



Jesse White

SECRETARY OF STATE

NEWS

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Jesse White, Illinois Press Association Salute Top Literacy Students and Tutors in Illinois

SPRINGFIELD — Secretary of State and State Librarian Jesse White and Illinois Press Association Executive Director David Bennett today handed out Spotlight on Achievement and Spotlight on Service awards, recognizing outstanding progress made by literacy students or families and honoring volunteer tutors for their commitment to literacy.

During ceremonies held in Springfield, Spotlight on Achievement awards recognizing outstanding progress made by literacy students or families were given to:

- Lisa Bogden, a literacy student at Westside Employment Education, Inc. of Chicago;
- Ya Chhan, a student at Cambodian Association of Illinois in Chicago;
- Latonia Cromer, who took classes offered through the St. Clair County Regional Office of Education in Belleville;
- Paulette Ford, a student at the Blue Gargoyle Youth Service Center, Chicago;
- Marisa Colardo Garlich, who attended classes at Kaskaskia College in Centralia;
- Anthony Haynie, who took classes offered through the Rockford Area Literacy Council.

- Shirley Henry, a student at the De La Salle Institute, Tolton Center, Chicago;
- Rosie McNutt, who also attended classes at the De La Salle Institute, Tolton Center, Chicago;
- James Poole, who attended classes offered at the Waukegan Public Library;
- Venissa and Brianna Smith, a mother and daughter who attended classes at the Common Place Family Learning Center in Peoria.

Spotlight on Achievement winners received a \$100 check, a plaque, a subscription to their local newspaper, and a personalized copy of the Illinois Blue Book.

Spotlight on Service awards recognizing outstanding tutors of literacy students were given to:

- Margaret Behles, McHenry County College, Crystal Lake;
- Renee Blanchard, Blue Gargoyle Youth Service Center, Chicago;
- Janice Bonilla, Oakton Community College, Skokie;
- David and Jodie Briggs, College of DuPage, Glen Ellyn;
- Maria Jimenez, Albany Park Community Center, Chicago;
- Wally Jonas, Blue Gargoyle Youth Service Center, Chicago;
- Beverly Jones, Spoon River College, Canton;
- Kevin Rilott, Rock Valley College, Rockford;
- Alma Taylor, Prairie State College, Chicago Heights;
- Ramona Wise, Lake Land College, Mattoon.

Spotlight on Service award winners received a plaque and personalized Blue Book, and \$100 will be donated in the recipient's name to the literacy program for which they volunteer.

"I applaud these outstanding men and women for their hard work, determination and commitment to excellence," said Secretary White. "The personal stories of our award-winning students are a reminder to all of us that, with courage and perseverance, we can overcome obstacles and hardships to achieve greater personal and professional satisfaction. The skills our students have obtained through our literacy programs are allowing them to be better parents, better employees and more active, productive citizens and members of their communities.

"The enormous generosity and selflessness of our award-winning volunteer tutors is a reminder that each of us should devote time and effort to improving the lives of others. We can make our communities and our state stronger and more vibrant if we each try to make a positive difference in someone's life. Last year in Illinois, more than 15,000 volunteer tutors provided basic reading, writing, math and language skills to almost 37,000 adult students. Our noble volunteers in this state contributed more than 1.3 million hours of service to literacy students. Our volunteer tutors are genuine heroes, and I salute and congratulate all of them for their exemplary efforts."

"The Illinois Press Association is proud to be a co-sponsor with Secretary of State Jesse White in recognizing and honoring our outstanding literacy students and volunteer tutors," said Bennett. "The IPA is committed to addressing literacy needs in Illinois to ensure that all of our citizens have the skills necessary to attain their personal and professional goals."

The Secretary of State Literacy Office, a division of the Illinois State Library, mailed award nomination forms in January to literacy programs registered with the Illinois Adult Learning Hotline. The Illinois Press Association reviewed the nominations and recommended ten students and ten tutors for the awards.

Lisa Bogden, Westside Employment Education, Inc., Chicago

Lisa was in and out of foster homes after the age of 12. When she was five months pregnant and still a teenager, she arrived at Westside. Lisa set specific goals that focused on her unborn child. She was determined that her child would have a more stable life than she had. Last December, Lisa took the GED test one week before she had her baby. After her son was born, she found out she passed the GED, she began to set further goals caring for her son, getting a job and continuing her education. She has participated in a business venture through Westside's literacy program and has started a savings program for her child. She has grown in confidence and in abilities. Even bad weather could not keep her from walking to school at Westside. The staff at Westside have become Lisa's family support system. Lisa's determination to learn has made quite an

impact in her life.

