



Jesse White

SECRETARY OF STATE

NEWS

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For More Information Contact:
Pat McGuckin
Henry Haupt

Jesse White and Illinois Press Assn. Announce Spotlight Awards For Outstanding Literacy Students and Tutors

SPRINGFIELD –Secretary of State and State Librarian Jesse White and the Illinois Press Association announced today the winners of the annual Spotlight on Achievement and Spotlight on Service awards recognizing outstanding literacy students and volunteer tutors in Illinois. The awards were presented during a ceremony at the Illinois State Library in Springfield.

"I am honored and privileged to congratulate these outstanding students for their hard work and determination in seeking to enhance their reading and learning skills," said Secretary White. "Many of them have overcome enormous personal difficulties and obstacles to reach this level of achievement. Theirs are stories of courage and amazing persistence, and we are all inspired by their success."

"I am also enormously proud to recognize our outstanding volunteer tutors for their generosity and encouragement in helping literacy students achieve their utmost potential. It is so important for each of us to give something back to our neighbors and our communities, and these heroes who help improve the lives of their students are a terrific example of the positive impact that comes from volunteerism."

Twelve students were honored for outstanding achievement in developing and improving their literacy skills:

- Breanna Anderson, Peoria County Superintendent/Project U.P.W.A.R.D.
- Patricia Arvizu-Rico, DeLaSalle/Tolton Center, Chicago
- Rosemary Bielarz, Township High School District 214 Community Education, Arlington Heights
- Kim Cash, Frontier Community College, Fairfield
- Alma Kidd, Common Place, Peoria
- Jose Maldonado, Anixter Center, Chicago
- Francisco Nunez, Morton College, Cicero
- Willie Pearl Richardson, Tolton Adult Education Center, Chicago
- Carinna, Victor and Alan Tello, District 214 Community Education, Arlington Heights
- Teresa Wallace, Southwestern Illinois College-Cahokia Even Start, Cahokia

The ten winners received a \$200 check from the Illinois Press Foundation, a plaque presented by Secretary White and a personalized Illinois Blue Book.

Ten outstanding tutors were honored for their contributions in helping literacy students reach their goals:

- Carolyn Day, Southwestern Illinois College, Belleville
- Glenn Fanter, Spoon River College, Canton
- Yolanda Higgens, Literacy Volunteers of America, Project U.P.W.A.R.D., Peoria
- Diana Howard, YWCA Adult Literacy, Pekin
- Lynne Leonard, Township High School District 214 Community Education, Arlington Heights
- Kathy Lyons, Congregation of St. Joseph/School on Wheels, LaGrange Park
- Nicholas Roessler, Anixter Center, Chicago
- Kathleen Sayles, YWCA Adult Literacy, Pekin
- Bonnie Schukai, Lawrence Education Center, Springfield
- Oneita “Nita” Volz, Common Place Family Learning Center, Peoria

The ten winning tutors received a plaque and personalized Illinois Blue Book from Secretary White, and \$200 is donated by the Illinois Press Foundation to the literacy program where they serve as volunteer tutors.

Students and tutors are nominated from among the local providers who receive literacy grant funding from the Secretary of State/Illinois State Library Literacy Office. Last year adult literacy programs that received grant funding provided educational services to 22,725 adult students. 8,797 volunteer tutors statewide gave nearly 774,000 hours of time to help students develop and enhance their reading, writing, math and language skills. Persons interested in becoming volunteer tutors are urged to contact the Illinois Adult Learning Hotline at **1-800-321-9511**.

“The Illinois Press Association and the Illinois Press Foundation are proud to join Secretary of State Jesse White in honoring the recipients of the Spotlight on Achievement and Spotlight on Service awards,” said Dennis DeRossett, Executive Director of the Illinois Press Foundation. “Today we celebrate the achievements of these men and women who have changed their lives forever through improving their reading skills. Also, we honor those individuals who devote their time and energy helping others to achieve their reading goals. Illinois newspapers are proud to be part of this commitment to help people overcome the crippling effects of illiteracy.”

(Profiles of the award-winning students and tutors are enclosed.)

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2010 SPOTLIGHT ON ACHIEVEMENT WINNERS

Breanna Anderson, Peoria County Superintendent/Project U.P.W.A.R.D.

Bright, intelligent young ladies sometimes sit in wheel chairs. Take Breanna, she uses a wheelchair to get around and special computers to communicate. She also works at the Peoria Association for Retarded Citizens (PARC) Assistive Technology Room where she does data entry. She wanted to study psychology in college but she had to improve her reading and writing skills first. So she began studying with her Project U.P.W.A.R.D. tutor to improve those skills. Soon she was able to take a psychology class at Illinois Central College. As her reading skills improved, she also found the confidence to speak up and to ask for help. When she expresses herself, the staff at PARC can understand her needs better. She wants to show others that living with a disability does not mean that you cannot learn to read and write.

