

## Immigrant Turned Congressional Aide Tells His Story at Rededication Event



Angel Velitchkov

A stellar cast of speakers headlined Lincoln Literacy's Rededication Ceremony on Wednesday, September 28<sup>th</sup>, held to unveil a new logo, name, and tagline and to reaffirm our commitment to the community.

Angel Velitchkov, who arrived in America as a bewildered immigrant from Bulgaria, became a scholarship student, and worked his way through law school to become an aide to Congressman Jeff Fortenberry, told the moving story of his life.

"When I arrived in the airport, I couldn't even read the signs to know where my next flight was," he recalled. "I tried to ask someone, but I couldn't understand what he was telling me."

Velitchkov, who also speaks Russian, German, and his native Bulgarian, added with pride that he has since drafted speeches for the congressman to read on the floor of the House.

Four decades after its start, Lincoln Literacy has become our community's leading charitable provider of English language and acculturation services to

*See Rededication on p. 3.*

## The Good Kirk Reimers Did Lives On in a Memorial Fund

Lincoln Literacy has many outstanding volunteers, but few can match the late Kirk Reimers. He was a tutor whose enthusiasm never flagged. From 1997, shortly after his retirement from Cushman Motors, where he had served as chief engineer for two decades, until his death this past July, he enthusiastically, compassionately, and competently tutored students from all over the world. He guided several of them through the citizenship process.

"Kirk loved working with students on citizenship," Charlene Reimers, his widow, recalls. "He even went with one of them to Omaha for their citizenship test and naturalization ceremony."

In the wake of his passing, family and friends created the Kirk Reimers Memorial Fund in his honor. Appropriately enough, the fund is currently sponsoring Lincoln Literacy's Citizenship Class. It serves immigrants and refugees who are or will soon be eligible to apply for U.S. citizenship. By combining English-language instruction with civics and history lessons, the class helps students prepare for the citizenship test and interview. This free citizenship class takes place Saturday mornings from 10:30 a.m. to noon at Saint Paul United Methodist Church (11th & M Streets). It is currently led by award-winning volunteer tutor Beverly Clark.



Kirk Reimers

*See Reimers Fund on p. 3.*

## New Name, New Look!

After a year of design, brainstorming, and hard work, the board of directors has approved a change of name, tagline, and logo for the nonprofit organization.

*See New Name on p. 3.*

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## Determined to Learn



Khanh Lu is the picture of determination. He joined Lincoln Literacy's evening classes at the Asian Center in October, and has not missed a class since. You may think that this is nothing special; however, you should know that Khanh walks through every kind of weather

from his home to the Asian Center at 27<sup>th</sup> and O twice a week. It's a two-mile hike. After an hour and a half of English lessons, he makes the long walk home again. Nothing deters him, not even the unfamiliar sight of snow.

Khanh is from Vietnam, where it never snows. Since arriving in the U.S. a year ago, he has secured a full time job at ARCK Foods, where he puts labels on packages. In Vietnam, Khanh worked as a photographer, and his dream is to someday practice his profession in the United States. He knows he must learn to communicate effectively in English. With his determination and Lincoln Literacy's help, his tutor, Joyce Hahn, is convinced that Khanh will make his American dream come true.

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## Lincoln Literacy Student Gains a New Home for the Holidays

Galina Letyayeva, an émigré from Russia, has truly made a new home for herself and her two daughters here in America. This fall, the three have been working with local Habitat for Humanity volunteers to build a new home they can move into just in time for the holidays.

In addition to working on the family's new home, Galina, a native of Siberia, is working to pass her citizenship exam with the help of Lincoln Literacy tutor Steve Leeper, a board member and volunteer with whom she's studied for the past three years. Galina credits her tutor for having helped her a lot in understanding the history and way of life in the United States. Dr. Leeper, former dean of the UNMC Dental School, also helps Galina improve her English vocabulary and reading skills, especially in connection with her job at Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital.



