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In Its 45th Year, Lincoln Literacy Looks Back Fondly and Moves Swiftly Ahead

In a year of great memories and profound uncertainties, Lincoln Literacy has come through with more activity and achievement than ever. Forty-five years ago, in 1972, a handful of volunteers, now all passed on, founded Lincoln Literacy after hearing a speech by Dr. Frank Laubach, a literacy organization pioneer. Having adopted his slogan, “each one teach one,” they were able to assist just a handful of learners in their first few years.

But we’ve grown steadily in the decades since. Would 2016’s record

number of students and tutors prove to be our high-water mark? When we gathered in April at the Midwestern African Museum of Art (see photos at right) to hear from past students, some worried that Lincoln Literacy’s best days were done. New White House policies on refugees and immigrants might have meant people turning away from us, either in fear or hostility.

Instead, we’ve had a surge of new volunteers, more supporters, and more students. By Nov. 6 we’d served 928 adults, up (See 45th Year, p. 3)



Businessman and educator Pablo Cervantes, at 45th anniversary event, recalls how Lincoln Literacy helped.

Couple Embraces Financial Literacy



Kifah and Khitam pursue all learning opportunities.

When Lincoln Literacy launched its first financial literacy seminar this fall, Kifah al-Shaheeb and his wife Khitam al-Zaidi were among the first to take part.

“I don’t have a dream, just goals,” says Khitam with a smile. Among those goals are to soak up as much education as possible while they pursue jobs. Diane Wilson, a certified public accountant who leads the financial literacy seminar, says, “Kifah and Khitam are just wonderful. And man, are they serious about education!”

Wilson, a longtime Lincoln Literacy volunteer tutor and board member, said she looks forward to connecting them with the engineering community. The Iraqi couple arrived in Lincoln as refugees five years ago. In Baghdad, Kifah supervised construction, while Khitam taught math. They share a love of numbers, so financial literacy was an attractive class. Both have since gone on to take prerequisite classes at Southeast Community College.

If You Can Read This, You Can Surely Help!

Lincoln Literacy depends on volunteer tutors to get the job done. We offer highly effective training and support to the volunteers who teach our students. Tutors have a wide range of choices, from serving in classrooms or as one-to-one tutors. For more info, click “Get Involved” at our website, www.lincolnliteracy.org.

We Prepare to Honor Two Great Tutors Who Are Gone

This year Lincoln Literacy lost two amazing volunteers who changed the lives of many grateful students: Warren Urbom and Joanie Perry.

As he noted in his memoir, tragedy first brought Judge Urbom to Lincoln Literacy. While driving, Urbom struck a motorcyclist, who later died. Urbom immediately accepted responsibility, surrendered his license and, anticipating the possibility of community service, volunteered to serve with us.

Warren and his wife Joyce offered to serve in any capacity, but Executive Director Clayton Naff saw rich possibilities in



Judge Warren Urbom, guiding citizenship student Qui Nguyen through the Capitol.

having them lead our citizenship class. "Who better than a respected federal judge to learn from when it comes to our Constitution, government, civics, and history?" Naff said.

Having Joyce, a skilled educator, on the team made it that much better. The couple got started in November 2006, and continued for three years, until cancer got the better of Joyce.

At first, just a few students enrolled, but as word got around about how kind, dedicated, and effective they

were the class rapidly grew. Soon our classroom was full.

Field trips were one of the attractions of the class. The Urboms took students to the Capitol (see photo at left), where they visited all three branches of government — with personal introductions, in many instances. They also got to visit the federal courthouse where Judge Urbom sat.

Urbom died July 28 at the age of 91. We later learned that he provided for a gift to Lincoln Literacy from his estate. In lasting gratitude for their splendid service and generous support, Lincoln Literacy plans to dedicate its citizenship class to the memory of Warren and Joyce Urbom.



Joanie Perry, in blue, was featured in a 2015 L Magazine story on Lincoln Literacy.

We should have kept count.

Every Wednesday morning for nearly two decades, Joanie Perry would arrive at Lincoln Literacy to lead a conversation class for English language learners. Every week, she would have another delightful surprise to share with her class: cuttings from her garden, curios from her travels, or something yummy.

Every May, when we'd open up our awards process, a bundle of nominations for Joanie Perry would arrive. She won her first award in 2009 and other accolades followed, including a lifetime achievement award, but the nominations never stopped.

Still, she did more. She joined the board of directors in 2010 and loyally served until her health began to slip last June. Even then, she continued to lead her weekly class, until a few weeks before death claimed her in September. Just days before she died, she wrote a gracious thank you note to her students.

For the countless ways in which Joanie Perry enriched the lives of our students, and everyone who knew her, we are refurbishing the Lincoln Literacy classroom in which she taught for so many years and renaming it in her honor.

Be Part of Our Future

Warren Urbom's legacy gift to Lincoln Literacy adds to those of Helen Roeske, Martha Countryman, and others who have put Lincoln Literacy in their wills. All the funds from such gifts have gone into board-managed investments termed the "Fund for the Future."

Since its inception in late 2015, the Fund has gained more than 7%. It recently topped \$100,000 in value. That's welcome news, but far from the \$1 million or more it will need to reach to offset government grants and become a true endowment.

"The sun is setting on federal funds for the kinds of work we do," says board president David Williams, who recently pledged to include Lincoln Literacy in his estate plan. "Legacy gifts will be absolutely critical to the future of this much-needed organization."

