

2015 Spotlight on Achievement and Service Awards

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



2015 Spotlight on Achievement Winners - Standing left to right: Dennis DeRossett, executive director of the IPA; Nube Vidal, Albany Park Community Center, Chicago; David Tolen, Erie Neighborhood House, Chicago; Norma Sanchez, Regional Office of Education Peoria County, Peoria; Lisette Lopez, Illinois Eastern Community College, Fairfield; Venetta Hunt, De La Salle/Tolton Center, Chicago; Secretary White. Sitting left to right: Maria Reyna, Oakton Community College, Skokie; Carina Reyes-Carranza, De La Salle/Tolton Center, Chicago; William Grant, Literacy DuPage, Naperville; Bobby L. Archie Jr., Common Place Family Learning Center, Peoria; Ronald Cluck, Lester and Rosalie Anixter Center, Chicago.

Adult learner winners' stories:

Bobby L. Archie, Jr., Common Place Family Learning Center, Peoria

Bobby had always struggled in school. He dropped out of school in the 9th grade. Bobby started hanging out with the wrong crowd and wound up incarcerated several times. He vowed never to return to prison. His focus remains on constantly improving his life. The improvements include obtaining better housing and employment. He is also continuing his education. "When I got out of prison I wanted to make a change for the better. I brought my reading grade level up after 2 months. I am proud of this accomplishment. In the near future I plan on opening my own Lawn Care business."

Ronald Cluck, Lester and Rosalie Anixter Center, Chicago

Ron had a Traumatic Brain Injury at age 17. The injury has impeded his learning abilities from a developmental standpoint. His physical disability also caused many challenges regarding communication and movement. He has met those challenges head on by participating in creative writing groups. His participation in creative writing expanded his understanding of literacy as well as improving his writing skills. His biggest accomplishment to date has been founding his own small business.

William Grant, Literacy Dupage, Naperville

William completed 10 years of school when he was a young man. William decided to quit school and worked for 34 years as a Chicago cab driver. Illness forced him to leave his job behind at the early age of 59. He always had the goal of getting his GED, but it was difficult to find time to work on it while driving a cab 12 hours a day and raising a family. For more than a year he has met weekly with a tutor to improve his reading and writing. His participation in creative writing expanded his understanding of literacy as well as improving his writing skills. "Since I started with Literacy DuPage I am able to read and understand the Bible and Sunday school lessons better. I am able to stand before the people and speak clearer than I used to."

Venetta Hunt, Tolton Center, Chicago

Venetta is no different than most of the students at Tolton Center. Venetta regularly overcomes obstacles most people find insurmountable. When Venetta initially enrolled at the Tolton Center she was reserved, suspicious, and distrustful. Her work at Tolton has helped her emerge as a student ambassador who helps with new student transition at Tolton. Sometimes her energy gets low or she feels depressed. She has learned to energize herself by removing a palm card from her purse and repeating the pronunciation and definition of the word perseverance. She then applies it to the situation at hand.

Lisette Lopez, Illinois Eastern Community College (Frontier), Fairfield

Lisette moved to this country from Peru and settled in a rural area of the United States. The only jobs available were on pig farms, factory work, or cooking in local Mexican restaurants. Lisette wanted more for herself and her family than those limited options. An aunt took her to the Adult Literacy Program at Frontier Community College. "Currently, I am in my last semester of college obtaining my Associate in Art and Sciences. I plan to transfer to University of Illinois at Chicago to complete my degree in Chemical Engineering. This way I can focus in the development of medicine to improve the lives of other people."

Carina Reyes-Carranza, De La Salle/Tolton Center, Chicago

As a little girl in Mexico, Carina's family was very poor and often had no food. She got married and knew that she wanted to provide her daughters with a more secure future. Her husband lost his job. The young couple looked at this an opportunity to move to Chicago. Carina's incredible intelligence and her determination helped her succeed. "I used to be shy and had a lack of self-confidence. My tutor told me

how smart I am and that I could accomplish anything I set my mind to. I studied harder. Now I am able to write long stories with good grammar in English. I speak English fluently. I am definitely not shy anymore.”