Galina Letyayeva and daughters

"She is a very strong and determined young lady," Dr. Leeper remarks. Galina says she is excited to share her new home with her daughters, Anita, 12, and Alina, 10, who are both doing well in their schools.

## ◆ Reimers Fund

Continued from Page 1

On a snowy Saturday recently, Charlene and her oldest son Todd visited the Lincoln Literacy program at Saint Paul. After touring the English classes, they spent time in the citizenship class learning about the process and teaching materials. Flipping through the flashcards with exam questions and answers, Todd was amused to find that some of them can be quite challenging — even for those who have grown up as U.S. citizens.

"I'm going to get a set of these and quiz my children on them," he vowed with a smile.

In addition to sponsoring the citizenship class for two years, the Kirk Reimers Memorial Fund is helping to purchase books for a variety of classes, including some much-needed picture dictionaries for beginning English language learners.

In the spirit Kirk so generously displayed, the memorial fund will help many to achieve their dreams and in turn contribute their talents and good will to strengthen our community.

If you would like to contribute to the Kirk Reimers Memorial Fund, or if you would like to discuss creating a fund to honor someone else, please let us know. You can contact Executive Director Clay Naff at 402.476.7323, or by email at [cnaff@lincolnliteracy.org](mailto:cnaff@lincolnliteracy.org).



Todd & Charlene Reimers outside the citizenship classroom

## ◆ Rededication

Continued from Page 1



Qui Nguyen & Judge Urbom

Lincoln's burgeoning population of immigrants and refugees—although it continues to tutor homegrown Americans as well.

The noontime outdoor ceremony began with a short presentation by one of the founders of the organization. Frances Taylor recalled the efforts of volunteers to get it all going four decades ago.

U.S. District Judge Warren Urbom took to the podium with his former student Qui Nguyen and recounted how he and his late wife Joyce volunteered to teach citizenship together. Qui, born in Vietnam, learned all about American history, civics, and law from the Urboms and went on to pass his exam with flying colors. He continues to study English while working at Lincoln Industries. Other speakers included refugee student Hiba Hemeida, who has since gained citizenship, and her tutor Barb Johnson Frank.



Hemeida and Johnson Frank

## ◆ New Name

Continued from Page 1

Having dropped "Council," the organization is now known simply as Lincoln Literacy.

"It's not a radical change," notes Executive Director Clayton Naff, "but it is a good one. No one knew just what 'council' meant, so it created confusion in the public mind. Now, it's clear: we are a local nonprofit focused on literacy and basic skills—especially learning the English language."

The new logo was designed and donated by an expert: advertising professor Phil Willet of UNL's College of Journalism and Mass Communications. The tagline, *Uniting Our Community with English for All*, reflects Lincoln Literacy's growing service to refugees and immigrants in our community; the pencil in the logo reminds us that reading is still the key.

## If You Can Read This, You Can Help!

Lincoln Literacy depends on its volunteer tutors to get the job done. Every month, we offer orientation and a highly effective set of training classes to prepare volunteers to teach our students, either in teams serving in classrooms or as one-to-one tutors. For more on this, go to [lincolnliteracy.org](http://lincolnliteracy.org), and click "Get Involved."



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www.lincolnliteracy.org

Our mission is to assist people of all cultures and strengthen our community by teaching English language and literacy skills.

Lincoln Literacy is proud To be affiliated with:



## Helping New American Children Get Set for Success in School

“What sound does the letter “K” make?” That’s a question you might have heard in the FLAIR program this fall. FLAIR is Lincoln Literacy’s family literacy program for children ages 3-8 and their English Language Learner parents. FLAIR (Family Literacy Activities for Immigrants and Refugees) is offered at six Lincoln Literacy sites each week — including three elementary schools. The program is sponsored by United Way and other donors. Its focus is on building literacy, school readiness skills, and love of learning by having a good time with books. Parents take part with their children in regular reading activities.

