

The Adult Learning Center Charlotte's Literacy Web

September 2011

GOVERNOR RICK SCOTT ISSUES PROCLAMATION DECLARING SEPTEMBER AS FLORIDA LITERACY MONTH

Did you know that **more than 20% of Florida's adults experience literacy issues** that severely impact their lives and families, their ability to work to the best of their potential and their full participation as residents and citizens of our state? This is one of the findings that persuaded Governor Rick Scott to issue a proclamation officially designating September as Florida Literacy Month. The Adult Learning Center is proud to work with our students to assist them in achieving their educational and literacy goals. And our students are proud to be counted among the 350,000 adults across the State who are making an investment in themselves by taking classes, working in learning labs, and meeting with tutors to achieve those goals. In the articles in this edition of *Charlotte's Literacy Web*, you will get a sense of the way the Center celebrates adult literacy every day.

SPOTLIGHT ON STUDENT RACHEAL NYAMAWI AND TUTOR BARB BAZYK

Sometimes a student-tutor match seems like it was destined to be. Case in point: student Racheal Nyamawi and tutor Barb Bazyk.

Racheal grew up in her native Kenya without the opportunity to attend school. In fact, her first formal education was taking classes in Mombasa at an adult education program somewhat similar to ours. There she began to learn to speak English and to read and write in both English and Swahili.

In 2009 she came to the United States with her American husband and they settled in Port Charlotte. One day they were walking through the Mall and came upon the Adult Learning Center. Racheal immediately decided to enroll and started classes shortly thereafter. She is in our intermediate ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) course and is enjoying every minute of her studies.

Last spring, Racheal signed up to work with a tutor to supplement her class work and was matched with volunteer Barb Bazyk. Barb is a retired para-social worker who has been an active volunteer



Racheal Nyamawi and Barb Bazyk

(Continued on page 3)

INSTRUCTOR GERI MILINSKI BRINGS CORPORATE BACKGROUND TO ALC

People often assume that adult education instructors have worked as teachers throughout their careers. Not so, and lead instructor Geri Milinski at our Family Services Center site is a lesson in the benefits of bringing people with fresh perspectives to the classroom. Geri spent most of her adult life in Wisconsin, where she utilized her accounting degree working at corporate giant General Electric. While at GE, Geri learned (among other skills) the importance of teamwork and of running an efficient operation. In her spare time, she tutored ESOL students at the first adult literacy program in Milwaukee. About ten years ago, Geri left Wisconsin for warmer climates and landed in Port Charlotte. When the opportunity arose to run the Adult Learning Center site at the Family Services Center, Geri jumped at it, and the Center benefits daily from her enthusiasm and skill set.



Instructors Michelle Rollins-Hall and Geri Milinski

During Geri's tenure at the Center, she has grown the number of students served, the types of programs offered and the physical space of the program. When Geri first arrived, the site consisted of two small rooms that could (barely) accommodate eight students. The Center now operates out of four large rooms, including two rooms that are shared with the Boys and Girls Club. (One of the great things about working out of the Family Services Center is that it is a non-profit hub, providing a sort of "one stop shopping" for our students.) The program offers four levels of ESOL classes and an assortment of math, reading, and language classes for adult basic education students.

During one of Geri's recent math classes, she worked with students on counting the number of vertices in various geometric figures. The students were excited about what they were learning, practically doing fist pumps when they figured out the number of vertices in a square pyramid. When talking with Geri's students after class, they said that she is "the best teacher they've ever had" and "one of a kind". Geri's classroom is filled not only with learning but with laughter and a nice camaraderie that makes for a great learning experience.

Thanks to Geri and to all of our instructors for making learning accessible and fun for our students. You are truly an inspiration.

ADULT LEARNING CENTER PARTICIPATES IN UNITED WAY EVENT AT PUBLIX

On Saturday, September 3rd, Punta Gorda's Publix employees had the opportunity to learn about the Adult Learning Center and other non-profit organizations that receive funding from the United Way. Leslie Isley took advantage of the chance to perfect her "elevator speech" about the ways in which the Center works with adult students in Charlotte County to obtain the skills required to pass the GED or to learn English as a second language. Most people were surprised to hear that **the functional illiteracy rate in Charlotte County is close to 18%**, meaning that nearly one out of every five adults in our county does not have sufficient skills to function successfully in today's society. Thanks to the United Way for giving us the chance to let people know about our programs!



Leslie Isley

New and Improved Website Presence!

