

## 2012 SPOTLIGHT ON ACHIEVEMENT AND SERVICE AWARDS

Anne Craig, director of the Illinois State Library, and Dennis DeRossett, executive director of the Illinois Press Association (IPA), presented awards to 10 adult learners and nine (one winner was unable to attend) 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 for the literacy program where they tutor as well as a plaque and a personalized *Illinois Blue Book*.



**2012 Spotlight on Achievement Winners** - Standing left to right: Dennis DeRossett, executive director, IPA; Supaporn Yip, Albany Park Community Center, Chicago; Gayla Karns, Frontier Community College, Fairfield; Darrell Taylor, Literacy Chicago, Chicago; Tywonda Edwards, Fishes & Loaves Outreach, Springfield; Henry Dillon, Common Place Family Learning Center, Peoria; Anne Craig, director, Illinois State Library. Seated left to right: Lola Jones, DeLaSalle Tolton Center, Chicago; Hilaria Ochoa and her son Eduardo Dominguez, Tolton Center, Chicago; Frantz St. Fort, Indo-American Center, Chicago; Lovell Fisher, Southwestern Illinois College, Belleville; Debra Bradford, John Wood Community College, Quincy.

### **Adult learner winners' stories:**

#### **Debra Bradford, John Wood Community College, Quincy**

As if growing up with alcoholic parents wasn't enough, Debra had to struggle through school as a slow learner. She wanted to learn so even after she lost both parents when she was 15, she

continued to attend school. However, when she reached 21 without graduating, she could no longer attend school. She wanted to join the armed forces but couldn't meet their educational requirements. Her life went into a downward spiral of alcohol and drug abuse. Although she worked in restaurants, she couldn't better herself due to her lack of reading ability. But she managed to supplement her income through her artistic ability by painting murals and signs. But her personal relationships didn't last and she moved frequently. At age 31 a gunshot wound to her head caused severe brain damage. She had to relearn how to read and write at a beginning level. But she gave up the drugs and alcohol and she began to work hard with a tutor in a quest to get her GED. With the help of her tutor, she is now able to read with confidence and comprehends written math problems. Before she takes a section of the GED test, Debra and her tutor work through lessons and GED practice tests. She is well on her way to completing all five sections and the Constitution test. In fact, Debra has become a tutor herself, enjoying helping a fellow student. When she completes the GED test, she wants to go on to become a minister. She is looking forward to serving others.

### **Henry Dillon, Common Place Family Learning Center, Peoria**

Henry was picked on at school because he stuttered and had vision problems. He was told to defend himself from the bullies so he ended up fighting a lot. He was a slow learner and quit high school when he couldn't keep up. When his mother died, he disappeared for a while. He didn't know that something better was out there. No one in his family supported him in his pursuit of an education. One day Henry had a "light bulb moment." He realized he needed to master his reading skills and basic math if he was going to survive. He began coming to Common Place and was matched with a tutor. At first he was very quiet and unsure how to interact with people. In time, his people skills improved immensely. Now, he studies on his own and works very hard with his tutor toward passing the GED test. With his improved reading skills and confidence, he was able to get a job at a local grocery store. He volunteers at Common Place working with the maintenance man and is going to church. He found his Grandma and has been living with her but he hopes to be able to live on his own someday. His drive and focus demonstrate that he will accomplish these goals because he knows anything is possible now.

### **Tywonda Edwards, Fishes & Loaves Outreach, Springfield**

Tywonda dropped out of high school in the ninth grade. As a single mother of four, she wanted to improve life for her family and herself. She sought help from Fishes & Loaves and was matched with a tutor and began taking classes to work toward her GED. She learned that education impacts everything in life. Her increased skills have helped her deal with life's obstacles along the way. She is a hard worker and expects to one day move off of assistance programs, gain employment and become totally self-sufficient. Her fourth grade daughter is very excited to see her Mom going to school. She is working even harder in school like her Mom. Tywonda is able to help her with homework and special projects as well as participate more in school activities. Tywonda now communicates clearly with others and speaks with confidence. All of her determination and hard work has paid off. She took and passed the GED test in December. This fall, she will enroll at Lincoln Land Community College to pursue an Associate degree in Applied Science.

