

The Lamplighter

April 2009 – March 2010

A newsletter of the Literacy Council
of Bonita Springs

Race to the Finish Campaign Launched

The Literacy Council has been serving the Bonita Springs and surrounding area since 1989. Now, 21 years later, it is teaching English to over 1,900 students, with the assistance of more than 650 volunteer tutors.

The heart of the Council's program is our one-on-one tutoring and various-sized group classes for adults. A growing attraction is self-directed English language study at the computer lab in our library.

The Carol DeJoy Moms and Tots Family Literacy Program is the fastest-growing activity in the Council. It offers English classes to both moms and their children. The moms develop a love of literacy; their children enter school prepared to succeed.

The program for golf communities recruits and trains on-site volunteers to teach employees English, improving communication and boosting job opportunities.

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Council Raises Over \$100,000 at 7th Annual Fundraiser Breakfast

More than 325 supporters of the Literacy Council of Bonita Springs filled the Calusa Ballroom of the Hyatt Regency Hotel on March 18 and demonstrated their appreciation of the emotion-filled program and their strong support of the Council by donating over \$100,000.

Attendees leaving the event were lavish in their praise of the presentations, which included greetings from numerous students, a video, an address by Susan Acuña, Council Executive Director, and a welcome by Council President Kim Hastings.

There was a strong international flavor throughout the hour-long session, with references made to the Council's hosting of students from 38 countries throughout Central and South America, Europe and Asia. Representatives from many of the countries shared their experiences with Council supporters, expressing their appreciation and demonstrating their newly learned English-speaking skills.

One of the presenters was Suela Dedja, who was introduced by her tutor, Barb Goff. Dedja, from Albania, won over the audience with her remarks, which included her reference to the need to learn English so that she could shop. "Being a woman," she said, "you know I love to shop," which brought a warm response from all of the ladies in the audience, and even most of the men.

"Trust me," Dedja added, "I now know how to shop." The room exploded.

Many positive references were made by students to the new building that the Council now occupies, a 10,400 square-foot edifice fronting Old 41, which has quickly become a magnet for those who seek a better life in America. Alluding to the open arms represented by the Statue of Liberty, Acuña said that the new building has become a "beacon of hope in our community."

Since the building opened earlier in the year, Acuña pointed out, "it has been attracting new students at a record rate. They all tell us they need to learn English to get a job, be able to fit into the community and to have any chance of succeeding in this country."

Acuña likened the beacon represented by the new building to the promise offered by the famous statue in New York Harbor: "Give me your...huddled

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Literacy Council Celebrates Grand Opening of New Headquarters

After 20 years of makeshift operations, a dream came true for our students, staff and supporters when the Grand Opening of our new, spacious Headquarters building on Old 41 was held the evening of December 2, 2009.

The 10,400-square-foot building will enable students to more effectively follow their own dreams by learning to understand, read, write and speak English in modern, technologically advanced educational facilities.

Fittingly, Council student Alma Sanchez set the tone for the evening when she told the assembled supporters, volunteers, officials, staff and other students, "Without the chance to come to this building and learn English, life would be so much harder," she said. "Thanks for offering us hope, knowledge, happiness and the chance for success. Thanks for helping us fulfill our dreams."

The stunning new Council headquarters building is located on the west side of Old 41 between Terry and Rosemary Streets. It will provide classroom space for the Council's 1,900-member student body and offices for staff. Numerous spaces are available in the building to accommodate everything from one-on-one tutoring exercises up to large classrooms, permitting the consolidation of all training classes under one roof.

A separate area in the building houses the Council's Carol DeJoy Moms and Tots Program, newly named for the recently deceased board member who almost single-handedly kept the dream of a new building alive with her contributions of time, untiring tutorial efforts and monetary gifts.

Two other major contributors were permanently honored with the naming of the largest room in the facility (designed so it can be partitioned into four smaller ones) as the Suwyn Community Room. Mark and Patt Suwyn are prominent strategic and financial supporters. Their recommendations throughout the process kept the capital campaign on track.