The Adult Learning Center is pleased to announce that we have officially entered the 21st century with a new website presence. You can find us on Charlotte Technical Center's website (www.charlottetechcenter.com) by going to the "Adult Learning Center" dropdown under "Adult Students." With just a few clicks on your keyboard, you will be able to find general information about our program (including hours of operation), past editions of *Charlotte's Literacy Web*, and information for tutors and prospective tutors. Check it out!



Racheal and Barb *(Continued from page 1)*

since the age of five when she helped her family package and deliver food to needy families. She brings an unparalleled enthusiasm to her tutoring, and loves having the chance to help Racheal improve her English language skills and achieve her personal literacy goals. Barb says that tutoring is the "best gig" that she's ever had!

When Racheal and Barb first met, Racheal shared that one of her goals was to obtain her driver's license. She had not, however, been able to pass the written exam despite several attempts. Barb picked up a copy of the test booklet from DMV and they went to work. In August, Racheal obtained her driver's permit after receiving a perfect score on the 20 question exam. (Now she has to pass the driving portion of the test, which is beyond the skill set that she can work on with Barb!)

In the time that they have been working together, Barb has seen Racheal's reading ability improve significantly. Racheal recently headed back to Kenya to visit friends and family. Before she left, Barb and Racheal had a five hour marathon tutoring session at the Mid-County Regional Library at which Racheal read about her native country for the first time. Barb says, "We just got carried away!"

Racheal's new goal is to complete a Certified Nursing Assistant certificate program and to find a job in the medical field. She has enrolled in a class in North Port, and Barb and Racheal now spend some of their time during each tutoring session going over vocabulary from the course. It will be a challenge, but Racheal clearly has the dedication and determination to accomplish what she sets out to do.

Thanks to Racheal and Barb for sharing your partnership with us. If this article has inspired you to join our program as a student or a volunteer tutor, please contact us at 941-255-7555. We would love to have you join us!

THANKS TO ALL OF OUR TUTORS!

The staff and students of the Adult Learning Center would like to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of our volunteer tutors. You are making a difference in our students' lives.

UPCOMING EVENTS



TUTOR TRAINING. We will be holding our next tutor training session on **Saturday, October 8th**, from 10:00—1:00 at our Mall location. New tutors will be matched with students shortly after completing their training. For further information or to register for this session, contact Nanette Crist (e-mail: alctutor1@gmail.com; phone: 941-255-7555).

LEARNING TO ACHIEVE: STRATEGIES FOR WORKING WITH ADULTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES. The Adult Learning Center is hosting a day-long symposium on **Saturday, October 29th**, on the topic of working with students with learning disabilities. Participants will receive an overview of what constitutes a “learning disability” and learn strategies to help adults with learning disabilities improve their reading and writing skills. This workshop is free and is being provided by the Florida Literacy Coalition with support from the Florida Department of Education, Division of Career and Adult Education. Anyone working with adult students is welcome to attend. For further information or to register for the symposium, contact Nanette Crist (e-mail: alctutor1@gmail.com; phone: 941-255-7555).

CHOCOLATE FESTIVAL FUNDRAISER. The Adult Learning Center will host a chocolate festival with a tropical twist on **Saturday, February 11th**, at the Port Charlotte Town Center Mall to raise scholarship funds for our program. It is going to be one sweet event, so save the date!

WE'RE EXPANDING!

The Adult Learning Center is excited to announce that we are expanding in two ways this fall. First, the storefront next door to our Mall location has become available, and we are building out the space to create an area where classes will be taught to supplement the work our students are doing in the learning lab. This space will also house a dedicated spot for tutors to meet with their students. Second, we are partnering with **Florida Gulf Coast University** to offer classes and a learning lab at FGCU's campus at Herald Court Centre in Punta Gorda. We are thrilled to be able to offer our students the opportunity to learn in FGCU's incredible facility. Watch for more information about our Punta Gorda presence in the next edition of *Charlotte's Literacy Web!*

ADULT LEARNING CENTER

E-mail: Leslie_Isley@ccps.k12.fl.us
www.charlottetechcenter.com

Port Charlotte Town Center Mall
1441 Tamiami Trail, Suite 365
Port Charlotte, Florida 33948
Phone: 941-255-7555

Family Services Center
21450 Gibraltar Drive
Port Charlotte, Florida 33952
Phone: 941-255-1431

Charlotte Technical Center
18150 Murdock Circle
Port Charlotte, Florida 33948
Phone: 941-255-7500