Patricia Arvizu-Rico, DeLaSalle/Tolton Center, Chicago

Three years ago Patricia knew practically no English. She was a single mother from Mexico with two young children. She did know that to improve her life, to be able to communicate with others, and to be able to help her children, she would need to learn English. So she began studying at Tolton Center. She has a long day. First she gets her oldest son to school. Then she and her younger son walk a mile to Tolton Center. Her son attends an early childhood education program at Tolton while she studies English. Her studies are paying off. Her oldest son was born with an ear problem that requires surgeries. At first, she had to bring an interpreter with her to the medical appointments. The last time she took her son to the hospital, she did not need an interpreter because she could understand what the doctor was telling her. Her self-assurance has increased so much that she spoke at a Tolton Center fundraiser in front of 200 English speaking people. She is to be applauded.

Rosemary Bielarz, Township High School District 214 Community Education, Arlington Heights

Some people put service to others' needs in front of their own needs. Rosemary came from Italy, married and successfully raised four children. She always focused on helping them reach their goals. Now it's her turn. One day Rosemary saw a sign advertising the English as a Second Language "Read to Learn" program posted at the high school. After checking it out, she joined the tutoring program. Although Rosemary is now battling cancer, she uses that circumstance as a motivation to push her reading skills to greater heights. She uses cancer as subject matter on which to practice her reading skills. She sees all reading material on the subject of cancer as part of the steps she is taking to her recovery. Rosemary enjoys reading and writing with her tutor, but, most of all, she enjoys the conversation. Rosemary's determination is an inspiration.

Kim Cash, Frontier Community College, Fairfield

Imagine moving from state to state during the elementary school years, never attending the same school for more than one year. Of course that would make learning basic skills, like reading or math, difficult. Kim experienced that situation. By the 7th grade, at 15 years old, she was frustrated enough that she quit school. Her life went on. She married and had two children. But she couldn't read to her boys. She tried to go to

literacy programs, but her first husband refused to baby sit. Kim was always employed and able to provide for her children. But she worked long hours for low pay. She knew that if she could get her GED, she could get a better job. So she sought out the Literacy Program at Frontier Community College to help her improve her reading skills and work toward that GED goal. Her current husband, Kenny, encourages her to go after her dreams and stands by to lend a helping hand. Her current job allows Kim to miss mandatory overtime work so she can go to school. She is on track. She is going to reach her goals. She knows that it may take a long time but it will be worth it.

Alma Kidd, Common Place, Peoria

Alma was referred to the adult literacy program by the nurses in the hospital where she was recovering from a heart attack. Alma wanted to learn to read books and keep track of her check book but her reading and math skills were not up to those tasks. So she signed up with the adult literacy program at Common Place and has been a faithful member ever since. Her consistent participation allows her to consistently improve her reading skills. Now she can check out books to read from Common Place's library. Despite dealing with life-threatening conditions, her attendance has always been very good. She attends class even if she has received radiation or chemo treatments. She inspires everyone at Common Place. Alma's tutor, Nita Volz is also here today as a Spotlight on Service winner.

Jose Maldonado, Anixter Center, Chicago

Unfortunately, some students don't have positive and productive early school experiences. Jose was one of those students who was dyslexic and did not receive the assistance he needed. Despite his negative experiences, he turned to Anixter's adult literacy program and has had immense success. With one-to-one tutoring, he is improving his reading. He now has his driver's license and he wants to earn his GED. He is also working towards a promotion. Sometimes Jose's work schedule makes it difficult to schedule tutoring, but Jose tries to make literacy tutoring his priority. He would like to become a server, but that will require that he use a computer to place the customers' orders. It is an achievable goal. His tutor, Paul, educates himself about dyslexia so he can help Jose learn. Paul is not only Jose's tutor; he is a friend with whom Jose can talk. With his new skills, Jose now helps his nieces sound out and spell words. He helps his Mom, too, who also did not have the opportunity to learn to read.

