

Word & Hope

A Circle of Learning



Expressive, petite Leonarda Martinez is a 2005 graduate of the Dominican Literacy Center.

Like most children on the ranches of her native San Luis Potosi State, Mexico, Leonarda had formal schooling for only six years. In her early twenties, newly married, she and her husband immigrated to Southern California to live with her brother-in-law and work in the agricultural fields. Eventually they came to Aurora, Illinois, where they have remained for 28 years, working and raising their five children.

While her husband worked, Leonarda took care of their growing family. As her children entered school, she took a job at North American Plastics where she remained for 10 years. Later she went to work in the kitchens of Hollywood Casino.

In 2000 she began attending citizenship classes at Sacred Heart

School. In 2002, as a brand-new United States citizen, Leonarda came to the Center at the urging of her citizenship teacher, Sr. Jane Ann Beckman. For three years she turned her considerable energy to learning English with tutor Jinny Lamermayer.

She found that her improved English skills helped her not only in her job but also with her family. "My mom told me it was hard when her children started speaking a different language," said Leonarda's fourth child, Ana.

A poised 25-year-old with a stunning smile, Ana (pictured with her mother at left) is a first year tutor at the Center. Growing up, she was fortunate to have attended bilingual classes through fifth grade. There she learned to read and write in both languages. Her transition from Spanish to English occurred smoothly.

Last summer, while sitting in church, Ana heard an announcement asking for volunteers to help tutor at the Center. "I remembered that my Mom went there. I thought I would like to help Spanish speakers learn English."

Even though she's employed full time and is working toward her liberal arts degree in fashion merchandising, Ana started tutoring at the Center in the fall of 2007. Her student, Elena Lopez, is an English beginner. Ana conducts her tutoring sessions in English but occasionally switches to Spanish to

make sure Elena understands the concepts.

Ana draws on her experience of learning German in high school to empathize with Elena. She remembers how difficult it was to learn German and that helps her to teach Elena. "It challenges me, too, because my student really wants to learn English." Ana knows how important that is. "I think learning English is empowering and motivating and gives confidence." She works hard to make every session count.

When Leonarda speaks of her family life and the hardships she endured, she radiates energy and joy. How did she handle the stress of immigrating to a foreign country as a young bride, raising her children in a different culture,

"...learning English is empowering and motivating..."

acquiring jobs and learning a new language? "How did I do this? With God's help!" She exclaims.

A strong work ethic and love of learning seems to run in the family. Leonarda laughs when she tells of her three-year-old granddaughter helping her wash dishes and encouraging her to speak more English. A DLC tutor in the making?

Crazy English

The next time you buy a product with package information in more than one language, look at the number of words it takes to convey the same meaning in English versus, say, Spanish. Nine times out of ten, the English version will be much shorter ... fewer words, fewer syllables.

That's because English "has a grammar of great simplicity and flexibility," say the authors and editors of *The Story of English*. "Nouns become verbs and verbs nouns in a way that is impossible in other languages" ... and with mixed results.

Do you shudder at a marketing firm's proposal to help your organization "vision" its strategic direction? But maybe you announce your intention to "google."

English is adept at inventing, or repurposing, words. Why do we do it? Because we can! (See paragraph two.) Paul Payack, who runs *Global Language Monitor*, figures there are about a million words in the English language (versus 275,000 in Spanish and 100,000 in French), with new ones invented every day.

Payack tracks new words and if their use reaches critical mass, he adds them to his lexicon. Among recent additions is "bagonize," to "describe the agonizing feeling of waiting for your luggage at the airport." How's the newcomer to English to master this wild, wonderful welter of words? Taint easy. Ask any DLC student!

Center becomes voter registration site



The Dominican Literacy Center has just added one more benefit for the Hispanic community it serves.

The last issue of this newsletter highlighted the Center's commitment to helping those who aspire to become citizens of the United States. Like Americans born in this country, naturalized citizens have the right and responsibility to vote for their

elected leaders. To vote, a person must be a U.S. citizen, be 18 years old by the date of the next election and be registered to vote. In the past, many of the new Americans who achieved citizenship with the help of the Center did not know how or where to register to vote. Thanks to some research by an Advisory Board member and the efforts of Sr. Kathleen, new citizens can now register to vote at the Center.

The Illinois State Board of Elections first had to recognize the Center as a "bona fide State civic organization" that has among its stated purposes the promotion of civic, patriotic, or political goals, including the promotion of free and equal elections and the encouragement of political responsibility through informed and active participation of citizens in government. In February, Sr. Kathleen filled out the necessary paperwork and within a week received the notification of recognition from the state.

She then contacted the Aurora Election Commission to request the appointment of a deputy registrar, which is available to officials or their designees. The Commission agreed to appoint all three directors of the Center as deputies. On April 22, an employee came to the center to train Sr. Jane Ann, Sr. Kathleen and Sr. Ann in how to register voters and to administer the oath of office.