### **Lovell Fisher, Southwestern Illinois College, Belleville**

As a child growing up in Mississippi, the only time Lovell was able to go to school was when the weather was so bad that working in the fields was impossible. His family included six brothers

and one sister who all worked on a farm to earn a living. The landowner's children would get on the bus to go to school and wave out the window to the others working in the fields. Lovell always wanted to get an education but his work schedule made it impossible to devote the time needed to learn. Lovell recently retired after working 40 years for the railroad. He now has the time to devote to working with a tutor. His tutor has opened doors for him that he thought would never open. He is beginning to read basic words and is learning how to sound out new words. When he goes to the grocery store, he reads words now that he never understood. Lovell raised four children making their education a priority. He is so proud that his children have all graduated from high school and three have attended college. His goal is to take the GED test and go on to college. You are never too old to learn.

### **Lola Jones, De La Salle Tolton Center, Chicago**

She wanted life beyond working in the fields, so Mrs. Lola moved to Chicago. She began working. During the day she worked at a cleaners and at night she worked at the post office. But that scheduled didn't leave time for going back to school. For fifty years she wanted to get her high school diploma but she had no time. When she retired, she had time to think about what she wanted to do with the remainder of her life. She chose education. She began to study for the GED at the Children's Home and Aid Society. When that program was terminated, Mrs. Lola was still motivated to continue, so she and her tutor worked together at the neighborhood library. There came a time when her tutor could no longer travel to the south side of Chicago to meet with Mrs. Lola. But Mrs. Lola was still motivated. To meet with her tutor, Mrs. Lola, who walks with a cane, took a bus from the West Englewood to West Garfield. Her determination paid off and she completed the GED requirements at the age of 76! At her graduation ceremony, her message to others was powerful. She told everyone to follow their dreams and not to give up even when you feel life is getting you down. Mrs. Lola wants to be a counselor to encourage people to persevere and to achieve their goals. The Tolton Center is helping her go on to college so she can achieve that goal.

### **Gayla Karns, Frontier Community College, Fairfield**

Gayla has been diagnosed with multiple cognitive disabilities that prevent her from learning easily. She began to take GED classes but it was too much. So she took the initiative and started classes at Frontier with a tutor. However, to get to class she had to have someone drive her 62 miles every time. Gayla is determined to succeed and refuses to let anything get in her way. She works very hard to complete her lessons and prepare for tests. When she first started the program at Frontier, she was shy and lacked confidence. Now she can do more for herself and her family. She has a job and her employer is pleased with her performance. She is able to live on her own with her husband and her guardian is less involved in her decisions. Gayla is an advocate for the literacy program. She has been a guest speaker for the college president as well as the local Rotary Club. Gayla wants to become a literacy volunteer herself. She wants go to college to help others who have learning challenges. She is an inspiration to other students because if she can succeed, they can too.

### **Hilaria Ochoa, Tolton Center, Chicago**

Hilaria only went to the third grade in Mexico. When she moved to Chicago, she began ESL classes to learn to read and write Spanish and to speak, read and write English. Hilaria walks over a mile to ESL class with her four year old son through a neighborhood filled with gangs. She walks through heat, rain and snow, but she doesn't let the weather keep her from going to class. Hilaria, her husband, and their four children live way below the poverty level, yet she

manages to feed them, clothe them and keep them all in school. Learning English has allowed her the opportunity to talk to people in stores, ask questions at her children's school and help her children with their homework. Her family regularly visits the local library. When asked she will help others navigate the neighborhood and school system. She used to be shy but now she is an active participant.

### **Frantz St. Fort, Indo-American Center, Chicago**

A year after the horrific earthquake in Haiti, Frantz and his two brothers relocated to Chicago. Their father insisted that the three brothers come to the U.S. to get a meaningful education. Their father completed the registration papers for Frantz and his brothers to begin the ESL program at Indo-American Center since none of the boys could speak English. Frantz came to English class with a spring in his step as he became more confident in his speaking skills. With his improved English, he was able to get a job to help support the family. Frantz graduated from the most advanced class offered at Indo-American and has started to attend Truman College. Frantz is a young man in a new land who has overcome his apprehension and is determined to make his life productive and meaningful.

### **Darrell Taylor, Literacy Chicago, Chicago**

Growing up in the housing projects of Chicago made life hard for Darrell. After being expelled from school, he battled drug addiction and ended in prison. He lost hope. Released from prison, he felt tremendous pressure to go back to his old life but he fought that temptation. Instead, he began studying at Literacy Chicago to improve his reading and to get back on track with his education. He also enrolled in classes at Safer Foundation to learn to use the computer. Darrell used his newly acquired reading skills to begin a thriving business. He sells CD's, DVD's, and children's clothes. This business has helped him purchase a car and obtain additional jobs at the Salvation Army and a flower shop. He has reconnected with his 15-year-old son and even helps the elderly people in his neighborhood. He is a testament to his fellow classmates that anyone can change their life drastically for the good.

