

2014 Spotlight on Achievement and Service Awards

Secretary of State Jesse White along with Dennis DeRossett, executive director of the Illinois Press Association (IPA), presented awards to 10 adult learners and 10 volunteer tutors at the annual Spotlight on Achievement and Service Awards ceremony in May. Adult learner winners received \$200 from the IPA Foundation, a plaque and a personalized *Illinois Blue Book*. Volunteer winners received \$200 from the IPA Foundation for the literacy program where they tutor as well as a plaque and a personalized *Illinois Blue Book*.



2014 Spotlight on Achievement Winners - Standing left to right: Dennis DeRossett, executive director of the IPA; Telesforo Villasenor, De La Salle/Tolton Center, Chicago; Zitlalitl Vargas, De La Salle/Tolton Center, Chicago; Erasmo Vargas, De La Salle/Tolton Center, Chicago; Secretary White; Guadalupe Vargas, De La Salle/Tolton Center, Chicago; Em Thu Tran, Literacy Volunteers Fox Valley, St. Charles; Corey Hibbler, Southwestern Illinois College, Belleville. Seated left to right: Doris Wright-Simmons, De La Salle/Tolton Center, Chicago; Amy Golke, De La Salle/Tolton Center, Chicago; Senator Hunter; Sabra Dawson, Frontier Community College, Fairfield; Kayti Carter, Frontier Community College, Fairfield; Julie Andrus, YWCA of Pekin.

Adult learner winners' stories:

Julie Andrus, YWCA of Pekin

It was difficult for Julie to learn in school because she could not understand some subjects. She was passed from grade to grade until junior high when she was diagnosed with a learning disability. Although she was put in a special education class, it did not help. She turned to alcohol and drugs in high school and finally dropped out of school when she became pregnant. At age 40 she saw an advertisement for the GED program at the library. She joined the classes and passed some of the tests, but she soon realized that to succeed she needed one-to-one help with the other subjects. However, she had health problems, issues with her son and with her mother for whom she is the sole caretaker. But she did not give up. One of her tutors was Victor Zamora who is a Spotlight on Service winner this year. Vic helped Julie understand math concepts that she had struggled with her entire life. Julie says "the sky's the limit" and perseveres. Her family realizes how important the GED is to Julie and is very proud of how far she has come. Julie's daughter says that her mother not only improved her skill level but her self-esteem blossomed as a result of working with tutors. With the GED test changing in 2014, Julie has refused to give up and has the willpower to continue towards her goal.

Kayti Carter, Frontier Community College, Fairfield

In grade school Kayti was made fun of because she could not learn as fast as the other kids in her class. She fell further and further behind. By the time she reached high school, both her self esteem and school work had suffered greatly. She dropped out of school and got in with the wrong crowd. When she became pregnant, she made the decision to return to school and get her GED. She wanted to be able to take care of her daughter and she wanted her daughter to be proud of her. She attended class and met with her tutor despite having morning sickness every day and a car that was not dependable. She was determined to pass the GED before it changed in January 2014. She worked with her tutor until she understood a lesson even if it meant staying longer than the allotted time. Her tutor and teacher never became frustrated with her; instead they pushed her to succeed. Just in time, she took the GED test in December 2013 and passed! Her world has opened up. She and her daughter are living on their own. She has the reading skills to shop well and to complete everyday paperwork without feeling overwhelmed. She has enrolled in Frontier Community College to get her associates degree with a goal of becoming a mortician. Her life is forever changed!

Sabra Dawson, Frontier Community College, Fairfield

Having Down's Syndrome, Sabra has struggled to learn her whole life. She has a Special Education High School Diploma but is still challenged with life skills, reading and math. Sabra works every day and meets with her tutor every week. She looks forward to seeing her tutor because the tutor makes her feel special and encourages her to do the work. Her mother died recently and Sabra now lives with her sister in another town. In spite of that, she continues to work and to meet with her tutor. Her sister takes care of her money but someday she hopes to be able to handle her own money. Her tutor takes her shopping and they practice with "fake money" to increase her money management skills. She can do some of her own shopping now and continues to learn more about handling money. Her reading level has improved and she is more confident. With her improved reading, she received a raise at work. When a goal is met, she sets a new one. Her goal this year was to work hard and win the Spotlight on Achievement Award. And she did! She wants to thank Secretary White for all he does to help people learn. She is very grateful for the literacy program.