Ya Chhan, Cambodian Association of Illinois, Chicago

During the Khmer Rouge's reign of terror in Cambodia, Ya lost two young children and numerous friends and family members. She finally escaped to a Thai refugee camp where she began to learn to read and write Khmer - the first formal education she had received in her entire life. Just as she was making real progress, however, she was diagnosed with cancer. She underwent radiation and her cancer went into remission. She immigrated to the United States where Ya struggled to pick up the pieces of her life as a single mother who couldn't speak, read or write English. Without the ability to speak English, tasks as simple as buying food for her children and asking directions would reduce Ya to tears. Once when a case worker came to help her, she ran out the back door. She enrolled in English and citizenship classes at Cambodian Association of Illinois and passed her citizenship test. She now chats warmly and easily about day to day life. Ya has used her English as a volunteer translator for women's mental health group. She most recently has served as a featured panel discussion member at the Women Warriors Festival at Columbia College. She talked about her journey to learn English which was an inspiration to all.

Latonia Cromer, Regional Office of Education - St. Clair County, Belleville

Twelve years after Latonia dropped out of school, she returned to school and began classes through the St. Clair County Adult and Family Education program while raising three sons. Latonia studied for and successfully passed the GED test. She is currently enrolled in a six-month Welding and Machine Shop training program and has secured employment upon completion of the training program. In the fall, she will start classes at Southwestern Illinois College. Latonia has served on the Even Start Advisory Board and is a mentor to many of the students. She recently was asked to share her educational experiences with the prisoners in Greenville Federal Prison. Latonia's sons have also been included in all facets of the literacy program. She shows her children that they too can be successful if they work hard in school and do the best they can. She tells them to "always read because reading feeds the brain!"

Paulette Ford, Blue Gargoyle Youth Service Center, Chicago

Paulette returned to school after 40 years and her life has greatly improved. She works full time while she takes evening classes. In addition, she meets with a math tutor and reading/writing tutor at least once a week. Going back to school has proven that she is a gifted writer. She feels she typifies the characters in the Wizard of Oz. The Scarecrow thought he didn't have a brain and she felt the same way. But now she has learned to study, listen and write her feelings on paper. The Tinman wanted a heart which she already had but her heart felt broken because she thought she couldn't learn. Today her heart feels good and she knows she can learn. The Lion found courage and she also began to believe in herself. She learned to speak out and isn't afraid to speak her opinion to others. Her self-esteem has grown so much since returning to school.

Marisa Colardo Garlich, Kaskaskia College, Centralia

When Marisa arrived in the United States from the Philippines, she could not speak any English. She started working with a tutor through Kaskaskia College's The Reading Link Program. One of her goals was to obtain her U.S. citizenship. After much hard work learning English, U.S. history and government, she achieved this last September. She also obtained her driver's license. As a single mother and working full-time to support two sons she continues to meet with her tutor weekly to work toward the GED.

Marisa is energetic and willing to tell others about how her studies in the literacy program has changed her life. She provides encouragement to non-English speaking adults to learn English.

Anthony Haynie, Rockford Area Literacy Council, Rockford

Even though Anthony graduated from high school, he was not prepared for the work world. When he began working with a tutor at the Rockford Area Literacy Council, he wanted to improve his reading comprehension and learn to read "the big words". He also wanted his future children to know that he could read. Anthony is now the proud father of a daughter and his improved reading skills have helped him be a better father. Anthony wants his daughter to know that books are fun and learning is exciting. Anthony has been a member of the Rockford Area Literacy Council, providing a voice from the adult learner population. He has also been asked to do many interviews for the Literacy Council, which gives him the opportunity to tell his story. By telling his story he helps others and he is proud of that. Anthony was a volunteer father that helped with a "Boot Camp for New Dads: Lessons from the Front Lines". This workshop gives soon-to-be fathers information on what works and what doesn't with new babies as well as a hands-on opportunity on changing diapers and holding a baby.

Shirley Henry, De La Salle Institute - Tolton Center, Chicago

Shirley left school at seventeen and got married. She couldn't read well so she had the attitude that she couldn't learn. When Shirley's teenage son dropped out of school, she found the Tolton Center. She did not want her son to follow in her footsteps. She discovered that yes indeed she could learn and learning became an adventure. Her attitude changed dramatically. Shirley encourages other students when they get down and she helps her classmates with their work. When he saw the change in his mom and what she achieved by going back to school, Shirley's son returned to school and now hopes to go to college.