Maria Reyna, Oakton Community College, Skokie

Maria has faced many obstacles in her life. She was abused by her family and the others around her. She thought she was not bright and achieved only an elementary school education. When she arrived in the United States she spoke no English. She arrived with three young children and no income to support them. Little by little, Maria learned English and began to support her family. She learned to help her children with their school work. She returned to school to improve her reading and writing skills, get her GED, go to college and become a nurse. This year alone she has renegotiated her mortgage, passed a CNA course, and enrolled in a GED program.

Norma Sanchez, Peoria County ROE Adult Literacy/UPWARD, Peoria

When Norma settled in Peoria, she got a job in a school cafeteria. She noticed the children in the school were excited to be there. She also noticed the children conversing in English. At that time she had limited English skills. So Norma enrolled in the Peoria County Adult ROE Adult Literacy Program and worked with a tutor at the local library. When Norma completed the program she still felt like she wanted more than to just learn English in her chosen land. She studied citizenship lessons and worked very hard. When she passed the test, her family and friends were just as excited as she was.

David Tolen, Erie Neighborhood House, Chicago

David was in the demoralizing position of being jobless in a new country. He was unfamiliar with the language and culture. David enrolled in the Erie House literacy programs. David was persistent and started to overcome these difficulties. However, David did not uproot himself from his home country and master a new language simply to improve the circumstances of himself and his family. He also advocates for a better life on behalf of his friends and neighbors.

Nube Vidal, Albany Park Community Center, Chicago

Nube arrived in Chicago from Ecuador. She had not finished high school and did not have much work experience. She relates, "My life was very hard because I did not speak English. My daughter was very sick and I was at the emergency room. I needed a translator and had to wait an hour before she could receive care. Someone offered me a job, but I could not take it because I did not know English. Now I've finished the fourth level of English and am in the Beginning ABE Reading class. In the last year I took the Childcare Career Bridge class at APCC and the Home Childcare Business class at Truman College. In this way I have changed my life and my family.”



2015 Spotlight on Service Award Winners – Standing from left to right: Dennis DeRossett, executive director of the IPA, Nancy Hahs, Rend Lake College, Ina; Phyllis Harmening, Kaskaskia College, Centralia; Jan Herman, Illinois Eastern Community College, Fairfield; Bill Slusser, Common Place Family Learning Center, Peoria; Secretary White. Sitting from left to right: Ira Goodkin, Literacy Volunteers of Western Cook, Oak Park; Steve Friedman, Erie Neighborhood House, Chicago; Barbara Denny, School and Tutors on Wheels, LaGrange Park; Olga Delgado-Cano, UIC Center for Literacy, Chicago; RoseMary Sullivan, De La Salle/Tolten Center, Chicago. Not pictured: Greg Mucci, Lester and Rosalie Anixter Center, Chicago.

Volunteer tutor winners' stories:

Olga Delgado-Cano, University of IL at Chicago Center for Literacy, Chicago

A year and a half ago Olga joined the program at the UIC Center for Literacy as an Americorps volunteer. She was assigned to the ESL department where she helped teach English as a new language to parents at various Head Starts in Chicago. She was also an immigrant who came to this country not knowing English. She wanted to raise children who could have every opportunity this country offers. As she herself says, "Volunteering has helped me grow immensely as a person. I have learned that there is much more joy in giving than receiving."

Barbara Denny, School and Tutors on Wheels, Chicago

Barbara has been a tutor with School and Tutors on Wheels for almost five years. She began tutoring at a location which was the closest to her home. She soon discovered that another location had a need for more tutors, so she instantly agreed to go to that site even though it was the one furthest from her home.

In addition to helping students improve their English skills, she assists students in studying for the citizenship test, the GED test, and the driver's license test. Always well organized, punctual, and dependable, she even schedules her vacation days around her tutoring times.