Amy Golke, De La Salle/Tolton Center, Chicago

Amy was born with Cerebral Palsy. Though she was mainstreamed in school, her teachers did not encourage her. In fact, they discouraged her by telling her she was moving too slowly in the classes. Eventually, at age 16, she dropped out of high school. Several years later, she began attending GED classes at an adult education center. She passed all but the math section on the GED exam. She joined the Tolton Center a year ago to improve her reading even more and to work on math. It was not easy finding a way to get to the Tolton Center. Finally she was able to get a special bus service to take and pick her up. There were some problems in the beginning with the bus service but Amy persisted. It was not an easy road improving her math but Amy was determined to pass the GED math test. After six tries, she passed the math portion of the GED! Amy is thrilled to have met her goal of completing all parts of the GED. Without her tutor's help this would not have been possible. Amy is proud of all that she has achieved and is looking forward to attending Daley College to study computer technology. Amy is also planning to give back to the Tolton Center by becoming a volunteer reading tutor. She will be a tremendous inspiration to adult learners who need reading improvement and want to pass the GED exam.

Corey Hibbler, Southwestern Illinois College, Belleville

Corey struggled in school as a child. When Corey was growing up, his mother had an addiction problem and his father was not around so he was raised by his grandmother. He had a difficult time in school because of behavior problems, so he was placed in classes with students who had learning disabilities. He objected to the learning disabilities diagnosis but he stayed in school where he was able to play high school sports. His teachers "pushed him aside" with other students who had learning problems or who fell behind. Nevertheless, he was determined to graduate and he did. After high school, he began working in a hotel laundry department. Despite being unable to read, he became known as one of Marriott's most reliable, hard-working employees. In the fall of 2011, he learned of the St. Clair County Adult Literacy Program and began attending weekly reading classes at the Belleville Library. His inner drive and determination continue to grow despite the daily challenges he faces. In addition to studying, he works full-time and helps his sister with her young children. Corey's success is due to his relentless pursuit of self-improvement. He is resilient and his positive attitude is contagious. As his reading skills improve, he is now considering the possibility of continuing his education even further. Corey is determined to succeed. He dreams of having a family of his own that he can love, support and nurture.

Em Thu Tran , Literacy Volunteers Fox Valley, St. Charles

Thu came to the United States about ten years ago. In spite of having very little knowledge of the English language, she was able to find a job as a nail technician trainee working seven days a week. Not knowing English kept Thu from going to places on her own. Once she wanted to eat at the Subway by her workplace. She went there at lunch time when it was very crowded. When it was time to order her sandwich, she did not understand what the salesperson was asking. She guessed and pointed to what she wanted. But this embarrassed Thu very much and she wanted to get out of the restaurant fast. One of her regular customers at the nail salon suggested that she contact the Fox Valley Literacy Volunteers so that she could work with a one-on-one tutor to study English. She began working with a tutor meeting once a week at the local library. Within a year, she built up enough vocabulary to inquire about the US Citizenship Test process. She wants to be able to communicate better with her clients, learn more about the United States, vote and travel. As her husband is working to get the family business going, Thu is financially responsible for the family. During her one day off a week, she tends to many responsibilities but always finds time for tutoring sessions. Thu needs English to communicate with doctors, to

understand diagnostic tests and treatments. As she becomes more confident in her communication skills, she has been able to face those roadblocks head-on. Thu is a very conscientious and dedicated adult learner. She works hard to achieve her goals..

