

# ILLINOIS LITERACY

SUMMER 2008

**Jesse White**  
Secretary of State  
& State Librarian

This issue of *Illinois Literacy* is dedicated to the achievements of adult learners. In May I attended several Chicago neighborhood celebrations called "Night of a 1,000 Stars," where adult learners shared a poem, a song or just a word of thanks with their fellow learners, tutors and teachers. They applaud one another's successes. They listen to one another's stories. They encourage each other because they share similar goals.



In Springfield, the Spotlight on Achievement and Service Awards honored 10 outstanding adult learners and 10 volunteer tutors. It warms my heart to see how far these adult learners have come and the devotion of these tutors, whose unselfish desire to help improve the lives of others is admirable.

In this issue you also will read about Adult Education Awareness Day at the State Capitol. Adult learners from across Illinois listened to inspiring speeches from literacy and adult education professionals, spoke with their legislators and advocated for their own education. Through education, these learners are taking their place as responsible and involved citizens.

*Jesse White*

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Secretary of State & State Librarian

## "Night of a 1,000 Stars" — where adult learners shine

The commons area of De La Salle High School rang with applause on May 7 for Chicago's Southside Literacy Coalition's "Night of a 1,000 Stars," an annual neighborhood celebration that recognizes the achievements of adult learners. The Westside and Northside Literacy Coalitions also hosted "Night of a 1,000 Stars" events in their neighborhoods.

Coalition member agencies give their students the opportunity to speak at the events. Students might read a poem they wrote, or someone else's, or talk about their personal learning experiences. It's a heartwarming experience to hear the adult learners talk about the challenges they have faced and the positive impact that learning to read has made in their lives.

Joanne Jones, chair of the Southside Literacy Coalition and the volunteer coordinator at Jane Addams Hull House/Parkway, encouraged one of her students to go to the microphone. Mattie Williams told everyone about the goals she was accomplishing that she never dreamt she would, and how Parkway's tutors had been a blessing in her life. Another young man told of dropping out of school in the ninth grade and how he recently passed his GED exam

with a score of 3020 out of 4000.

Adult learners and agency staff were especially honored that Secretary of State Jesse White attended the celebrations. A treasured keepsake for many of the learners was a picture with Secretary White.

"These students are an inspiration to their friends, family members and other adult learners," said Secretary White. "Their accomplishments are a testament to our commitment to keeping literacy at the forefront of our social and economic agenda."



Adult learner Mattie Williams (left) and Joanne Jones, volunteer coordinator for Jane Addams Hull House/Parkway, at the "Night of a 1,000 Stars" celebration.

**Penny Severns grants awarded** — Secretary of State Jesse White awarded Penny Severns Summer Family Literacy Program grants totaling \$247,323 to 53 programs this summer. Funds for the program are allocated by the General Assembly in honor of the late state Sen. Penny Severns who was a staunch supporter of literacy efforts in the state. For details on the awards, visit [www.cyberdriveillinois.com](http://www.cyberdriveillinois.com).

The *Illinois Literacy* newsletter is available at [www.cyberdriveillinois.com](http://www.cyberdriveillinois.com).

## IACEA Adult Education Awareness Day



IACEA, the voice of adult education in Illinois and the state's premier adult education association, hosted its 10th annual Adult Education Awareness Day event on April 9 in Springfield. More than 400 adult education and literacy students and staff from nearly 30 programs across the state converged on the Capitol to raise awareness and bolster support of adult education and literacy programs in Illinois.

Staff and students displayed tabletop exhibits and students learned about government and advocacy before the event to prepare them to see government in action. At the Capitol, participants found their legislators' offices and many talked to their legislators in person. The day culminated with a rally in the Capitol rotunda.

"It's exciting to see students and staff come together from across the state to demonstrate their support of this great cause and to feel a part of the legislative process," said Laura Bercovitz, president of IACEA.

Longtime IACEA board member Bevan Gibson delivered a rousing opening speech, and ICCB Vice President Karen Hunter-Anderson energized the crowd by chanting, "At \$395 per student, IT IS NOT ENOUGH!" Secretary of State Literacy Program Manager Cyndy Colletti encouraged students and told them that their voices not only matter but are the most important voices for legislators to hear. State Rep. Art Turner encouraged students to talk with their legislators about the needs and value of adult education.

Student representatives Hattie Clay and Alena Taft shared their stories about how Illinois Adult Education and Literacy has touched their lives. IACEA legislative consultant Larry Stuffle closed the event, energizing the crowd by saying, "Adult education is the only program in the state that gives back \$3 for every dollar spent," and "Illinois has the best program in the nation!" It was an exciting day of learning for everyone involved.



Spirited participants show their support at Adult Education Awareness Day at the State Capitol.



Hattie Clay, a student at Lawrence Education Center in Springfield, addressed an enthusiastic crowd in the Capitol rotunda.