Francisco Nunez, Morton College, Cicero

When Francisco came to this country, he could barely understand English. During his first day of tutoring, he felt like a child walking in a dark room trying to understand what people were saying. But he knew that the only way out of that darkness for him was to learn English. His tutors not only helped with writing, they also helped him understand grammar and improve his pronunciation. After learning some English, Francisco decided to study for the GED. Along with his teachers, his tutors taught him how to communicate by reading, writing and speaking English. He can now go out and ask for directions, surf the web, talk to customers at work, shop, understand the radio and TV, write letters, do homework and share information about countries and customs. Less than two years after arriving in the United States, Francisco passed the GED in English

and received a scholarship to study at Morton College. He is well on his way to achieving his personal goal of a Bachelor's Degree.

Willie Pearl Richardson, Tolton Adult Education Center, Chicago

Willie dropped out of school at the end of 10th grade, married and became a mother by the age of 18. Soon she had four more children and was working part-time jobs -- when she could find work at all. Then she had a further set-back when a combination of asthma and needed medications caused brain damage and memory loss. The drugs made her lethargic and unable to function well. She was discouraged and afraid to talk to other people. Because of her difficulties with reading and math, her adult children suggested she attend the Tolton Adult Education program. At first Willie was timid but after a few months, she began to speak up. She then convinced her doctors to take her off a few of those medications. She was amazed to see how healthy she could be. "My brain is working much better," she tells everyone at Tolton. As her reading and writing improved, she began to write short stories. She found that she has a flair for expressing her ideas. She has become a mentor for other Tolton students and for teenagers at her church. Her ultimate goal is to earn a GED and become a real estate agent. "It is never too late to enjoy your life in successful ways", she says!

Carinna, Victor and Alan Tello, District 214 Community Education, Arlington Heights

When the Tello family arrived from Mexico, they spoke very little English. This lack of skill isolated Carinna and her five year old son, Alan. Then they found the opportunities offered by the Family Literacy program at District 214 Community Education. In all kinds of weather, Carinna and her son walked to class. Carinna attended ESL classes five days a week and improved her English so much that Northwest Hospital hired her. She was trained to go into the Hispanic community to do health education. Alan also benefited by participating in the children's educational programming offered while his mom was in class. He will be prepared to learn English when he enters first grade this fall. Through sheer hard work, Carinna has been transformed into a woman who helps others in her community. In addition, she is taking citizenship classes to meet her next goal.

Teresa Wallace, Southwestern Illinois College-Cahokia Even Start, Cahokia

In the 11th grade, Teresa left school when she was told she would never make it because of her learning disability. Like so many others, she had her first child plus four more in the next four years. Then, as a teen mother with low reading skills, she entered the family literacy program at Southwestern Illinois College. As her reading skills improved, she enrolled in Certified Nursing Assistant classes and earned her license. The CNA certification enabled her to be employed, to support her family and to remain off public assistance. However, something was still missing. She wanted her GED. So she attended GED classes at the Goodwill Career Center in Cahokia and received lots of encouragement from the Even Start staff to achieve her goal. After working all day in the nursing home, she attended class two evenings a week. Although her hours were long and she had responsibilities at home, she had perfect attendance. She praises her teacher, Mark St. Ivaney, who taught her, who stuck with her and who answered her questions. She received her GED last year. Now she is excited to be in the nursing

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program at SWIC. Her message to everyone “Don’t let anyone tell you you can’t do it. You can do whatever you want to do in life. It’s your decision.”

2010 SPOTLIGHT ON SERVICE WINNERS

Carolyn Day, Southwestern Illinois College, Belleville

Carolyn has been tutoring for Project READ for almost 20 years. After retiring from instructing GED, ESL and family literacy, she continues to tutor. In recent months, her ESL group has grown to six students from Mexico. Because her students work many hours, Carolyn tutors them on their one day off each week. Over the years, Carolyn has often met students in restaurants and other workplaces to tutor them before work, during lunch or after completing their work day. She has always been willing to arrange her schedule to meet the needs of her students. Recently, Carolyn received a call from a student that she had tutored a few years ago. This 80 year old student was calling to share her excitement at finally earning her GED. Many students have kept in touch with her over the years. In one Hispanic family, she tutored several members of the family. She went to the doctor with one sister, helped that woman find a preschool for her daughter, and provided her with shelter when the power went out. As a result of Carolyn's tutoring three different sisters in this family, they all have moved up from bussing tables to waiting tables as their English improved. It is extremely rewarding for Carolyn to see the students' faces light up when they finally "get it". Like so many other tutors, Carolyn feels blessed by the students she tutors and feels that far outweighs anything she does for them.

