

The Lamplighter

April, May, June 2008

A quarterly newsletter of the
Literacy Council of Bonita Springs

U.S. Civics Class For Future Citizens

All students who are interested in studying for the U.S. Citizenship exam are invited to attend the Literacy Council's new American Civics class held each Tuesday and Wednesday from 5 pm - 6:30 pm at the Council office. Instructor Chantal Matthews will teach the basic organization of United States government, the operations of Congressional Senate and House plus the Judicial and Executive branches of the government. Students will practice exam-taking by answering 100 sample questions taken from past exams. Interested students should call the office at 495-0999 to sign up for the class.

United Way Grant

United Way of Lee, Hendry and Glades Counties has granted \$132,000 to the Literacy Council. The funds will help cover the costs of English language instruction for the increased numbers of students along with the expansion of the Moms and Tots Family Literacy Program.

Literacy Council Breaks Ground June 12 for New Home

Local government officials and civic leaders helped break ground Thursday, June 12, at 11:30 a.m. for a new 10,000-plus square-foot office building to house the activities of the Literacy Council of Bonita Springs. Over 75 guests were in attendance at the new site. A beautiful sign at the property noting the "Future Home of the Literacy Council" was unveiled along with the theme and logo for the Capital Campaign: Share the Dream.

Bonita Springs Mayor Ben Nelson was represented by Councilman John Spear, Lee County 3rd District Commissioner Ray Judah, Sarah Hines, Special Assistant to Senator Mel Martinez, Kay Timms representing the United Way of Lee, Hendry and Glades Counties, Nancy Keefer, Executive Director of the Bonita Springs Chamber of Commerce and Crissy Fabian, Marketing Director for Regions Bank (a sponsor of the event) spoke. Board President Crista Short, Executive Director Susan Acuña, and Program Director Diego Grisales, along with members of the board, wielded shovels at the historic event held on land located on the western side of Old Route 41 just north of Terry Street and south of Rosemary Street. Members of the Bay Singers/Naples United Church of Christ Sanctuary Choir, under the direction of Dr. Becky Weese, sang patriotic tunes. Food was donated by sponsor Fresh Market.

The building, which will be the first structure to be independently owned by the 20-year-old group, will consolidate English language and literacy classes for members of the community formerly held in several locations throughout Bonita Springs.

The new building will provide office accommodations for staff and classroom space for the Council's record enrollment of over 1,700 students. Separate classroom facilities will be available in which one or more large meetings can be held at the same time that a number of smaller groups are gathering in other spaces and numerous one-on-one tutor sessions are being held in additional rooms. There are currently some 600 volunteer tutors. An area will also be set aside to house the Moms and Tots Family Literacy Program. *(continued on page 2)*

Groundbreaking (Continued from Page 1)

In addition, the Council will continue to serve as host agency for the United Way Resource House. The Council also conducts worksite literacy programs for 354 employees of 17 golf and gated communities in southwest Florida. A specific target date for completion has yet to be set, but move-in is expected to be either year-end or early 2009.

“The new building is the culmination of a lot of hard work, planning and searching by a talented group of volunteers,” said Acuña. “We would not be approaching this landmark point in time without their passion and dedication.”

Crista Short, president of the Council, praised the efforts of her fellow board members, who persisted in advocating a building to house the fast-growing organization. “And let’s not forget our loyal supporters in this community, who have never let us down,” she added. Several such supporters have stepped forward and donated almost half of the total \$3.2 million needed to pay for the project.

The original home for the Council almost 20 years ago was in donated office space next to the loading dock at the home of a local newspaper, the Bonita Banner. After 10 years, the Board of Directors began looking for a new home. At that time it had 90 students and 58 tutors.

Two years later, a rental space became available on Old 41 in half of a one-story site being vacated by the Art League. To help pay the rent, the Council applied for acceptance as a United Way agency. Over the years, a second, then a third office space became available next door and across the street from the new home and both were added.

Local citizens who helped found the organization were driven by the obvious need they saw for some English education for a growing number of Hispanic immigrants who were being attracted to Bonita Springs, most of whom arrived with no knowledge of English. The Council started recruiting volunteer tutors and established a program to teach them how to spread the Council’s message of hope, utilizing the Laubach Method, a nationally proven approach to the task.

The growing challenge facing the Council was emphasized in this notation from one of its newsletters in the late '90s: “While Lee County’s overall population increase in the 1990s was 13%, the Hispanic population increased 49%.” That trend has only accelerated ever since. In the 10 years between 1995 and 2005, the growth in the Hispanic population in Bonita Springs was pegged at 179%.

For most of the early years, the “staff” consisted of one full-time employee and a part-timer, augmented by volunteers. Despite the huge growth in students and services, today that staff total is only three full-timers and five part-timers, aided by volunteers and some paid ESOL teacher assistance. Financially, the Council began to gain assistance in the form of United Way allocations and grants from government, corporate and family foundations. Additionally, income was increased from individual donors through a mail campaign and an annual fund-raising event.

The new building is being funded totally from a separate capital campaign that has yet to go public. Besides the initial major donations already made, others are possible from several foundations now considering the project. At some future point, the general public will be invited to help the Council reach its \$3.2 million target.

Meanwhile, thousands of English-speaking “graduates” of the Council’s program are employed in business and industry throughout the community; many are in school and still others are raising families and contributing to the social, economic and cultural welfare of Bonita Springs.

New Board Member

Lee Powar has joined the Board of the Literacy Council. Lee has extensive experience as an attorney and business executive. Welcome, Lee!

Literacy Council Annual Meeting

August 5 at 4 pm at Northern Trust Bank.
All are invited.

“We Ask You To Share the Dream”

(Executive Director Susan Acuña delivered the following comments during the groundbreaking ceremony June 12.)