Erasmus and Guadalupe Vargas, De La Salle/Tolton Center, Chicago

Erasmus and Guadalupe have been married for thirty-eight years. As immigrants from Mexico, life has not been easy for them. Education in Mexico did not go beyond the 6th grade for both of them. They came to the United States hoping to make a better life and be able to send money home. They met each other at the factory they worked at in Chicago, fell in love and got married. As immigrants with little education who did not speak English, they both needed to work to make ends meet. When they had two sons, Guadalupe took a few years off from work until the boys went to school. But money was tight and work kept them from having much family time. Now they are both retired and live in the same building as one of their sons and their two granddaughters. They want to be able to help their granddaughters so they joined the family literacy program at the Tolton Center to bring both girls. They participate in all parts of the program including parenting classes and going to the library. Their English has improved and they are now able to read aloud to both girls. They enjoy going to the library and museums with their granddaughters. They help others in their class and have created a class spirit of openness and caring. Erasmo has invited another learner from class to go places with him. They also made a young Algerian woman feel welcome to their home. They are a special couple who have come a long way.

Zitlalitl Vargas, De La Salle/Tolton Center, Chicago

Zitlalitl came to the United States with her family when she was twelve. Her mother did not speak English and her father spoke only a few words. Her large family did not encourage her to learn English or to do well in school. Instead her duty was to find a good husband, be a perfect wife and mother. She married after she finished high school and is now the mother of four young children. She respects her culture, her family's traditions and the role of the Hispanic woman but she also has a desire to learn. She wants to be able to help her children as they prepare for life in America and help her husband with his goal of starting a family business. Although she walked the road to literacy alone, she was determined to meet her goal of learning English. She did not have anyone to talk to or to offer her a single word of encouragement at home. After two years of being in the ESL program, she has overcome her fears. She was shy when she first started classes but she is much more confident now and helps other learners in her ESL class. She also interprets for her children, husband and her family. She helps others in her community fill out forms and explains what is going on at the local school council meetings. She volunteers at her children's school and helps other parents communicate with their children's teachers. Her long term goal is to go to college and obtain a degree that will benefit her husband's goal of starting a family business. She is on her way to achieving her dream.

Telesforo Villasenor, De La Salle/Tolton Center, Chicago

Telesforo had never set foot in a school until he migrated from rural Mexico to Chicago at the age of 11. He found it difficult to focus at school in the U.S. and never gained confidence or a sense of his own abilities. He eventually dropped out of school in the 10th grade and began working 12 hour shifts in restaurants. After his father was killed in a car accident, he became the primary breadwinner for himself and his younger brother. Because of his age, he and his brother had to leave the community they knew and go live with an aunt. Moving to regular eight hour shifts in factories seemed like a great step forward for this young man. Manual labor jobs paying minimum wages was all he and his family ever knew or expected. Four years ago, Telesforo was very seriously injured at his factory job. Doctors did not think

he would live and if he did, he would probably never walk again. Telesforo is a fighter and after more than a year of struggle and rehabilitation, he can walk with a cane. He will no longer be able to do the kind of work he did at the factory. This accident brought Telesforo to the attention of social service professionals who helped him connect with the Tolton Center at Legler Library. He was matched with a tutor and his communication skills in English have greatly improved. He is much more confident and has made friends and connections beyond his small family and close knit Hispanic community. For the first time in his life, he has hope for a better life. He is a tremendous role model for other students at the Tolton Center. He is just now allowing himself to set goals and make personal, academic and career plans. He wants to be able to help his younger brother who is in special education classes. He hopes to someday buy a house, have his own business or a good job. His future holds many possibilities!

Doris Wright-Simmons, De La Salle/Tolton Center, Chicago

When Doris was 15, she became pregnant and had to drop out of school to take care of her baby. She is one of nine children and her mother could not help her very much. At 22, she married a good man and had four more children. She managed to get a job and thought she would be okay, but tragedy struck when she lost her husband, her son and her home in a fire. Then her sister was murdered by her sister's husband and Doris lost her job due to cutbacks. She went into a state of deep depression that affected her diabetes and hypertension. She felt hopeless and did not know how she would get another job without a high school education. When she heard about the Tolton Adult Education Center, she decided she had to do something before it was too late. At first, she was sad, shy and fearful but she found the courage to begin a new journey. Her academic and personal growth over the last three years has been tremendous. She has a job now, is happy, focused and confident. She comes to school tired after working a night shift, but she is enthusiastic about reading and learning. She finds time to help class mates and staff members. She is determined to work towards taking the GED test. Reading has opened new doors for a future career and has helped Doris heal in many ways. At last year's "Night of 1000 Stars" a fellow student was going to give a speech on Rosa Parks. The student became ill just moments before the time of the speech. Doris quickly volunteered to read the speech. Without having a chance to read the speech ahead of time, she read it in front of everyone attending the event including Secretary White and did a great job!



