

Word & Hope

First Women's Book Club

There was a different kind of conversation buzzing around the Dominican Literacy Center gathering room on two fine fall mornings in September and October. The conversation centered around books! To help meet the needs of students with advanced literacy skills, the Center formed a women's book club.

During the 2015-2016 school year, the need for such a program was identified by Judi Paulson, Center Registrar. During the registration process, applicants are tested for their literacy level. Some applicants had high test scores and their abilities surpassed any instruction that the Center could offer them. "I first began to think about the possibility of forming a book club as a way to offer instruction, conversation and an opportunity to improve their English language skills," said Judi of those advanced applicants.

Over the summer, Judi, Sue Howe, a long-time tutor, and new tutor, Marcia Van Dyke, formulated the structure for the program. They envisioned a program which introduced a new book each month. The book selection represented varied cultural influences, themes, or viewpoints. The selection was based on the participants' interests. Discussion on the selected book occurred the following month. The Center provided financial support and encouragement to the trio.

Students were invited to participate in the program through direct contact by Judi Paulson, as well as a flyer and a follow-up e-mail.



Book club organizers, (l to r), Judi Paulson, Sue Howe, Marcia Van Dyke

During the first meeting, attendees shared their reading interests, possible recommendations, and hopes for what they wanted to gain from this new initiative. Several women expressed a desire to improve their vocabulary, their English-speaking skills and to make new friends. Everyone expressed a love for learning and reading. By participating in book club, they hoped to



Members of the newly formed book club.

provide important language and literacy models for their children. Member Celia Renteria said, "This book club makes me a good example for my children. I am always checking in with my children to see if they are doing their reading, and now they can see me doing my own reading!"

When the first book, *Becoming Naomi Leon*, by Pam Munoz Ryan, was previewed, the participants already demonstrated the strategies and skills of good readers. They made predictions, asked questions, and made connections to their own lives. The book was rich for discussion, because the main character changed and grew as she learned lessons about life and herself. The women were asked to rate the book and express the reason for their rating. All rated this first book between 4 and 5 stars.

The second selection, for discussion in November, was *Home of the Brave*, a novel written in free verse by Katherine Applegate. It tells the story of Kek, an eleven-year-old boy from the Sudan who arrives as a refugee to Minnesota in the middle of winter. "This America is hard work" is one of Kek's first realizations.

The Center's new book club is one of several ways in which the Center promotes community, collaboration and validation for women. The hope is that the women find the book club a safe, welcoming and stimulating environment. As book club member, Leticia Galves said, "I don't know who recommended me for this book club, but I want to thank them ... the book club is perfect me."

Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive our hate; only love can do that
- Martin Luther King, Jr.

In Their Words

Students at the Dominican Literacy Center share their gift giving traditions.

My family celebrates Christmas by giving gifts to my son and friends and family. We put up a Christmas tree with ornaments and some gifts. We eat ham and some Korean food such as Korean noodles, Kimchi and Bulgogi, which is Korean BBQ. In Korea, we celebrate Christmas because half of the country is Christian. We also celebrate Buddha's birthday, which changes every year based on the lunar calendar.

~Sunny Ahn

In Ecuador, we celebrate on December 24. During the day, we prepared food and games. Later on, everyone dressed up and went to church. After church, we enjoyed a late dinner and then played the games. At midnight, we opened presents. I received toys, Barbies and books. I would then write a Happy Birthday letter to Jesus, attach it to balloons and release it outside. On December 25, we would visit relatives.

~Lilia Arizabala

The biggest holiday in China is the Chinese New Year celebrated in February. Traditional gifts for kids would be new clothes, and if the family is prosperous, a special toy or book. Everyone goes out of their way to be kind to others, especially to strangers. Fireworks are important, paper lanterns are lit and there are big family gatherings. The Christmas holiday is a Christian tradition not typically recognized across China.

~Min Xiao

In my state, San Luis Potosi, we received gifts on December 25. The gift I remember most was a Barbie doll. It was so special and expensive that I put it in a special place and only looked at it. I never played with it.

~Imelda Cepeda

Giving Back

The accomplishments of Silvia Larios demonstrate that the Dominican Literacy Center provides more than just English instruction. It empowers and inspires its graduates to give back to the community. After completing three years of tutoring at the Center, Silvia is now a tutor herself and more.

When she first arrived in the United States, Silvia had hoped to get a Master's Degree in Business. Even though she had studied English in Mexico City, her language skills were not strong enough. Instead she cleaned houses for twenty years while also serving as a nanny.

One Sunday, while attending Mass at St. Therese, she heard about the Dominican Literacy Center and decided to enroll. Despite the fact that she knew some English, her tutor, Candy Gawne, started with the basic text to make sure her skills were firmly grounded. Silvia praised Candy for her patience in teaching. Remembering this, Silvia is patient with her own students.

Teaching came naturally to her. "I have a teacher inside of me," she said. Silvia sympathized with the difficulties facing her first student who knew no English. Silvia started from scratch, finding it hard at times not to resort to Spanish when her student failed to understand a concept.

