Vietnam.

During the summer, other students and their tutors will have a chance to use CATZ passes to visit the zoon.

As for the first group to go through, a highlight for all was the Humboldt Penguin Habitat. Workforce Readiness Program Coordinator Samira Sabetrasekh, herself a former refugee, remarked, "They loved it!"

No surprise there. Who doesn't love penguins?

Tutor Town Hall Reels In Contented Yet Eager Volunteers

Like salmon returning to the spawning grounds, on June 1st Lincoln Literacy tutors circled back to First Lutheran Church, the place where they first trained, for the 2011 Tutor Town Hall meeting. Some two dozen tutors engaged in a lively, upbeat exchanges with one another and LLC staff about challenges and successes.

They were then treated to a brief but richly informative presentation by Jane L. Hanson, Ph.D. (at right). By day, Jane is a member of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Intensive English Program faculty, but afternoons, evenings, and weekends she serves as LLC's Family Literacy Coordinator. Speaking to tutors, she shared research-based findings on second language acquisition, as well as insights as to how tutors might apply the information in their tutoring. (During the year ahead, LLC staff will work to create other chances for tutors to share "nuts 'n bolts" strategies to help students of all levels over hurdles such as idioms, informal dialogues and reading.)

With the lecture portion done, tutors happily socialized over cookies and iced tea. And unlike salmon, they survived to teach another day!





◆ Afghan Winner

Continued from Page 1

travel outside the home. Once she reached the safety of Lincoln, the mother of four began studying English with a Lincoln Literacy Council tutor, and by 2005 she was able to land a job on the housekeeping staff of BryanLGH Hospital. With her English still weak, the hospital put her on night shift duty, cleaning offices.

Azizi persevered in her study of English language literacy, however, and about six months ago she was promoted to the day shift, working in patient wards. Her current tutor, Lindsey Dykman, says that Mahjan's verbal abilities have advanced from "Hello, how are you?" to having full conversations that are completely comprehensible and enjoyable.

On hand to see her receive the award were Douglas J. McDaniel, director of human resources at BryanLGH Health System and Mike Hanigan, her supervisor at BryanLGH. Hanigan, who heads the Environmental Services Department there, says Azizi has improved "100 percent." Azizi, he noted, has passed all the competency tests at the hospital and is now able to converse comfortably with patients and nurses on the floor.

Meantime, Azizi has worked diligently on preparing for the United States Citizenship exam, which she expect to take — and pass! — later this year. Everyone at Lincoln Literacy salutes her inspiring achievements!

◆ Honored

Continued from Page 1

all she had expected to do was tutor one-to-one. Her class quickly grew in popularity, and before the schoolyear was over, Najjar also volunteered to work with the children of our adult English language learners.



Susan Chohany (at left in adjacent picture), received the Judy Ellingson Award for Tutoring Excellence, after her students, a husband and wife from China, nominated her for unflinching dedication and excellence in her work with them.

Tutor Michael Ortiz received a Lifetime Dedication Award not only for his more than ten years of service but for patient, caring and successful tutoring that he has offered students over the years.

Hawa Kokendy, a refugee from Sudan, was given the Student Leadership Award for setting a great example for others and providing fellow students with encouragement and always a warm smile.

The Champion of Literacy Award went to West Gate Bank, in recognition of that organization's

wide-ranging support of LLC and its mission. In presenting the award to Senior Vice President and Chief Financial Officer Steve Sloup, LLC Board President David Barga observed that for the past five years, the locally owned bank has provided direct financial support, expertise, low-cost banking services, and volunteer assistance to LLC. Its staff have worked long into the night as volunteers at LLC fundraising events, and one of its staff members has served on the board.

Rounding out the slate were tutor Joy Eakin, who received a Poppe Award honorable mention; Fang Fang and Xinran Wang, Susan Chohany's students, who received honorable mention in the "Learner of the Year" category; and Ninh Vu, who got a Mayor's Award honorable mention for working hard on his English so that he could pass the college entrance exams and enroll at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to study chemical engineering. In staff awards, AmeriCorps Members Karen Lenz and Alison Holt received well deserved tributes, and Business Manager Sanela Ganic received a hard-earned Distinguished Service Award.



West Gate Bank's CFO Steve Sloup (right) receives award from LLC's David Barga.



LLC is registered with GoodSearch.com, a search engine that makes a donation to us every time you use it. It's powered by Yahoo!, so you get great search results, and each time you search, LLC benefits. If



you go through GoodShop.com, you can choose from hundreds of popular merchants and benefit LLC even more!



745 South 9th Street
Lincoln, NE 68508
(402) 476-7323
e-mail: info@lincolnliteracy.org
www.lincolnliteracy.org



Uniting Our Community Through Communication

Lincoln Literacy Council's Mission:

*To assist people of all cultures
and strengthen our community
by teaching English language
and literacy skills.*

Denied an Education, a Refugee Learns to Read

By Karen Lenz

I met Cooper Dennis when he arrived at Bennett Martin Public Library last October to sign up for ESL



classes. When I inquired about his goals, Cooper said, "I want to learn to write my name." The following Monday Cooper rode Lincoln Literacy's van to an English class at First Plymouth Church, where he met his tutor, Leona Mitcheltree. Leona soon learned that Cooper had never been to school in his home country of Liberia. She soon also learned that she

had been matched with an extremely hard worker who was determined to learn to read and write. The two began meeting each week as part of the class and would often stay late to continue working on letters and sounds. Last May, when students and tutors met to share a meal and celebrate accomplishments, Cooper stood before the group with a book in his hand. Line by line, he worked his way through a short story, never even looking to his tutor for help. I was so proud of him as I listened, and soon a handful of other students who have been learning to read came to mind. I'm proud of all of them, too. Though many of our students were denied an education in their home countries, their response is not one of complaints or excuses but rather of determination and gratitude for the opportunities they have now. I want to thank all of the students and tutors who continue to move forward, no matter where they are starting from!

.....
Karen Lenz is completing her second year as an AmeriCorps Member with Lincoln Literacy Council. The staff, students, and volunteers of LLC want to express their gratitude for her extraordinarily skillful and compassionate service.

Help Support Our Programs!

Become an LLC Member!

When you contribute \$25 or more, you qualify for membership benefits such as these:

- ◆ Receive our Newsletters
- ◆ Be Nominated for Annual Awards
- ◆ Attend In-Service Workshops at No Cost
- ◆ Vote at our Annual Meeting

**Please, donate now — online
or in the enclosed envelope.**

www.lincolnliteracy.org