**FAMILY READING NIGHT** — Pre-ordered posters, bookmarks and other materials for Family Reading Night will be mailed later this summer. To request materials, please contact the Literacy Office at 217-785-6921. See poster on back page.

## Adults + Books + Club = Success!

Common Place Family Learning Center and the Peoria Public Library have collaborated since 1999 on the "Let's Connect! Book Club." Nearly 10 years later, many of the original book club members continue to meet monthly at the Lakeview Branch Library to discuss not only children's picture books and young-adult novels, but also classic and contemporary adult literature.

When the project began, adult learner/tutor pairs read books selected by literacy and library staff, then met for discussions led by a humanities scholar. By the end of the first six months, however, the adult learners wanted to choose their own books, and by the end of the first year the learners volunteered to lead the discussions themselves. At the end of the second year the group tackled *A Long Way from Chicago*, and in the third year participated in the Peoria Reads book choice, *A Lesson Before Dying*.

Among the many successful outcomes of the book club for members are a greater enjoyment of and confidence in reading, an increased number of books and reading in the home, and development of relationships between adults and children around books. The group has even taken their discussions online at <http://friends.peoria.lib.il.us/community/letsconnectonline/index.html>. The site also has funding information and a complete bibliography of books used by the book club.

Pam Ritter, formerly of Common Place, partnered with Peoria Public Library's Roberta Koscielski for the "Let's Connect!" book club and has since duplicated the concept at YWCA Adult Literacy in Pekin. She says, "Hands down, the book club is the most successful adult literacy activity I've ever undertaken."

## 2008 Spotlight on Achievement and Service Awards

Secretary of State Jesse White, along with Sue Montalvo, director of the Illinois First Amendment Center (representing the Illinois Press Association), presented awards to 10 outstanding adult learners and 10 volunteer tutors at the annual Spotlight on Achievement and Service Awards ceremony in May. Student winners received \$200 from the IPA Foundation, a plaque, a personalized *Illinois Blue Book* and a bag of books donated by Delta Systems. Volunteer tutor winners received \$200 for the literacy program where they tutor as well as a plaque and a personalized *Blue Book*.

### Spotlight on Achievement winner highlights:

- **Burnice Blair** wanted to learn to read and write but thought she was too old. She found out that you are never too old to learn. In two years, Burnice acquired new driving skills, can balance her checkbook and pay her bills.
- As a child, **Marco Ceja** attended more than 20 different schools. He struggled to learn to read but never stayed long enough at any one school to get help. Now he has a job and can read his mail, street signs, work orders and books. He also voted for the first time!
- **Michael Dellar** had a very difficult childhood filled with experiences no child should have to endure. In two years, he has learned to read and write stories on a computer and has a part-time job.
- **Alexandra Fleming** was born in Germany and came to the United States 14 years ago. She found the Reading Link Program through her son's school. She can now read and speak better English, help her son with his homework, passed the citizenship test and obtained her driver's license.
- Thailand native **Wantanee Freeman** faced a huge adjustment when she came to the United States. After learning to speak English, she has become more outgoing and can now ask for help when shopping. She also talks to her neighbors more and understands her son's teacher.
- **Delfino Garcia** came to the United States from Mexico when he was 16. With only four years of schooling, he sought out reading, writing and computer skills at Oakton Community College. He has received a promotion at work, can help his children with their schoolwork and can talk with their teachers.
- **Bernice Husher** has overcome many obstacles to get where she is today and to work toward her goal of obtaining her GED. She also gives back to the community by volunteering at her church, the local food pantry, Girl Scouts and the recycling center.
- After 38 years with Maytag Company, **Jerry Mezo** lost his job when the plant closed. Faced with a stack of forms to complete to get benefits following the plant closing, he had to admit that he couldn't read. With the help of a tutor, he has learned to read and write checks and used an ATM for the first time.
- **Christine Moeller** struggled with reading problems throughout school. Severe medical problems interfered with her ability to learn and comprehend. After brain surgery, she has had to retrain her brain. With her tutor's help, she is learning to write sentences and paragraphs and to use a computer.



### 2008 Spotlight on Achievement Winners

Standing left to right: Sue Montalvo, director of the Illinois First Amendment Center; Delfino Garcia, Oakton Community College, Skokie; Bernice Husher, Kaskaskia College Reading Link Program, Centralia; Jerry Mezo, John A. Logan College, Carterville; Christine Moeller, Illinois Eastern Community Colleges (Frontier), Fairfield; Wantanee Freeman, YWCA Adult Literacy, Pekin; and Secretary of State Jesse White. Seated left to right: Alexandra Fleming, Kaskaskia College Reading Link Program, Centralia; Michael Dellar, Blue Gargoyles Community Services, Chicago; Marco Ceja, Waukegan Public Library; and Burnice Blair, Common Place Family Learning Center, Peoria. Roshonda Smith, De La Salle/Tolton Center, Chicago, was unable to attend.