Believing that she has something worthwhile to share, Silvia firmly believes in giving back to others. After learning yoga to relieve her joint pain, she now teaches yoga and meditation to cancer patients at the Waterford Place. She was recognized by Waubensee Community College as a member of the honor society for adult education volunteers. The Dominican Literacy Center is justly proud of her achievements and thankful for her giving spirit.



A special THANK YOU to Kevin Fitzpatrick, Senior Vice-President for Investments at Stifel Investments, Geneva, IL, for his challenge gift of \$10,000.00 to the Dominican Literacy Center. If you wish to respond to Kevin's challenge, and help match this gift, please go to our website, www.dominicanliteracycenter.org, and donate online, or send your check to the Dominican Literacy Center, 260 Vermont Street, Aurora, IL 60505. Thank you—Every donation helps another woman to learn English!

New Board Members

The Dominican Literacy Center is fortunate to have two lifelong Aurora residents as new members on the Advisory Board, Sue Stanciu and Julie Linden.

Sue Stanciu, a graduate of West Aurora High and Robert Morris University was a volunteer in local schools for many years, helping in school classrooms and serving as president of parent/teacher organizations. During her service on various committees and advisory councils, Sue gained experience in fundraising. She looks forward to utilizing that for the benefit of the Center. She feels the work of the Center has an immeasurable impact on the lives of its students, their families, the volunteer tutors and the community.

A graduate of West Aurora High and of Aurora University, Julie Linden's first teaching position was at St. Therese School, next to the Center. She currently serves as the Technology Facilitator for East Aurora School District. Julie's inspiration as a board member comes from a desire to enrich non-English speaking women's ability to communicate with their children's schools so that they can be more involved in their children's learning.

The skills and talents of these two women will go a long way to help promote the mission of the Dominican Literacy Center!

La Cabana

On Saturday October 22, 2016, Steve Hernandez, the owner of La Cabana Restaurant in Aurora hosted an “Eat and Earn” fundraiser for the Dominican Literacy Center. Tutors, students and friends of the Center were encouraged to dine at La Cabana on Oct 22nd between the hours of 11 a.m. and 8 p.m. Fifteen percent of the money taken in that day was donated to the Center.

Steve has been a good and generous neighbor in the community. He has hosted many fund raisers, and considers this a way of giving back to his customers and thanking them for their support.

Forty-five years ago Steve Hernandez opened La Cabana, which means “the cabin” or “thatched hut” in Spanish. The building was formerly an A&W Restaurant. He bought it, renovated it and added to the original structure. This picturesque little cafe is nestled in an Aurora neighborhood and overlooks the Fox River. Originally, La Cabana was one of the first Mexican restaurants in the area. Many of the earliest diners were workers at nearby factories which have since closed.

Through the years La Cabana has been a popular dining choice of the staff of the Center. Many of Steve’s staff have been students at the Center, and he has helpfully adjusted their work schedules, so that they could attend classes. Two recent graduates of the Center, Aracely and Luz, work at La Cabana at the present time.

La Cabana has built a large and jovial customer base. The staff seems to know and remember just about every diner who walks through the door, and many hugs and smiles are exchanged.

October 22nd was a sunny fall day, and it was a pleasure to enjoy a delicious Mexican meal for a worthy cause. At the end of the day, La Cabana Restaurant donated a profit of \$900.00 to the Center. A heartfelt thank you to Steve Hernandez and his staff for their hospitality and generosity!



Steve Hernandez, owner of La Cabana, presents Sr. Kathleen with a check for the proceeds of the fundraiser

Christmas at Cantigny

Boost your history literacy while helping the Center win \$2,500! Bring your family to the McCormick Mansion Museum at Cantigny in Wheaton this holiday season. The historic mansion is decorated with trees created by seven area non-profits. Each tree is uniquely decorated to help raise awareness of the mission of its organization. Visitors are invited to vote for their favorite tree/non-profit. All seven organizations received a generous \$2,500 for participating, but the tree that receives the most votes between Nov. 18th and Dec 29th will win an additional \$2,500. Museum hours: Tues-Sun, 10 to 4pm. Free admission; parking, \$5. See website for holiday hours: <http://www.cantigny.org/>



The Center Christmas tree is decorated with photos, literacy items and ornaments

The next training for new tutors will be on Saturday, January 21, 2017 from 9a.m. to 4:00pm. Lunch will be provided. Contact Alison Brzezinski at alison@dominicanliteracycenter.org or (630) 898-4636 to register or for more information.

Advisory Board

The Advisory Board provides guidance and support for the many initiatives of the Dominican Literacy Center:

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“Word & Hope” is a twice-yearly newsletter of the Dominican Literacy Center, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

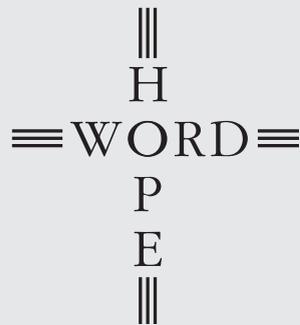


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The Dominican Literacy Center provides ...



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.

**For more information, call 630-898-4636, M-F 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.
 or see our website at www.dominicanliteracycenter.org**