### **Supaporn Yip, Albany Park Community Center, Chicago**

When Supaporn moved to the U.S. from Thailand, she knew very little English but for a Thai immigrant there are cultural stigmas associated with learning so she did not immediately look for help. Supaporn was able to get a job that did not involve speaking English. But you need English in the US for many purposes. For instance, she is married with two school age children, but it was difficult for her to understand what her children's teachers were saying. So she decided to get help with reading, writing and speaking English at Albany Park Community Center. She was matched with volunteer tutors and they began working on her English. She studies her lessons two or three times and sometimes reads out loud. She does whatever it takes to learn English because she is determined not to give up. Now she can communicate with her children's teachers, she can read the papers her children bring home from school and she can talk confidently with her children who speak English well. She has found that she enjoys writing short stories that use her improved English language. She wants to continue learning so she can work in the medical field some day.



**2012 Spotlight on Service Winners** - Standing left to right: Dennis DeRossett, executive director, IPA; Rodney Yarger, Literacy Volunteers Fox Valley, St. Charles; Connie Jenkins, Project READ, Richland Community College, Decatur; Sheela Jeevanandam, DeLaSalle Tolton, Chicago; Yaro Hospodarsky, Rend Lake College, Ina; Anne Craig, director, Illinois State Library. Seated left to right: Lynn Campbell, Peoria Regional Superintendent of Schools, Peoria; Naomi Crowell, Kaskaskia College, Centralia; Mary Gercken, South Suburban College, South Holland; Sister Lucy Giacchetti, SSND, Corazon a Corazon, Chicago; Lori Hesterberg, Monroe/Randolph Regional Office of Education, Chester.

**Volunteer tutor winners' stories:**

**Lynn Campbell, Peoria Regional Superintendent of Schools, Peoria**

Lynn taught for thirty-four years as an English/foreign language teacher, when she retired, she looked for somewhere she could use her teaching skill and experience. A local newspaper ad led her to a volunteer tutor training workshop for Project UPWARD. Lynn jumped at the chance to tutor adults who need to learn how to speak English and how to navigate the American culture. Her learners are excited to become U.S. citizens. Her learners get library cards so they can practice English by reading books, magazines and newspapers. Sometimes they discuss with her what they have read at the library. Lynn finds it rewarding to see the learners move on to English as a Second Language classes. One of her learners was the director of a Saturday morning Korean children's program who is now able to prepare written correspondence in English for parents and her co-workers. Another learner passed the U.S. Citizenship test and was sworn in as a citizen. She becomes a friend to the adult learners she tutors. They value

the time she spends with them and they do not forget her. Those who move away, keep in touch with her. Lynn is thrilled to give back to the community by encouraging foreign born adults to learn English.

### **Naomi Crowell, Kaskaskia College, Centralia**

When Naomi retired from public school teaching, she needed to fill her time and she wanted to use her teaching skills to help others. After visiting Guatemala where she helped a family learn English, she was inspired to help other adults learn the English language. In Guatemala, she had been impressed with the family's eagerness to learn and their gratefulness for her encouragement and her skill in helping them reach their goal. Naomi's first student in the US was a woman from Mexico. Naomi began teaching her English that would help her to handle the many different experiences she would face every day -- from safety issues, to legal issues, to negotiating daily living in the US. Naomi not only volunteers as a tutor but she is also an instructor in English as a Second Language. When the ESL class was cancelled due to loss of funding, she tutored those learners weekly at her church. She started a second ESL tutoring group to tutor workers at a local Chinese restaurant. Through tutoring Naomi has had a chance to assist her learners in many ways. She has given advice on housing options, she has gone to court with learners, she has taken learners shopping and to the doctor. At their swearing in ceremony, she saw the pride in her learners faces as they became US citizens. One young man she tutored wants to become an English teacher. Another Hispanic man graduated from Bible school and has become an outstanding preacher. Naomi helps others reach a richer and fuller life.