### 2008 Spotlight on Service Winners

Standing left to right: Sue Montalvo, director of the Illinois First Amendment; Ruth Richert, Spoon River College Literacy Project, Macomb; Diana Schueler, YWCA Adult Literacy, Pekin; Tom Barbee, accepting Paul Strauss' award, Blue Gargoyles Community Services, Chicago; Beverly Wheatley, Kaskaskia College, Centralia; and Secretary of State Jesse White. Seated left to right: Carol Randall, YWCA Adult Literacy, Pekin; Robert Mathis, De La Salle Institute/Tolton Adult Education Center, Chicago; Ellen Hooker, Regional Office of Education—St. Clair County, Belleville; and John Fendrich, Common Place Family Learning Center and LVA/Project U.P.W.A.R.D., Peoria. Donald Bartak, Prairie State College, Chicago Heights; Robert Brown, Waubensee Community College, Aurora; and Paul Strauss, Blue Gargoyles Community Services, Chicago, were unable to attend.

- At age 14, **Roshonda Smith** ran away from home. Life on the street was brutal and she endured experiences that left her devastated. When she reconnected with her family, she went to live with her grandmother and enrolled at the Tolton Center. No one in her family had graduated from high school so it was a joyful occasion when she passed the GED test on the first try!

For more information on Spotlight Awards, visit [www.cyberdriveillinois.com](http://www.cyberdriveillinois.com) (click Programs, then Literacy) or contact Diane Manning at 217-524-3005 or [dmanning@ilsos.net](mailto:dmanning@ilsos.net).



**August 15** — Application deadline for books for small rural public libraries offered by The Libri Foundation, [www.librifoundation.org](http://www.librifoundation.org)

**September 8** — International Literacy Day

**September 25-26** — 2008 National Refugee and Immigrant Conference: Issues and Innovations, Chicago, [www.thecenterweb.org/alrc/refugee.html](http://www.thecenterweb.org/alrc/refugee.html), 224-366-8632

**October 1-4** — Pro-Literacy Worldwide Conference, Little Rock, Arkansas, [www.proliteracy.org/conference](http://www.proliteracy.org/conference)

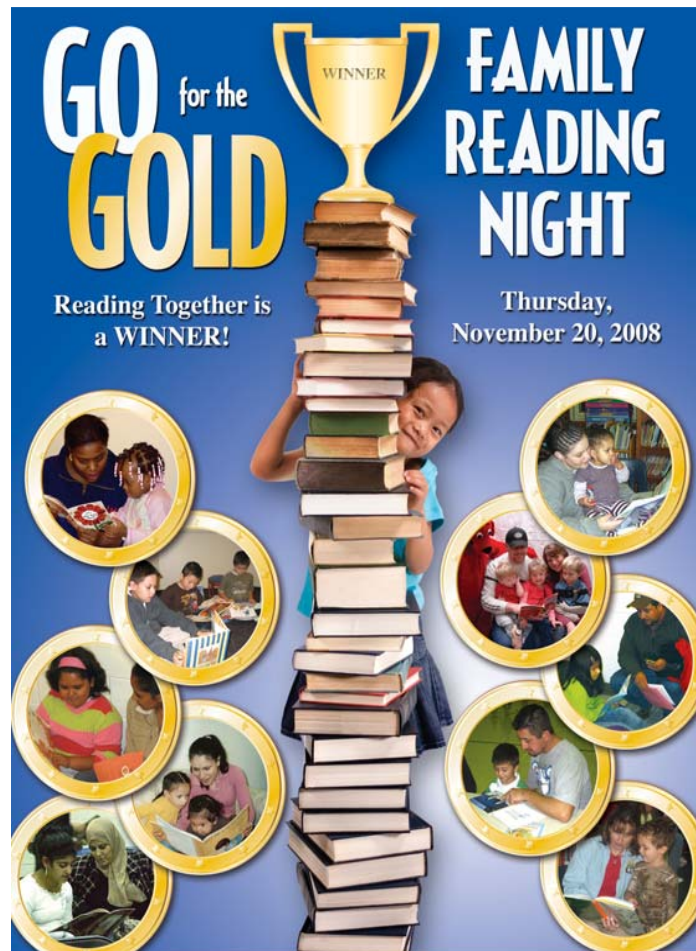
**October 9-10** — Central Illinois Adult Education Service Center Fall Conference, Bloomington, [www.cait.org/ciaesc/conference/index.jsp](http://www.cait.org/ciaesc/conference/index.jsp)

**October 16-17** — International Dyslexia Association Illinois Branch Annual Conference, Oakbrook Terrace, [www.interdys.org](http://www.interdys.org), 630-469-6900

**November 11-14** — American Association for Adult and Continuing Education Annual Conference, Denver, Colorado, [www.aaace.org](http://www.aaace.org)

**November 13-14** — Southern Illinois Professional Development Center Fall Conference, [www.siu.edu/SIPDC](http://www.siu.edu/SIPDC), 618-650-2254

More literacy event information is available at <http://literacy.kent.edu/illinois/calend.htm>.



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