UNL and Nebraska Wesleyan education students who want to hone their skills teach the classes. Jane Hanson, Ph.D. oversees FLAIR, with the help of AmeriCorps Member Britt Varisco. Hanson notes, “The average native speaker of English enters elementary school with a vocabulary of more than 16,000 words. This means that young children who are just learning English start school with an enormous disadvantage.” In its four years, FLAIR has proven to be a valuable remedy.



### Help Support Our Programs!

**Become a Lincoln Literacy Member!**

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

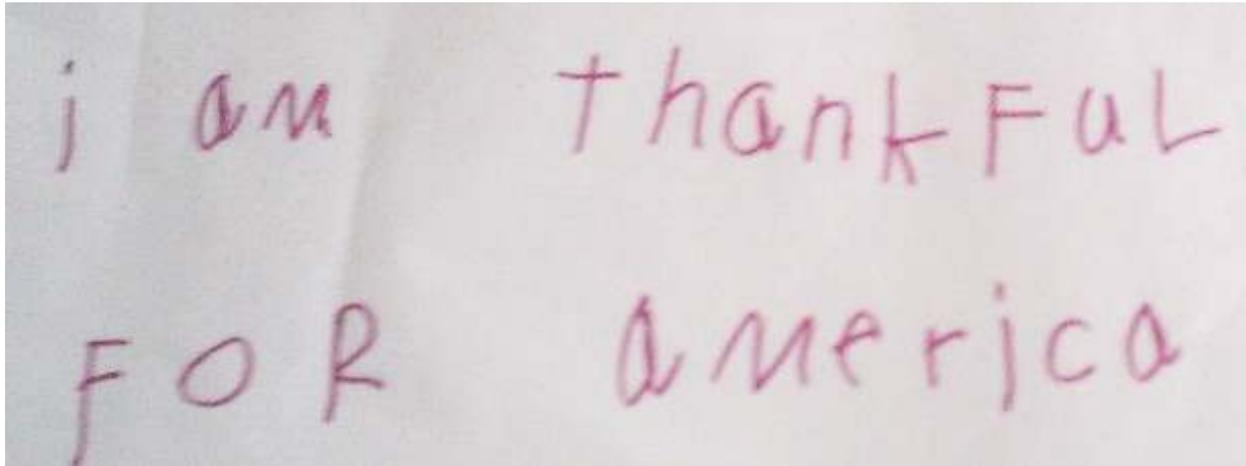
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**Please, donate now — online or in the enclosed envelope.**

**[www.lincolnliteracy.org](http://www.lincolnliteracy.org)**

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*A hand-written, heartfelt message  
from one of the many refugees we serve:*



*And we are grateful to you for making our  
work possible. We wish you...*



***Happy Holidays!***

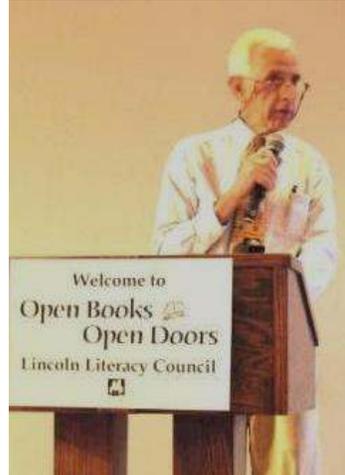
*From the Board, Staff, & Students  
of Lincoln Literacy*



# 2011: Lincoln Literacy's Year in Pictures



Annual Membership Meeting



Lincoln Historian Jim McKee,  
Guest of Honor at the 2011



Visit to Lincoln Children's Zoo



Tutor Town Hall



Havelock Charity Run Team



Sports Scribe Steve Sipple was  
guest speaker at Lincoln Literacy's



Afghan Refugee Mahjan Azizi re-  
ceives Mayor's Award.



A police officer talks to students.



Our Scrabble Scramble  
was wall-to-wall fun!



Hiba Hemeida joins other  
Lincoln Literacy students in  
becoming a US citizen.



We welcome a new AmeriCorps team.



Teach English!  
Learn English!  
Help Someone  
Learn to Read!

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Uniting Our Community with English for All

Officially, a new name