Rosie McNutt, De La Salle Institute - Tolton Center, Chicago

Rosie did not finish school. Instead she got married and raised seven children. She worked as a tailor and on the factory assembly line to help her husband support the family. As a widow and retired, Rosie wanted to be able to read the Bible and other books with understanding. Since enrolling at the Tolton Center, she is becoming a proficient reader. When she read her first book completely, she was overjoyed. Rosie wrote her life story as a Christmas gift to her children. She was also able to write a letter to her son - another first. When Rosie retired, she turned a junkyard in her neighborhood into a beautiful garden called Peace in the Valley. Now that her reading ability is improving, she will be able to read about plants and take even better care of her garden.

James Poole, Waukegan Public Library, Waukegan

Even though James had a high school diploma, he only went to school on days when it rained. By the age of eleven, he was responsible for the family farm. Needless to say, he missed a lot. Once he admitted he couldn't read, he sought help. He began working with Lyn Cima, his current tutor through the Waukegan Public Library, Lake County Literacy Program and his life has changed tremendously with his ability to read. He has evolved from a silent, quiet person to the natural leader he is. He is in a leadership position in his church, he is on the literacy board, taught classes at the annual literacy conference, founding member of the national movement VALUE - Voices of Adult Learners United for Education. James teaches math to an ABE class of adult learners and is a member of the Lake County literacy Program's Key Club. Members are adult learners

who have unlocked the doors for others. His passion is learning - his own and others.

Venissa & Brianna Smith, Common Place Family Learning Center, Peoria

Wanting to improve her reading and writing skills and to be role model to her daughter, Venissa enrolled in the family literacy program at Common Place. Now Venissa is attending classes at Illinois Central College toward a degree in Early Childhood Education. She wants to work in a day care center one day. Her daughter Brianna has progressed well, too. She attends an after-school program at Common Place for kindergartners. Her language and reading scores are on target. Venissa and Brianna have a better mother and daughter relationship. Venissa takes responsibility for Brianna and is her advocate when talking to teachers and doctors. Brianna is a bright, engaging child who is learning the importance of education and of having a loving mother. In spite of Brianna's health problems and Venissa's poor vision, the two attend every event at Common Place even if it means walking in the cold night or asking others for a ride. They have both grown as individuals and as a family.

Margaret Behles, McHenry County College, Crystal Lake

With extra time on her hand once her children were in high school, Margaret decided to volunteer at McHenry County College literacy program. It was quite an eye-opener to find out the number of adults who don't know how to read - even at the primary level. She wants to help learners reach their reading goals. Margaret enjoys teaching and learning with the students. Her students enjoy her fun sense of humor and her willingness to try new techniques. She thinks that the most challenging part of volunteering is reward the student's successes so that they keep working toward their goal. She is inspired by the students' progress and their growing self esteem.

Renee Blanchard, Blue Gargoyle Youth Service Center, Chicago

When Renee signed up for tutor training she was responding to a little voice inside that said it was time to give something back to the community. She had no idea that she would get to work with such a great and supportive staff at Blue Gargoyle. The student she has had for two years has become a friend and plans to take the GED by the time she is 65. Her student has a passion for learning and has improved her spelling, her vocabulary, and the quality of her written and oral communication. Renee has now moved to the suburbs, but she continues to meet with her student driving a good hour to work with her. The bond is so strong she didn't want it to break.

Janice Bonilla, Oakton Community College, Skokie

Janice volunteers as a gift to herself. She learns from her students who are from the Americas, Asia and Europe. Twice a week she is taken on historic and cultural tours around the world. She has developed friendships with her students that will not easily break even when their program participation ends. To see that very special look of comprehension in a student's eyes, to sense that you've truly reached and touched the life of another person is a gift. Janice is able to bring students of different nationalities together to learn from each other. One of her students announced he had signed up as a volunteer in his community, helping newly arrived immigrants with their paperwork. He looked her in the eyes, solemnly and quietly added, "I'm passing it on."

David and Jodie Briggs, College of DuPage, Glen Ellyn

After retiring from their teaching careers, David and Jodie wanted to

continue teaching. So they volunteer through the People Educating People at the College of DuPage. They both work with inmates at the DuPage County Jail. The inmates are appreciative and eager to learn. It can also be challenging to help students who have been out of school anywhere from four to twenty years. A 37 year-old student understood fractions after a three hour tutoring session. Now this student can help his son with his homework. When this man passed the GED exam you could just see his pride. Another student who thought he was a loser got his GED was so excited he called his parents to tell them. They had a family dinner the following week when he got home. Currently, Jodie is working with inmates whose native language is Spanish. They are so enthusiastic as they learn to read, write and speak English that it is exciting to watch their progress. Literacy programs at jails wouldn't be successful without the help and dedication from volunteers like the Briggs. Both David and Jodie also volunteer in a Jump Start program to tutor/help youthful offenders at the juvenile detention center and read to kindergartners and first graders at a local school.

