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Lincoln Literacy Executive Director Clayton Naff Announces Planned Retirement at Close of Summer

[Video announcement at: <https://youtu.be/nkgePZ0XJcQ>]

Clayton Naff, who has led the Lincoln Literacy Council (Lincoln Literacy) as its executive director since 2006, recently announced plans to leave the role in late August.

The position will be listed on the organization's website at www.LincolnLiteracy.org and posted widely beginning Wednesday, June 1. Interested persons may send resumes and cover letters to: searchcommittee@lincolnliteracy.org. Applications will be accepted until the end of June, with interviews to follow. Naff will remain in office until a new executive director is hired and a suitable transition can be arranged.

Meeting last week to discuss the qualities looked for in a new leader, staff and members of the Lincoln Literacy Board of Directors cited Naff's kindness and creativity, with one staff member likening Naff's management style to a quilter who has a plan in mind but who is ready to "listen to what the material is telling him." Another employee, who started at Lincoln Literacy as a student, said he has a knack for seeing what people are capable of, regardless of their native language or place of origin.

"As part of his dedication to this mission, Clay has always been a stalwart advocate for staff, creating for example, a robust healthcare reimbursement program," said Senior Associate Director Donna Stadig. "Dedicated to both strong ethical standards and a healthy work/life balance, he has championed all roles and encouraged advancement within the organization. His sense of humor and value of open communication is an inspiration and will be missed."

Born in California and raised in Philadelphia, Naff tallied varied experiences as a university news editor, foreign correspondent and science journalist, before transitioning into nonprofit leadership and eventually heading Lincoln Literacy.

“And yet for all that, nothing compares with the immensely gratifying experience I’ve had leading this wonderful organization for the past 16 years,” he said. “Lincoln Literacy has not only been the best professional experience of my life, it has given me daily engagement with some of the most wonderful, admirable people I’ve ever known: our staff, our students, our volunteers, and our board. It’s truly been a privilege.”

Under Naff’s guidance, Lincoln Literacy expanded its reach and innovated its services.

In 2006, the English Language and Literacy Academy (ELLA) was launched. It quickly grew into a citywide network of learning centers, primarily for adult English language learners, which serves more than 1,000 unduplicated persons a year. Two years later that was followed with the creation of FLAIR (Family Literacy Activities for Immigrants and Refugees), a multigenerational learning opportunity that grew to serve over 200 vulnerable children per year, along with their parents.

In 2018, Naff inaugurated Lincoln Literacy’s CNA Prep class, which helps refugees and immigrants become certified nursing aides. That program later expanded to become the Bridgeway to a Better Life program, selected as the Woods Charitable Fund Breakthrough Initiative of the year. It aims to help adult learners first gain English language literacy and then guide them through occupational and life skills training opportunities, with mentors who connect them with higher education institutions and/or employers.

Lincoln Literacy has won numerous awards during Naff’s tenure.

In 2008, Lincoln Literacy was selected for a Nonprofit Innovation Award for its creation of ELLA. Soon after the Community Health Endowment recognized Lincoln Literacy for its health literacy program. In 2010 the YWCA gave Naff an award for his organization’s empowerment of women. In 2011, Naff was named Lincoln’s Nonprofit Executive of the Year. In 2020, the Prosper Lincoln Initiative gave Lincoln Literacy a Step Up Award for its contributions to workforce development.

Since its founding in 1972, Lincoln Literacy has been working to strengthen the community by teaching English and literacy skills to immigrants, refugees and homegrown Americans. The award-winning nonprofit relies on nearly 250 trained volunteers to provide 80 weekly classes to people ranging from small children to the elderly. The nonprofit also helps businesses find, train and retain skilled and literate workers, and boosts children’s ability to succeed in school and adults’ ability to thrive on the job.

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