A longtime supporter and participant in the Council's programs, Chuck Pipher, was honored posthumously at the Grand Opening. Before he passed away, he was a master at all things audio-visual, personally managed total AV activities at every Annual Breakfast. For

many years leading up to the building campaign, Chuck and his wife Jackie and her family foundation contributed very generous financial support.

Students and staff alike are excited by the 2,200-foot library in the building, with its spacious Computer Laboratory, including 12 computer stations, to allow committed students to improve their English in private study.

The grand opening was the culmination of a three-year capital campaign in which numerous Council supporters stepped forward with major commitments and hundreds of others contributed what they could afford to move the project forward.

At the time of the closing on the property in 2008, the Council had collected \$1.6 million of the \$3.2 million total campaign goal. A search for a mortgage holder resulted in a partnership with Regions Bank, a community-minded financial institution which also supported the Council's Groundbreaking event in June, 2008. Officials of Regions also joined the partying at the Grand Opening.

Susan Acuña, Executive Director of the Council, put things in perspective for attendees at the Grand Opening when she said, "This building, as beautiful as it is to all of us, is still just a building. But it is also a reminder to us that 'the dream lives on.'"

After the ceremonies, the "dream" was given a new rallying cry: "A Race to the Finish," to identify the critical second phase of the Capital Campaign in which the Council will strive to erase the remaining \$1.4 million debt to the bank. "We're confident that our faithful Council supporters will join us in winning our 'race to the finish,'" Susan said.

Your Philanthropic Goals

Although the Literacy Council does not provide legal advice, we can help you formulate your philanthropic goals by working with you and your legal and professional advisors. There are many opportunities to benefit the Literacy Council, you, and your family through Bequest by Will, Charitable Remainder or Lead Trusts, IRAs and Qualified Plans and Life Insurance. Please call Susan if you would like to schedule a confidential discussion.

Council Raises \$100,000 (continued from page 1)

masses yearning to breathe free.” Immigrants to the U.S., Acuña said, “realize that the freedom they seek here can only be truly appreciated by learning the English language so that they can earn their share of the American dream.”

The Council moved into the new building early this year after securing a mortgage from Regions Bank. Acuña explained that the organization is now embarking on the second stage of its capital campaign, dubbed “Race to the Finish,” in order to retire the mortgage.

Two former students of the Carol DeJoy Moms and Tots Program were also big hits at the event. Tutor Bob Sorenson introduced Scarlett and Alison Brito, both 2009 graduates of the Program, who demonstrated skills by reciting numbers, naming colors and finally singing their ABCs and completely winning over the audience.

Proof of the fast-growing interest in the Council’s teaching is the fact that total attendance has almost reached 2,000. “This compares to the average monthly attendance in some 1,200 other literacy councils nationwide of about 270 students,” Acuña noted.

The \$100,000 in cash and credit card donations recorded after the breakfast will be enhanced by numerous additional donations to come from people who could not attend and from attendees who took pledge cards home to mail back in, Acuña explained. The donations are used to fund the Council’s operations for the next year.

Muchas Gracias Por El Dinero

Friends of Bentley Village	\$1,000
Bonita Springs Lions Club Charities	\$5,000
Federico Foundation	\$30,000
Junior League of Fort Myers.....	\$3,120
Mediterra Community Foundation	\$10,000
Pelican Landing Community Association, Inc.....	\$4,880
Southwest Florida Community Foundation.....	\$1,356
St. Mary’s Episcopal Church	\$2,000
St. Monica’s Episcopal Church.....	\$937
Target Stores, Inc.	\$3,000

Race to Finish Campaign (continued from page 1)

Our \$2.6 million facility was financed 50% by initial donations and 50% by a bank loan. That debt consists of a \$1.4 million loan, broken into two parts – a one-year, \$600,000 note and an \$800,000 five-year note.