Maria Jimenez, Albany Park Community Center, Chicago

Maria made a commitment to Albany Park and signed on as a Americorps volunteer. She tutors students in adult education, promotes literacy in the Even Start program and furthers the literacy skills of all student by working one-on-one with them in the computer lab. From a young age, Maria remembers the struggles her caregiver encountered daily because she could not read. Each time she helps someone read, she is honoring the memory of her caretaker. She also feels that she touches the lives of her students as well as everyone they encounter. She is contributing and enriching the lives of people in her community. She recently helped a student read a short story. When she finished the book, the sense of accomplishment shown in the student's eyes. This student then read the short story to her daughter and someday her daughter will be teaching her children to read. This gives Maria great satisfaction.

Wally Jonas, Blue Gargoyle Youth Service Center, Chicago

Wally started tutoring as a way of giving back for gifts that he received through an "accident of birth". Wally is full of energy, originality and practical problem-solving that helps him with the individual needs of his students. Although his first student had graduated from high school, he only read at about a 3rd grade level. They worked together between two and four hours each week. The student improved his reading ability and was moved from welfare to a job. After figuring out another student was dyslexic, Wally worked out some exercises that helped the student. Wally was rewarded when the student told him that he enrolled in a community college. Another student who was retired wanted to improve his reading and writing. He would tell Wally what he did that day or what was going on in his life. Wally would write out what the student had just told him so he could then read his own works. This technique worked very well for this student. He admires the students he meets because of the courage it takes to go back to learn something long after they left formal school.

Beverly Jones, Spoon River College, Canton

Tutoring through the Spoon River College Literacy Project has been Beverly's greatest joys during her empty nest/retirement years. She believes strongly in life-long learning and though she is not a certified teacher, she has taught in many different settings. Her first student was a Korean lady who needed to learn English because her youngest son was leaving to be in the military. They worked together after the student got off work and on weekends, becoming good friends and sharing their families and cultures. She has continued to tutor English as a Second Language students over the years. Once Beverly helps them overcome their anxiety

about learning English, their progress is amazing. She has learned much from her students and has always tried to expose them to all areas of life in middle America.

Kevin Rilott, Rock Valley College, Rockford

Four years ago, Kevin saw an ad for volunteer tutors and signed up. This was his chance to help someone as he had been helped. Kevin dropped out of school when he was seventeen and one of the reasons was that he had a hard time reading. However, he entered a program where he received personal attention with the subjects he was having trouble with, especially reading, and went on to graduate high school, attend Rock Valley College and open a small business. Now he helps other students. He attends the opening of classes to see what skills are being worked on for that session then carries it over to the tutoring hour to reinforce the skill with his student. Kevin is an excellent role model because he can relate his past difficulties of being a non-reader. He has learned that the only real failure in life is not trying.

Alma Taylor, Prairie State College, Chicago Heights

After retiring from teaching school for 24 years, Alma called the Adult Literacy Institute at Prairie State College because she had seen an ad earlier asking for volunteer tutors. She finds tutoring satisfying, rewarding and also fun. To be able to see someone go from struggling to read a complete sentence to reading paragraphs and whole pages smoothly is wonderful! She is proud of the student that got a promotion and another student who was able to write his first letter to his daughter. She never realized what joy there was in being able to read the newspaper. Her commitment and dedication is measureless. In spite of medical difficulties, Alma worked around her student's scheduled time. One of her former students, James Miles, was a 1999 Spotlight on Achievement winner.

Ramona Wise, Lake Land College, Mattoon

Ramona volunteers because she believes in the power of education and learning, and its ability to affect change in people, institutions and the world around her. As a Project Partner in Adult Literacy tutor, Ramona has had the privilege of being an active participant in the learning process as students have struggled to master skills that have eluded them throughout their adult lives. One of her proudest moments was sitting in the audience as one of her students read a Bible passage before his congregation. This student had left school at an early age and had wanted to do this for years. Only after months of hard work and significant struggle was he able to stand before the group and demonstrate that he too, could read. In the one-on-one tutor setting students can voice their frustrations and move at their own pace toward their goal. Ramona keeps busy tutoring 15 hours per week. When a student misses a GED class or leaves the jail, she finds them. She will take a student to a GED class or test site, out for lunch on their birthday, deliver a special gift to an expectant mother or provide a pizza party for the entire GED class to celebrate excellent attendance. Ramona goes above and beyond the call of duty to help a student.