2014 Spotlight on Service Winners - Standing left to right: Dennis DeRossett, executive director of the IPA; Peter Barclay, Common Place Family Learning Center, Peoria; Marilyn Walker, Township High School District 214 Community Education, Arlington Heights; John Walker, Township High School District 214 Community Education, Arlington Heights; Victor Zamora, YWCA of Pekin; Secretary White. Seated left to right: Joyce Philpott-Moore, De La Salle/Tolton Center, Chicago; Dr. Carolyn Kampe, Prairie State College Adult Literacy Institute, Chicago Heights; Ruth Hurley, School and Tutors on Wheels, LaGrange Park; Samuel Byndom, accepting on behalf of William Curry, Urbana Adult Education Center, Urbana; Linda Cesario, Arlington Heights Memorial Library, Arlington Heights; Linda Buechting, John Wood Community College, Quincy. (Not pictured: Carole Shegog, Corazon a Corazan, Chicago).

Volunteer tutor winners' stories:

Peter Barclay, Common Place Family Learning Center, Peoria

After 36 years of service at Caterpillar, Peter retired in 2009 and trained to become a volunteer tutor. He tutors a weekly math small group and has earned the loyalty of his students. Taking a personal interest in each adult learner, he patiently works hard to ensure that they understand the lesson before they move on. He will find methods to help his adult learners understand difficult math concepts. Peter introduced a new program called "Next Steps" which provides adult learners opportunities for personal growth, for leadership skill and life goal development. Upon graduation from the "Next Steps" program, each participant gets a personalized follow-up by volunteer mentors to help them develop and fulfill their goals.

Peter plays a major role in mentoring the graduates of “Next Steps.” The “Next Steps” pilot, held last fall, was so successful that the literacy program plans to continue it to enhance the learning of other literacy students. Peter not only volunteers at Common Place as a tutor, he speaks about his experiences at Tutor Training Workshops. He encourages other tutors by saying “all you need is a heart and a willingness to help.” Peter is a great asset to both the literacy program and to the team of volunteers.

Linda Buechting, John Wood Community College, Quincy

As a former writer and an avid reader, tutoring was a natural fit for Linda. What surprised her was how much she came to admire the courage and strength of her learners. Some of the learners have suffered the loss of children. Some have fled their homes to crowded refugee camps. Some have been abandoned by family, suffered abuse, fought health issues or were told they were stupid. But their spirit endures and they come to class to better their lives. Once she met an Indian woman who had been orphaned and was forced to abandon school at sixteen when she could no longer live in the orphanage. When Linda told her about the GED program, she began taking classes. Although Linda is not her regular tutor, the student calls her when she hits a snag in her studies. A Japanese student who was enrolled in the ESL program, loved history and wanted to learn about American culture so Linda took her to local museums. Another learner was a Hispanic woman who wanted to learn English to become a CNA. Linda bought the book she needed to practice the CAN admittance test and they worked together every week. She also needed a job to support her three children so Linda took her to apply for three jobs. Each learner is very special to her and will always hold a place in her heart.

Linda Cesario, Arlington Heights Memorial Library

After five months of retirement and countless hours of reading for pleasure, Linda wanted to return to instructing. She had taught for 40 years and missed helping others. When Linda read a newspaper announcement asking for volunteer tutors, she checked out the program. She always thought that if you rest, you rust, so she began her “rust prevention” program. Soon her tutoring grew into a desire to enhance the quality of life for adult learners who want to improve their literacy skills. Her role in this process is similar to that of a travel agent. Her students tell her what their goal is and she plans the trip so they can reach their destination. In addition, she learns about cultural diversity, perseverance and courage from her adult learners. Linda cannot imagine life without the joy tutoring brings and the value it showers on the learner. She will never forget the woman who was in her 70's who came to the library clutching a pencil and notebook and whispered it was her first day ever in school! Linda was beyond words when she watched this woman learn to read from the second grade level. All in all, Linda has been fortunate to tutor 70 adults from 25 different countries. Another adult learner had tried eight times to pass the Test of English as a Foreign Language. After working with Linda, she passed the test on the ninth try! Linda not only gives many hours of her time to help her students but she also loves and cares about each one she works with. With her help, sooner or later they all reach their individual goals.