Glenn Fanter, Spoon River College, Canton

Although Glenn and his wife volunteered in the Havana public schools to help children practice reading, they never considered adult tutoring. Then one day, at a women's health fair, Glenn was showing bees and honey and Cheryl Parr from Spoon River College was recruiting volunteer adult literacy tutors. Cheryl recruited both Glenn and his wife to become tutors. Glenn enjoys helping adult learners even though sometimes he thinks literacy tutoring is beyond his skills. Still, if necessary, he will figure it out with the adult learner. This caring individual is dedicated to helping the students. Students can't help but trust and admire Glenn. The Spoon River College Literacy Project feels very lucky to have Glenn's help. Besides volunteering with the literacy project, he continues to help in the grade school at Havana, 4-H, his church and master gardeners. In fact, last year during National Volunteer Appreciation Week, Glenn was featured in the Pekin Daily Times as an "Unsung Hero."

Yolanda Higgins, Literacy Volunteers of America, Project U.P.W.A.R.D., Peoria

After retiring, Yolanda was looking for something meaningful to do. She went through Project U.P.W.A.R.D.'s tutor training program and was eager to help someone upgrade their reading skills. She was surprised when she was paired with a Russian man who needed to learn English. Not knowing Russian, she could have said she would not be able to help him, but she took on the challenge. At first, they used a hand-held translator and flash cards with often used words. On one side of the flash card, there was English and on the other side was the Russian translation. Still, it was difficult sometimes to find a way to explain some words and concepts that he just could not understand. Yolanda did not give up and as he learned English, it became easier for both of them. The families became friends over the years. Yolanda has had them over to their home so they could experience American traditions such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter. As his English improved, he was eager to become an American citizen, so Yolanda helped him prepare. Then she watched with tears in her eyes when he took the oath to become an American. Unfortunately, the day before he took the oath, he was laid off from his job. After the ceremony, he said to Yolanda and her husband, "Yesterday I was an

employed Russian. Today I am an unemployed American.” Fortunately, he was recently called back to work. They still meet once a week to talk informally. Yolanda is proud to be a volunteer tutor.

Diana Howard, YWCA Adult Literacy, Pekin

Diana always says, “It’s all about the learner.” She is willing to rearrange her work and family schedules to accommodate her learners. Diana became a volunteer tutor five years ago when she read an article about the scope of adult illiteracy. She has firsthand knowledge of a family member who didn’t read well and who was quite creative in hiding that fact. She is also addicted to reading and wants to share her passion with everyone. Her first learner was from Jordan and spoke only Arabic. At first she was anxious. How could she teach someone English when she doesn’t speak their language? It turned out to be a great experience and she was hooked on tutoring. One of her learners started the program because her son would bring books home from pre-school and want her to read them to him -- and she couldn’t. Diana and the learner worked on those books until she could read a few to her son. Her current learner, Ron Draper, was a Spotlight on Achievement winner last year. Nothing prepared her for the emotion she felt watching him get his award that day in Springfield. By giving a little of her time each week, she saw the difference it made in Ron’s life. She truly feels that she gets back more than she gives. She can be tired, she can have a bad day or have a hundred things to do in her own life but when she sits down with a learner all her issues disappear. She is totally focused on helping the learner progress week by week.

Lynne Leonard, Township High School District 214 Community Education, Arlington Heights

After thirty-three years as a classroom teacher, Lynne retired. But then she found she really missed teaching. When she saw a local newspaper article about volunteering to tutor adult learners, she signed up. After going through the training, she was matched with an adult learner who had been in special education classes throughout school. With excitement and a little nervousness, she began her first session. He wanted to become a more proficient writer so he could fill out job applications with more confidence. He wanted to become a better reader to help with every area of life. At the end of their year together, he had successfully completed a job application and started working in a local store. He has also purchased a car and gotten a credit card. His new confidence and success are rewarding and inspiring to Lynne. She is amazed at the dedication of the learners. They work all day, have families and responsibilities and yet many come straight from work to class and spend two and a half hours studying, trying to improve their literacy skills. Lynne has enjoyed getting together outside of class with the learners and their families to learn about their countries and customs. Lynne is a dedicated, devoted tutor.

Kathy Lyons, Congregation of St. Joseph/School on Wheels, LaGrange Park

For over ten years, Kathy has been a tutor with School on Wheels tutoring at least two or three students each week. She not only quickly assesses the needs of her new students, but she also develops the kind of rapport with students that make them want to stay. Connecting with students from diverse cultural, educational and economic backgrounds, Kathy always goes the extra mile. One of her adult learners, who became a lifelong friend, started tutoring by bringing her preschool son to help her communicate. This learner wanted to read to her children and be

able to attend parent/teacher conferences. Soon, with Kathy's help, she was able to speak English proficiently. Parent/teacher conferences were no longer a worry. In fact, she now works

part-time as an interpreter for a dentist. Another student was a mom from Pakistan who raised seven children in the United States without any English speaking ability. Basic communication was nearly impossible. That learner's goal was to speak enough English to communicate at a place like a grocery store. Her goal changed after working with Kathy. She decided she wanted to work toward taking the citizenship test. The rewards of being a literacy tutor are far greater than Kathy ever imagined.