"With unprecedented interest in the presidential election this year, it is more important than ever to engage as many of our citizens in the political process as possible," says Sr. Jane Ann, who leads the Center's citizenship classes. Thanks to the efforts of the Center, Aurora's newest citizens can now easily participate in this democratic process.

On April 26, 2008, Elisa Barocio became the first voter registered at the Center. She was sworn in by Sr. Jane Ann (see photo above).

Special Thanks

Grants and donations are the cornerstone of the Dominican Literacy Center's budget. We are especially grateful to the following foundations funds, and groups which enable the Center to help so many people:

Grants

Illinois Secretary of State Literacy Office
Alfred Bersted Foundation
Dollar General Foundation
Chicago Tribune Charities
Agatha O'Brien Fund
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Meet Lulu Blacksmith



The experience and talents of Lourdes “Lulu” Blacksmith have made her a unique voice on the Advisory Board of the Dominican Literacy Center, a voice that will be sorely missed as she ends her service after seven years.

Her impact on the work of the Center can perhaps best be understood in the context of her remarkable life story, which took her from the status of a teenage immigrant from Mexico to the position of district press secretary to Rep. Dennis Hastert, then Speaker of the U.S. House of

“... brought experience and vision to our Advisory Board...”

Representatives.

Lulu came to the United States from Morelia, Mexico, at the age of sixteen. Armed with a strong work ethic, she began work in a factory and eventually started ESL classes, which helped her get a job as an order entry clerk. After marrying and starting a family, she worked part-time but soon was ready for a bigger challenge. She secured a job at Provena Mercy Center in Aurora as a patient registration clerk ... and there experienced a turning point.

Upon encountering so many people coming to the hospital unable to speak English, “I realized---this was me,” she recalls. Motivated to improve, she enrolled at Waubensee Community College and graduated, enabling her to fill a newly-created position at Provena as Hispanic liaison.

In 1999, the indefatigable Lulu founded *Companeros en Salud* (Partners in Health), a grassroots

nonprofit coalition helping the Hispanic community access health care and social services. In 2002, she helped develop Waubensee’s health care interpreter program.

That same year, Lulu was approached by Rep. Dennis Hastert’s staff to act in a community relations role at his Batavia office. While it was a difficult decision to leave her job at Provena, she knew she could have an even greater impact in the community by joining Hastert’s staff. As part of her job, she continued to help the people of the district through various projects, as well as in addressing educational, health care, or financial constituent concerns. In 2007, Lulu Blacksmith became Hastert’s press secretary and community relations director.

Today, with a degree in multicultural relations from DePaul University, the multi-talented Lulu chairs *Companeros en Salud*, is active with the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and is director of federal and cultural relations at Waubensee.

“When I was working at Provena, I was invited to meet Sr. Kathleen (Ryan),” Lulu remembers. “I was overwhelmed. [At the Center] the women have a safe place to go to learn English and to improve their lives. I have the utmost respect for the work they do.”

Lulu’s unique perspective has, in turn, helped shape the Board’s focus on supporting the community the Center serves. Sr. Kathleen states, “Lulu Blacksmith brought experience and vision to our Advisory Board that will always be reflected in our ongoing work with the immigrant families in Aurora. Her unique presence, talent and insights have enriched us and inspired us.”

Save the Date!

The next tutor training will take place on two Saturdays, August 16 and 23, 2008 from 9:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M. Lunch will be included. Tutors need to attend both sessions. You do not need to be able to speak Spanish. Call Sr. Ann at 630-898-4636 for more information.

Fall tutoring begins the week of September 8, 2008.

Advisory Board

The Advisory Board provides guidance and support for the many initiatives of the Dominican Literacy Center and recommends policies.

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“Word & Hope” is a twice-yearly newsletter of the Dominican Literacy Center, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization located at 260 Vermont Ave., Aurora, Illinois, 60505-3100. Call 630-898-4636 or visit domlitctr@sbcglobal.net. Founded in 1993, the Center is open to all women who desire to learn to read, write and speak English.

The Dominican Literacy Center provides ...

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The mission of the Dominican Literacy Center is to provide opportunities for women to receive individual tutoring in reading, writing and speaking English. We provide these opportunities through individual tutoring by trained volunteers within the neighborhood setting. The Dominican Literacy Center believes in empowerment through education, and in the dignity of each individual person.



- free 90-minute weekly individual tutoring sessions for women in reading, writing and speaking English as a second language
- customized curriculum of English-only instruction appropriate to each student's level
- sessions that run from September through May, with day and evening formats
- the opportunity for a student to remain in the program for three years, usually working with the same tutor during the entire time.
- conversation classes open to current students and "graduates"
- citizenship classes for both men and women

***The Center is located in east Aurora at 260 Vermont Ave., on the #521 Pace bus route.
For more information, call 630-898-4636, M-F, 9 am – 4 pm.***

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