William M. Curry, Urbana Adult Education Center, Urbana

As Bill was planning his retirement from the City of Champaign in 2010, he began looking for a meaningful volunteer opportunity in the community. He had already retired from law enforcement in the 90's and had developed an interest in English as a Second Language (ESL). He discovered Project Read at the Urbana Adult Education Center and has been there ever since. His abilities in French and Spanish make him a trusted advisor for the adult learners when they receive mail they do not understand. Bill thoroughly enjoys being part of the ESL classes and takes the success of students quite personally.

He is willing to do any task that needs being done because he understands how every bit of help he offers ends up making the lives of teachers and students easier. One of his adult learners is serving 12 years in the Illinois Department of Corrections and could not believe Bill had been a cop. He told Bill, "Man you're too cool to be a cop." This opened the door for a great lesson that day in English and in life. When Bill realized the school year ended May 1st, and that all of the ESL classes for the adult learners were closed to new students for the summer, he decided to teach his own six week class. He found a location at a local church, he advertised the class, set the time and date, registered students and developed the curriculum. He paid for all of the copies for the class, designed power point lessons and ended up with 25 very satisfied adult learners! With his energy, enthusiasm and genuine interest in ESL learners, he is inspirational to others.

Ruth Hurley, School and Tutors on Wheels, LaGrange Park

Ruth was the youngest of six children and learned the value of reading from her parents. Each week, her mother took all six children to the public library for story time and to check out books. After retiring as a school teacher and school administrator, Ruth knew she wanted to tutor at School and Tutors on Wheels in any way and as much as she could. That was eight years ago. Ruth hopes to instill her love of books to her learners. Ruth is truly interested in her students and learning about their culture. She has a gift for selecting activities that interest and challenge her students. When she travels, she keeps her students engaged by sending them postcards from places she is visiting. When one of her adult learners asked to study for citizenship, she not only researched the information with her but also took her learner to the facility and helped her through the process. Ruth acts as a mentor to new tutors in the program by participating in a tutor panel at training sessions. She gladly shares information and strategies, directs them to appropriate resources and offers great insights and practical advice to all. She also helps with planning in-service meetings and special events such as Family Reading Night. Whether she is helping her learners with social conversation, pronunciation or citizenship or sharing a strategy with another tutor, she has a gift for making everyone feel welcome and important. She is truly committed to improving the lives of others. She enjoys seeing her students grow in literacy as well as confidence, self-assurance and a desire to speak, read and write English.

Dr. Carolyn J. Kampe, Prairie State College Adult Literacy Institute, Chicago Heights

As a child, Dr. Kampe learned to read and spell words with her mother's help. It was especially important that Carolyn receive the extra help from her mother because Carolyn could not hear the sounds. In Carolyn's last year of college, the education staff told her that she could never be a teacher because of her deafness. But she was determined even though it was a struggle. Her first connection with Prairie State College was organizing the BIG READ Project. She devised a plan that included reading Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* book and included the movie to accommodate many different reading levels. Thanks to Dr. Kampe, the BIG READ Project was a huge success! After the project ended, she was asked if she would work with a small group of adult learners with special needs. She agreed and three and half years later she has worked with students for many hours. She has also recruited five volunteers to assist her in providing literacy services for adult learners with special needs. A 62 year old man who had never learned to read or even print his name joined Dr. Kampe's Life Skills Reading class. He learned to print his name and recognize the alphabet and vowel sounds for the first time in his life! When he realized that he could recall the sounds that he had learned, he hugged her. Sometimes students jump up and down when their reading skills improve. She inspires, motivates and empowers her students to succeed!