Nicholas Roessler, Anixter Center, Chicago

Two years ago, Nicholas' tutoring experience changed his life. He was a college student majoring in American Sign Language. For a class assignment he was to meet and talk to deaf people for a certain number of hours during the semester. He decided to tutor at Anixter Center and he began working one-on-one with a learner who was not only deaf but also lacked any language base. The learner communicated with his family by drawing symbols on a table and gesturing back and forth. He was eager to learn English and Nicholas was eager to take on the challenge of tutoring him. When the semester ended, Nicholas continued tutoring. He looked forward to their sessions every week. Now, the adult learner is able to write so he can communicate with people that don't sign. He can read what he wants to read without help. He has a job and has a goal to go to college. Now Nicholas has a new goal, he wants to teach in some fashion for the rest of his life.

Kathleen Sayles, YWCA Adult Literacy, Pekin

Kathie retired after 38 years of teaching and immediately became a volunteer tutor at the YWCA Adult Literacy program. She chose to teach immigrant adults how to speak English embarking on a learning venture that is rewarding and challenging. In just a few weeks she helped a grandmother, unschooled and not knowing her native Thai language, to write her name, address, phone number and the names of her family members. She also helped the learner to read simple books in English and talk about family activities. The woman's granddaughters even bought her books for Christmas because "Grandma likes to read." Another learner from Belarus improved her English while getting Kathie's help to become a U.S. citizen. Early on Kathie accompanied this woman to her son's school to discuss a concern she had with the principal. She did a very good job of expressing her concern and the principal complimented her on her English. This woman also had an experience at a local store that overcharged her for an item. When she realized she was overcharged, she returned to the store to ask for a refund. The women ended up speaking with the store manager and resolving the issue. She told Kathie, "And I wasn't afraid of standing up for myself." Kathie admires her students greatly as they face the challenges of adapting to a new country, culture and language.

Bonnie Schukai, Lawrence Education Center, Springfield

Bonnie retired from the State of Illinois after 34 years and wanted to use her time well. She saw a small ad in the State Journal-Register for volunteer tutors so she applied. She was soon assigned to an ESL class and has had the opportunity to meet many people from around the world. She enjoys helping them learn English but she also enjoys learning about life in their countries. The class serves as a welcoming community where differences disappear and a

sense of family emerges. She is proud to be a part of this experience. Bonnie also facilitates the book club sessions for family literacy moms. Bonnie's passion for reading brings the words to life. At the end of the year, Bonnie invited all of the moms to her home for a formal luncheon with all the trimmings and served beautifully. Bonnie provided hats and white gloves for fun and everyone enjoyed the girl talk and the book talk. The event was so powerful that they talk about it to this day. At another book club meeting, members were given new books. One of the members clutched her book to her chest and said, "I never in my life thought I would own as many as three books." This same book club was also inspired by "Beatrice's Goat." That book describes the true story about a young Ugandan girl who attends school after her family received the gift of a goat from Heifer International. This story led to the book club members having a successful bake sale to raise money for a donation of a goat and flock of geese to Heifer International. The sense of pride on their faces filled Bonnie's heart. Bonnie started as a volunteer wondering what she could offer to the adult learners. She found that what she receives from the experience is greater than what she could offer.

Oneita "Nita" Volz, Common Place Family Learning Center, Peoria

Five years ago Nita agreed to tutor a special class for adults with behavioral and developmental disabilities. Nita has earned the friendship and trust of her students by encouraging them to try their hardest to learn new skills. She will visit them when they are ill and she'll call them at home to check in on them if they miss a class. Nita uses real world materials with her students. Under her gentle guidance, her students have used the dictionary and calculators. They enjoy reading the newspaper and going on field trips. A field trip to the Apple Blossom Farm is still talked about today. The learners were thrilled to be read stories, tour the farm and pick their own pumpkins. Nita is very dedicated to her students and passionate about community services. She expects a lot from her students and they want to rise to her high standards. She is always looking for new activities to introduce to her class and she never fails to inform her students of any activities in town that relate to literacy. Nita feels privileged to be a part of their lives and progress. Alma Kidd is one of the learners that Nita works with and is also here today as a Spotlight on Achievement winner.