I am thrilled beyond belief to be able to be here to greet our many friends and supporters who have joined us for this ceremony. While we're standing on dirt, sand, rocks and grass now, we can certainly appreciate the beauty that will be our building in a few months.

Just think, on this spot, the Literacy Council will celebrate 20 years of service to our community with a brand new home to bring our far-flung programs together. We will be able to teach English in comfortable surroundings with ample space for our tutors, students and staff.

We are excited to begin the process to bring this dream into reality. We are extremely grateful for members of the Bonita Springs community whose generous donations of time and money help to keep the Literacy Council functioning and to the United Way for its very generous support. We are proud to be a part of a community which has supported us for 20 years! And now, the beacon of hope for those who want to improve their lives will finally have a home of its own.

This project comes none too soon. We have had incredible growth in numbers of students: from 141 in 2000 to over 1,752 as of June 30, 2008! Our worksite literacy programs have grown to be located in 17 golf and gated communities. Our Moms and Tots Family Literacy Program is teaching over 129 moms and 152 pre-school children in seven locations throughout the area. These children are starting school on an even level as their peers as a result of our program.

And we are not finished growing...As long as there are folks who want to improve their lives by learning English, who want to receive their GED, who want to study to be a US citizen, who want to improve their computer skills, then we will be here to help them reach their goals.

Our students are mothers and their preschool children, blue collar workers, professionals – those who recognize that the key to success in this country is through fluent communication in English – speaking, reading and writing. Our students are hard workers who work during the day, take care of their children, and study diligently – because they know that their dreams will be attainable once they can communicate in English.

We salute our committed students who make our job so satisfying – we are thrilled when they get better jobs, promotions, excel at school, receive their GED, start their own businesses, and become new citizens like Carlos Lopez, for example. It is incredible to witness a new citizen proudly carrying the flag of his adopted country – our country – choosing to be part of the fabric that is America. Is it not wonderful?

These are our students – serious, committed, eager and very grateful for this opportunity to learn. We have students here today, volunteering their time to help make this event a success and we thank them for their commitment.

And now, we begin the physical construction phase for the Literacy Council. A dream taking shape. We ask you to join us in this dream – we ask you to as your stickers say – Share the Dream! To share the dream of a home for the Literacy Council and to share the American Dream with the scores of students who want to improve their lives. Help us to fulfill our goal to build this building – to finish what we've started – to improve the quality of life for all who desire to move upward and onward.

The 18th century poet and playwright, Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe, is quoted as saying something which seems very appropriate to us today as we embark on our journey: “Whatever you can do or dream you can begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it.” We are taking a bold step here today and we have already seen examples of genius, power and magic through the support of our friends...come on board and join in the magic that is the Literacy Council.

Muchas Gracias por el Dinero

January-June 2008

Federico Foundation.....	\$30,000
Bonita Springs AM Rotary	\$5,000
Bonita Springs Lions Club.....	\$4,000
St. Mary's Episcopal Church.....	\$2,000
Work-a-Holics Landscaping.....	\$1,000
Country Creek Community Charities	\$1,500
SWFL Community Foundation	
Women's Legacy Fund	\$5,000
Regions Bank	\$1,000

Schools Give High Grades to Moms and Tots

Principals and teachers from seven local pre-school and elementary schools have praised the results of the Moms and Tots program sponsored by the Literacy Council of Bonita Springs, based on a recent survey.

Seventeen tots were part of the program's first "graduating class" last summer and entered pre-school and kindergarten classes in the Bonita Springs educational system (one was placed in day care), eager to test their English skills they had learned. Based on playback from their new schools, they have passed their first tests with flying colors. Typical of the many positive responses from principals was this one: "The students are above average in all areas."

Susan Acuña, Executive Director of the Council, explained that the purpose of the survey was not to solicit praise, but to learn what areas of learning and discipline the students' new teachers and principals felt could be improved in the Moms and Tots program. "It is a real tribute to our ESOL teachers, volunteers and mothers that the tots have fitted in so well in their new educational environments," she said.

Moms and Tots, now in its fourth year, is designed to teach English to Hispanic pre-school tots at the same time the tots' mothers are learning to understand, speak, read and write the language. From its start in one location with a handful of moms and their tots, the program has now grown to seven locations with more than 170 students.

The recommendations include having students practice letters, sounds, sight words more, to emphasize social skills, to

urge parents to be totally involved, to try to improve students' attention and to teach the concepts of "more, less, tallest, shortest."

While results of the survey indicate that the majority of principals and teachers think "the Moms and Tots program is great," some specific replies include: "The students come to school with an excellent knowledge of English"; "The students are very interested in all the subjects"; "They pronounce words with clarity most of the time" and "They are excellent students."

One teacher, citing a specific student, said, "He is at the top in my class; he knows everything."

Diego Grisales, the Council's Program Director, conducted the study and is sharing the critiques with the program's teachers and moms. Grisales was particularly pleased that the Moms and Tots program was so well known throughout the school system. And he is taking to heart the constructive suggestions that came back in the survey. "We will incorporate all of them into our teaching," he says.

OFFICE SCHEDULE

Susan Acuña, Executive Director
Diego Grisales, Program Director
Kerty Reiterer-Crespo, Office Manager
Monday to Friday, 9:00 am to 5:00 pm
Jeanne Sachs, Student/Tutor Coordinator
Monday to Thurs., 4:00 to 9:00 pm
Nora Martinez, Assistant Coordinator
Monday to Friday, 5:00 to 9:00 pm

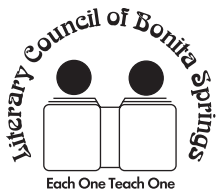
STUDENT LAB OPEN

Mon. to Fri., 9:00 am to 9:00 pm

CONTACT INFORMATION

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