Joyce Philpott-Moore, De La Salle/Tolton Center, Chicago

When Joyce was asked “Why do you want to be an adult literacy tutor,” the answer was easy. She always wanted to be a teacher. But after high school, Joyce went to work. Life got busy and fifty years later, when she heard a young lady from Hull House appeal for teachers in their adult literacy program, she signed up. By then she was retired and available for training. She was finally doing what she always wanted to do, to teach English and history. When the Hull House organization closed after many years of community service, she was given a list of adult literacy organizations that might need her help. She inquired at both De La Salle Tolton Center and the B.E.S.T program at Alpha Temple. She volunteers for both! She is now lead tutor in a small classroom setting at Bee Branch Library for Tolton Center and tutors individuals at B.E.S.T. in West Englewood. She finds both opportunities very rewarding. The adult learners that come to her class really want to learn. They show up on time eager to study and learn. No one is disrespected in class; they interact, laugh, learn and enjoy each other. Although learning can be difficult at times, it is not impossible. All adult learners want the same thing – to be able to read and understand what’s being read.

Carole Shegog, Corazon a Corazon, Chicago

Carole has worked in various social service roles and taught many students of minority populations in both inner-city and rural settings. Her experience serves the adult learners well at Corazon a Corazon. . When she first meets with a new learner, she shares her background and some personal details hoping to make them feel comfortable so they will also share with her. She tries to convey to her new learner how much she enjoys tutoring and that she looks forward to working with them. She develops rapport with her students, making sure they feel safe and comfortable when working together. Teaching the English language unlocks doors for many adult learners. She uses various methods and materials that help her learners. She wants to make sure the time spent in a tutoring session is interesting, relevant and enjoyable. She wants to be sure the material comes alive and can be used by the learner. Carole is always ready to help those who want to learn because she is a dedicated volunteer tutor.

John and Marilyn Walker, Township High School District 214 Community Education, Arlington Heights

The next tutors are a husband and wife team. Both John and Marilyn joined the Read to Learn program in 1997 to give back to the community. Before Marilyn retired, she worked in the educational field for more than forty years as a teacher, counselor and administrator. It seemed logical to her to work with adult learners who wanted to master the English language. Marilyn takes tutoring beyond the classroom. She has continuous communication with her students throughout the week either by email or telephone. She supplements the lesson plans with other resources to assure her adult learners success. Some of her learners ask her for help in making a decision even after “graduating” from their tutoring time with Marilyn. John not only finds satisfaction tutoring students who want to learn the English language, he learns from his students about their country, customs and educational history. He also tutors American born students who did not finish high school or learn what they needed to from school. One of his adult learners was gainfully employed and wanted to go to the community college, but she wasn’t quite ready academically for college. John focused on helping her improve her reading and writing skills. He helped a Russian woman learn about becoming a CPA by connecting her with his friend who had recently earned her CPA certification. His adult learners continue to amaze him by their high motivation to learn the English language.

A year ago John missed several tutoring sessions due to health issues. While John was unable to tutor due to treatments he was receiving, Marilyn worked with his learner as well as her own. This winter's frigid temperatures and snow did not keep John and Marilyn home. They continued their tradition of attending tutor training in January prior to the start of the spring semester. They are both dedicated to the literacy program.

Victor Zamora, YWCA of Pekin

After retiring from Caterpillar, Vic was looking for something constructive to occupy his time. Through a newspaper article about the Retired & Senior Volunteer Program, he learned that volunteers were needed to tutor reading and math at the YWCA in Pekin. He received training and began tutoring in both reading and math. His first learner was Julie Andrus who is a Spotlight on Achievement winner this year. Julie struggled with math but she hung in there and kept meeting with Vic. She began to realize that she was learning math because she knew more than when she started working with Vic. "He can do wonders. Look what he did for me!" says Julie of her former tutor. Julie gained more confidence as her grasp of math concepts became easier, and as she retained what she learned. Another learner called Vic with the news that she passed the GED. She sent Vic a copy of a picture showing her holding her GED diploma with a smile that said it all! To see and hear their happiness when they achieve their goal is very rewarding for Vic. He is always ready for a new assignment. Vic drove 32 miles round trip to make tutoring sessions more convenient for an adult learner. He doesn't wait to be paired with learners who live close to his home. He says, "Let's get them going" and then he does.