### **Mary Gercken, South Suburban College, South Holland**

Mary has always loved to read. So she became fascinated with the process of learning to read and began taking classes to become an early childhood educator or reading specialist. When she heard about South Suburban College's adult volunteer literacy program, she signed right up. Then she met her first adult learner and her life has not been the same. Her first student was an older woman who had suffered a stroke. Although she recovered her physical abilities, she lost her ability to read and especially to read small print. The learner holds down a full time job, but she struggles with everyday tasks such as reading mail or recipes. So Mary began by converting some of her student's favorite recipes to large print. Each week, they would read the food ads and create a shopping list. They worked on filling out forms for work and addressing an envelope. One Christmas, they read the recipe and baked a batch of chocolate chip cookies together. Because of her student's traumatic brain injury, the learner cannot perform consistently from week to week. Mary adjusts to the learner's needs by doing phonetics some weeks, reading about healthy foods some weeks or working on the math skills necessary to balance a checkbook or to double a recipe during other weeks. The experience has been rewarding for both the tutor and student. Mary developed various life skills lessons that other tutors at South Suburban use. She planned the last two Family Reading Nights and helps the program coordinator in many ways.

### **Sister Lucy Giacchetti, SSND, Corazon a Corazon, Chicago**

Born in Italy, Sister Lucy grew up in Chicago. After becoming a nun, she taught in Chicago's inner city and also spent 18 years in missions in both Peru and Italy. When she worked in Peru, she needed to learn Spanish. Learning a third language was hard for her so she knows how it feels when one has to learn another language. She returned to Chicago just as the Academy of Our Lady High School closed due to rising costs and low enrollment. The School Sisters

wanted to maintain a presence on the south side of Chicago so they started teaching English as a Second Language. Sister Lucy volunteered to teach twice a week for four hours a day and Corazon a Corazon was born. The learners assigned to her always attend and are on time. She is not only a wonderful teacher but also a gentle person who cares about the people she teaches and their families. Her learners are proud of learning at Corazon and living on the south side of Chicago. She is proud to be part of Corazon and proud to watch the learners as they begin to believe they can learn English.

### **Lori Hesterberg, Monroe/Randolph Regional Office of Education, Chester**

When Lori was an international student in Germany, she was blessed by the friendship and hospitality of a German woman. She experienced firsthand the difficulty of living in a foreign country without knowing the language. She now volunteers as a tutor to a Chinese family who immigrated six years ago. When they arrived, neither the mother nor the son spoke any English. The husband had immigrated seven years before but had not had the opportunity to learn more than a little English. When their son enrolled in school, he began picking up English so quickly that his parents began to rely on him to translate. However, the mom was determined to learn English herself. Both parents worked long hours at their Chinese restaurant where they picked up some phrases. But the mother wanted to be more fluent so she contacted Monroe/Randolph ROE for help. She was matched with Lori. Lori met with both husband and wife at their restaurant on Saturday mornings before they opened for business. When the wife became pregnant with her second child, Lori helped her with the paperwork for insurance and public aid. She geared the lessons toward medical information needed for having a baby. When the baby was eight months old, Lori helped her mother prepare to take the child back to China on a plane. Lori took the family's first picture together in the U.S. As Lori learned about all the challenges this family has faced, she is even more amazed by the wife's courage and by her cheerful outlook. Tutoring has truly been a rewarding experience for Lori

### **Yaro Hospodarsky, Rend Lake College, Ina**

Yaro was raised in the foster care system as a ward of the state of Ohio. His foster family taught him the value of giving his time and labor to help others without expecting anything in return. He was also taught to value education. He attributes his values to his foster parents. So, to give back, he volunteers as a math tutor at Rend Lake College. For some people, math is to be feared. However, math is not just numbers and right or wrong answers. It requires the ability to read, to comprehend, to make decisions, and to learn from mistakes. Yaro makes learning fun which encourages his students to want to learn. He makes mistakes on purpose in math, so his learners can point out his errors and discuss them. It's a game for the learners to catch his mistakes. Many of his adult learners go on to earn their GED and enroll in college to further their education. Some come back to give him a hug, a handshake or a thank you card. It is rewarding to Yaro because his is making a difference.