Steve Friedman, Erie Neighborhood House, Chicago

Over the past three and half years Steve Friedman has volunteered as an adult literacy tutor. He exhibits an extraordinary level of dedication, passion, and quality. Steve lives to teach and this fact is clearly embodied in the high caliber of his teaching. He knows how to motivate individuals to learn, and shows a remarkable aptitude for listening to his students and learning from their experiences. He is especially attentive to learners with special needs, and he goes to extra lengths to ensure that each of them can fully participate in his tutoring sessions regardless of their particular learning circumstances.

Ira Goodkin, Literacy Volunteers of Western Cook County, Oak Park

Commenting on his service, Ira said, "The demands of my professional and family life limited my ability to volunteer. Once I retired, I felt it important to contribute to the community in some way. I had a good deal of experience teaching and training and have a passion for reading. I decided to explore literacy tutoring. I love the idea of being able to help someone else experience the enrichment that reading provides to me in so many ways. I love the personal interaction that tutoring provides as well as the idea that I can help someone have a better life."

Nancy Hahs, Rend Lake College, Ina

Nancy has been an ESL tutor since February of 2014. Nancy cares very deeply for her learners. She prepares treats for them. Her enthusiasm makes them so excited to learn about American culture that they ask to take home American History books to continue reading. As Nancy herself tells it, "I love helping people learn and succeed. People that come here have dreams and hopes. They can't possibly accomplish either one of these if they can't communicate or understand our language. Just seeing the look on a learner's face when they have succeeded, no matter how large or small, is a great motivation for me."

Phyllis Harmening, Kaskaskia College, Centralia

Phyllis Harmening has been a tutor for Kaskaskia College since 2005. She has tutored restaurant owners, air pilot students, homemakers and out-of-work immigrants. Phyllis not only tutors, but she also mentors her learners and develops a lasting bond. The first learner she tutored still keeps in touch with her although she has moved out of the Kaskaskia College district. She demonstrates patience and flexibility in her method of tutoring, but most important she is successful with her tutoring and is sought after by ESL advocates. She reaches out to the community and volunteers in nursing homes, churches and schools.

Jan Herman, Illinois Eastern Community College (Frontier), Fairfield

Jan has served in literacy for over ten years. In January of 2014 she became a tutor for a new English as a Second Language class. For the past two years, she has tutored a community learner in his home because he has learning disabilities and no transportation. She spends her own money to reward her students like taking them to local restaurants for reaching a new reading level, or for reading a book. Jan says, "I hope that my efforts are making a difference by helping low literacy individuals to become self-sufficient and to realize that they have much to offer their families and their communities. They are certainly enriching my life."

Greg Mucci, Anixter Center, Chicago

Greg is a volunteer tutor at Anixter. He is always seeking both to help and to learn. He has utilized the tutoring relationships he has engaged in as a way to build his American Sign Language skills, knowledge of Deaf culture, and to use his English skills to help those in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community. He has tutored 4 learners for over 70 hours. He assists with completing Better Business Bureau complaints, studying for the Illinois Drivers License test, improving learner's English skills, and using creative writing to better writing skills.

Bill Slusser, Common Place Adult Learning Center, Peoria

Bill has been working with Adult Learners at Common Place for the past four years. He always makes sure that his students understand the material, directions and the processes of learning. He encourages students to call him at home if they don't understand their homework. It is important to him that he listens to his students. He makes every attempt to meet their needs. "After I retired I gained time to volunteer to help someone else. I enjoy teaching basic math operations and relish the challenge to help my students reach their academic goals. Watching them learn and advance is wonderful. This is my reward."

RoseMary Sullivan, De La Salle's Tolton Adult Education Center, Chicago

After 43 years in education RoseMary now serves as a volunteer tutor. She spends much time in preparation and finding or creating materials that meet the needs of her learners. These materials she then shares with other teachers and volunteers. She is often found helping a student even after her tutoring sessions. RoseMary relates, "Working with the Tolten students, at least half of whom are adults over the age of 40, is the most rewarding and most challenging teaching I have ever done. Their perseverance inspires me to keep looking for materials and teaching techniques that will give them a sense of accomplishment and knowledge to better navigate the pathways of their lives."