Lincoln Literacy is grateful to those who have led the way.

You too can make a gift that lasts forever: Leave a Legacy for Literacy!

You can designate a life insurance policy, set a portion or a percentage of your estate, or look into a charitable annuity to help LL into the future. Contact us for details.

You can also support our present-day work by making a tax-deductible donation online at: lincolnliteracy.org

◆ 45th Year Celebration

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Esther Steckly recalls learning to read at Lincoln Literacy.

and our new volunteer training classes continue to fill. In May the community showed exceptional support for Lincoln Literacy on Give to Lincoln Day. We finished 6th among more than 350 nonprofits, with more than \$70,000 in donations coming our way.

We used that income to purchase a second van and create the R-Block this fall: weekly 10-hour block of classes for refugees. They meet Monday–Thursday, from 9:30 a.m. until noon. The R-Block requires 14 volunteer tutors and numerous staff.

from 897 in the same period last year, along with 184 of their children, for a total of 1,112. That's slightly ahead of last year's record pace. Already this year, we've had 340

tutors in service,

To date, it has served more than 40 learners.

Over the summer, our board of directors assembled a new strategic plan for Lincoln Literacy. They began by making a subtle but significant change to the mission statement. It now puts community first and anticipates a variety of literacy lines.

The first variant began this fall, when we piloted a financial literacy seminar for refugees. We intend to broaden its scope in the future to serve of all kinds of people. Other kinds of literacy training, responsive to the needs of people as well as the community, will follow. For sure, the best is yet to come.



Tutor Brittany Evnen teaches refugees in R-Block about "in" and "on."

As Writing Skills Blossom, Immigrant Students Share Their Stories

We often hear about immigrants living in the U.S., but we rarely think about the 8 million Americans who live and work abroad. Rocky Hansen was one of them. He lived, worked, and married in Mexico, where he and his wife, Cristina Rodriguez, were happily raising their children. Then, everything changed. Cristina, now a Lincoln Literacy student, shared her story with us. We present it, lightly edited, in her words.

"My husband lost his job in Mexico seven years ago, and after eight months of trying to find a new one he decided to go back to Nebraska, where he is from. He found a job there a year later. Then he came back to Mexico to pick up me and our four children. We've now been in Lincoln two years and six months. Lincoln is a very nice city. No traffic no worries about robberies. Lincoln is peaceful."

But it wasn't so easy at first. About a year ago Cristina came with two of her sons to Lincoln Literacy's weekly classes at American Lutheran Church to begin learning English. She's found the experience rewarding enough to double her investment: she now attends twice a week at our afterschool program at Culler Middle School. To judge from her writing, the effort is paying off. Her volunteer tutor, Juliana Bukoski, agrees. "She is a great student, and I love having her in class!"

Fellow student Ana Maria Rodriguez chimes in, *"Lincoln Literacy has helped me to understand how important it is to receive and give a warm welcome. As soon as I can I will apply to become a volunteer teacher at Lincoln Literacy."*

Alvaro is an older gentleman who began studying English at Lincoln Literacy in 2015. He has since improved his scores by

more than 10%. He takes part in a variety of classes each week. Here is an excerpt from his essay:

"Lincoln Literacy has helped me to learn English in writing and reading. The U.S. is a great country. My country is poor and those who rule are crooks. I am to the U.S. because I wanted a better life. I am so thankful I came, because as soon as I crossed the border I ate, and I have never been hungry anymore."



Cristina Rodriguez, center, with her husband Rocky and other family members

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Our mission is to strengthen our community by teaching the English language and a variety of literacy skills to people of all cultures. Why not join as a member or sign up to become a tutor today?

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Long Journey to Graduation Makes It All the Sweeter

When Regina Walsh came to Lincoln Literacy in 2012, she had a part-time job that earned her less than \$10,000 a year, a knot in her stomach, and a goal: to earn her GED.

Lincoln Literacy's Adult Basic Education Coordinator Esther Ortiz recalls, "I don't think she was very confident, but she was determined."

No one likes preparing for exams, but there was a special reason for Regina's anxiety.

"I was homeschooled," she says, "so I had never had to take exams before."

One big stumbling block for her was the rigorous math section of the GED exam. Working with longtime Lincoln Literacy volunteer tutors Kent Vollenweider and Mike Ortiz, both instructors at Southeast Community College, she trudged ahead.

Vollenweider helped her slowly work her way through the tortuous math section. Along the way, they shared some laughs.

"He was really easy to work with," she recalls. "He explained all the concepts and helped me through the processes.

Also, he seemed to appreciate my sense of humor!"

Still it was not easy. Years into her studies, Regina attempted the test and failed. She tried again. The math section remained a bugaboo.

"I missed it by two or three points," she says. But she persevered.

This year, five years after she came to Lincoln Literacy for help, Regina Walsh made over the final hurdle and earned her GED. Life is better now, she says, "No more exams!" she grins.

Mike Ortiz commends her. "Regina epitomizes the very best in a student's commitment to achieving a goal."

But she's not entirely done with the world of GED. After her a long day's work at the Marian Sisters House in Waverly, she goes back to SCC to volunteer in Mike Ortiz's GED class. She's there to help others like her who are struggling to pass the GED. Are they inspired to see someone who kept at it for so long? "I hope so," Regina says.

If not, they should take a good look at her graduation photos.



Regina Walsh beams at her graduation. Next to her is LL volunteer Mike Ortiz, who heads SCC's GED program.