### **Sheela Jeevanandam, De La Salle Tolton, Chicago**

Sheela is a CPA who started volunteering as a math tutor several years ago. She is the longest volunteer tutor that Tolton Center has had. Even when she was hospitalized, she was soon picking up where she left off. Sheela has really connected with the adult learners at the Tolton Center. The student population is highly transient but Sheela takes it in stride. She realizes that when a learner doesn't show up for a scheduled appointment, it can mean many things besides irresponsibility. She brings a keen understanding of the math content on both the GED and TABE tests. Her students say her math techniques and shortcuts can't be beat. After

several years of tutoring, she quit her job to pursue more opportunities to assist students in adult education programs. She is currently working one-on-one with five adult learners and conducts group tutoring twice a week. It brings her great joy to realize that she is part of the process to open a new chapter in their lives. For instance, she tutored two sisters who had worked with other tutors before they took the GED test. One sister, who is a single mom of three, was very depressed when she did not pass the test. Then she was matched with Sheela to work on math. Shortly after they started working together, she retook the GED test and passed. The graduation ceremony at the Tolton Center where the sisters received their official diplomas was a real success story. The mother is now attending Harold Washington College and is looking forward to someday being a paralegal.

### **Connie Jenkins, Project READ, Richland Community College, Decatur**

After retiring from teaching, Connie immediately signed up for Project READ's volunteer tutor training. After training, she helped several teen mothers improve their reading and math skills. She was then matched with an adult learner that she continues to work with four years later. Because they have become friends, they now spend time together outside of tutoring sessions. Connie is very patient, understanding and makes her learners feel comfortable. After working a full time job from 11:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m., her student comes to sessions with Connie three days a week. Connie teaches her how to break down words so she can read. One of the learner's goals was to be able to read her Bible aloud during Sunday School and participate in the discussion of that lesson. A few months ago she not only read the Bible aloud, she led the Sunday School lesson. A year ago, she would never have attempted that. Connie also teaches an Introduction to Health course for the CNA program. She tutors after class those learners who need more help. She also shares her tutoring expertise with women at the Decatur Correctional Center to help them improve their reading and math skills. These learners want to qualify for early release and have a better chance at getting a job. Connie's heart is so big that she gives generously of her time and skills to help struggling adults improve their abilities and meet their goals.

### **Terry Schlabach, Black Hawk College, Moline**

Terry is a full-time professor of Occupational Therapy at St. Ambrose University but shares her teaching talents with low level ESL students at Black Hawk College. She teaches through touch, music and movement and there is always laughter in her room. Terry puts so much time and effort into preparing her lessons that her adult learners have achieved huge gains since she began volunteering. She helps the learners outside of tutoring by taking them to appointments, helping them fill out job applications, and look for housing. She even collects donated items to take to their homes so they will have warm clothing, enough food and adequate furniture. She will always remember the smile on her learner's face when was able to read the book "Brown Bear, Brown Bear" to the program coordinator all by himself. Learning to read brought such joy and pride to this man. It helped mitigate the sadness when he passed away suddenly the very next week. Terry volunteered two days every week when the program offered a summer program last year. Even though there were days when the temperatures reached the upper 80's, Terry came in, smiling, and ready to teach. Terry feeds off the enthusiasm of the adult learners in the literacy program. She teaches functional skills that will have meaning in their life. She is thankful for the opportunity to share her teaching abilities with an amazing group of people.

### **Rodney Yarger, Literacy Volunteers Fox Valley, St. Charles**

Rod was a retired engineer who, despite lacking formal training as a teacher, wanted to help others learn to read. After he completed tutor training, he began working with a man from Mexico. This man had limited oral skills, was unemployed and had just been in a car accident so even transportation was an issue. Rod met him at a location within walking distance of his home and quickly established a rapport. His reading skills skyrocketed as he went from a first grade reading level to a fifth grade reading level equivalency. Now he is learning to write and he has developed a love of writing. There have been times when this learner worked a lot of overtime but he was always on time and never missed a lesson with Rod. In fact, sometimes he would turn down overtime offers if it meant he would have to skip a tutoring lesson. Only a skilled motivator and teacher could trump an offer of more pay. His student did find a better job and with his improved English language skills, he is the primary go-to person when someone needs translation assistance. He is on a fast track to succeed in getting his GED. Rod's next student from Burma, had never been to school. He had just lost his job when they began working together. In a few months, he was able to read beginning level books to his children as his vocabulary increased dramatically. Rod helped this student learn life skills that extend beyond learning English. He found a bike for the student to use to get to the grocery store and to other urgent places. His student was told to call Rod whenever he needed help. He called. Rod helped him understand a certified letter that he received. He helped him find two used fans when his top floor apartment was stifling during the 90 degree temperatures. Helping someone learn to read for the first time in their life, helping them cope with life's circumstances, helping them make their life more comfortable and helping them find a job not only helps the student but makes Rod's life more meaningful.