Our challenge is one that we hope will become your challenge as well: To retire the debt on our beautiful new facility. A foundation, which has given support to the Council for numerous years, has challenged us to raise \$450,000 by October 1 of this year, whereupon they will add to that figure with a \$250,000 gift.

Your decision to support the Literacy Council is taken very seriously. We understand how important it is for an organization to earn the trust of its donors. The Literacy Council has recognized, first and foremost, it must prove its stability and viability. We have done that by utilizing efficiently every dollar donated, resulting in an average annual cost per student of under \$200.

A key to that efficiency is our ability to attract hundreds of volunteers who represent the lifeblood of our organization. We’re proud of our record of managing and maximizing the funds contributed and know that fiduciary responsibility is a sacred trust. We welcome the viewing of all of our activities by the public, and the budget that supports them.

We are fortunate to attract extremely talented and experienced professionals to serve on our Board of Directors, each possessing specific talents and skills that, together, further the goals of the Literacy Council.

The Literacy Council interacts with – and has earned the respect of – local government, schools, United Way, foundations and businesses because it has been successful in improving the lives of local residents, reflecting well on the community.

The Literacy Council prides itself on its autonomy, allowing it to offer new, creative programming because it receives no government funding. It relies on support from the United Way, foundations and individual donors.

As you consider where to spend your charity dollars, please give serious thought to the Literacy Council. We have become a beacon of hope in the community and throughout the area, enriching lives one student at a time.

Council Teaches 10X National Student Average

“An average of 270 students are served in 1,200 councils nationwide, according to a recent survey by a national association of literacy councils, which is only one-tenth of the total students we serve here in Bonita Springs,” Executive Director Susan Acuña told surprised members of the Council Legacy Society during a recent dinner party.

“The average number of volunteer tutors at the 1,200 councils is less than 100,” she added. “Here we have more than 600.” These figures, Acuña concluded, should put to rest any more questions about why the Bonita Springs Council needed to build its own headquarters building.

More than 40 leading donors, along with board members, enjoyed a catered dinner in a restaurant-like setting held in the spacious library/computer laboratory in the new 10,400 square-foot building, which opened late last fall. The donors were being toasted and thanked for their generosity and their loyalty to the mission of the Council.

Acuña stressed how that mission has been aided by the consolidation of the Council’s classes, tutoring and other services within the expansive, efficiently designed new headquarters building. She stressed that students are not taking the new setting for granted. As a matter of fact, she said, they are taken aback by the beautiful and spacious facility built just for them.

“In my country,” Acuña said one student remarked, “this building would be a university.” “The students are so grateful they want to do everything they can to help.”

Acuña also explained the financial data related to the capital campaign that facilitated the move to the new building. “Your generosity and your belief in our mission made this possible,” she said. “There are no words to thank you enough.”

Jim Kahl, Board member and chairman of the Capital Campaign Committee ended the party by thanking Susan for her compassionate caring and eye-opening remarks. He expressed his own appreciation for “your belief and support in the Council’s efforts,” and urged everyone to “help us ‘Race to the Finish.’”



Literacy Council of Bonita Springs
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Students Speak

10 students spoke at the Annual Breakfast held on March 18. They were: Suela Dedja (Albania), Catalina Sarmiento (Mexico), Miguel Alonso (Guatemala), Fabio Castellanos (Colombia), Yusun Kim (Korea), Oswaldo Camacho (Bolivia), Margarita Ortez (Nicaragua-USA Citizen), Ysaura Rojas (Venezuela), Alison Brito and Scarlett Brito (USA).

OFFICE SCHEDULE

Susan Acuña, Executive Director
Kerty Reiterer, Office Manager
Jeanne Sachs, Student/Tutor Coordinator
Nora Martinez, Assistant Coordinator
Monday to Thursday: 9 am-8 pm
Friday: 9 am-5 pm

STUDENT LAB OPEN

Monday to Thursday: 9 am-8 pm
Friday: 9 am-5 pm

CONTACT INFORMATION

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