

Student/Tutor Newsletter

Literacy Center of West Michigan



Literacy Center
of West Michigan

Our Super Students



On March 6, 2008 the Literacy Center of West Michigan held its first Spellebration. It was a combination of the annual celebration dinner and the annual fundraiser with the super-fun adult spelling bee.

Our adult tutoring program honored several of our students and a tutor this year. Tutor Monty Burch was awarded the Tutor of the Year. Monty had to leave but his wife talked about how much Monty loves tutoring and that he has learned as much as his students have, if not more! Our Reader of the Year was Gus Wilhelm. He works with tutor Julian Stroh.

Gus has been learning a couple years and is now able to read about his favorite subject, American History.

Our Language Learner of the Year was Sylena Vu. She is tutored by Belinda Stapley. Sylena was so obviously filled with joy as she accepted her award and was able to share that with her young daughter Katie.

We had two student speakers at the Spellebration as well. Gerald Nester is a reading student tutored by Lynn Brozek. He shared with the audience about how learning to read had such a great impact on

his life and family.

Gerald was surrounded by his family at the dinner.

Our other student speaker was Juana Pablo. She and her tutor Danielle Senneker shared how much tutoring together has enriched their lives. Juana has been a student since 2004 and is originally from Guatemala.

We hope to see many more of you next year, at this special event that is all about you and the importance of what you are doing. The road to self improvement is not always easy, but you are not alone! Come join us!

be ready to speak English, and be ready to have fun!

Comstock Park Library
3943 W. River Dr NE
(616)647-3860

March 2008

Special points of interest:

- March 18—Tutor In-service on Testing
- April 8, 10, 15, 17—New Tutor Training Classes
- April 30—Student Workshop, topic to be announced
- May 6—Tutor In-service, how to better use the ESL series Ready To Go

In This Issue

Our Super Students (about our Spellebration)	1
It's Talk Time (an opportunity for students)	1
My Story by Nataliya Rapeyko	2
Student and Tutor of the Quarter, Nataliya and Ruth Baron	2
Writing by Leticia Cisneros	3
A Heartfelt Thanks from Tsegahewit Fitwi	3
It's Spring! (a mini wordsearch)	4

It's Talk Time!

Are you looking for more opportunities to speak English? The Comstock Park Library is offering a free conversation group for adults who want a fun and relaxed setting to meet and brush up on

their language skills. The group meets each Tuesday night from 6:30 – 8 p.m. at the Comstock Park Library. The last meeting is April 29. You don't need to call first; you can just show up. But

Nataliya Rapeyko—My Story

People always try to find better places to live. Many reasons drove them to leave their native lands. A desire for a better life and a secure future are the main reasons. America is the best place to solve these problems.

Almost eleven years ago my husband, Igor, and I came to America from Kiev (Ukraine). We worried about doing it because it was a new country, a new language and an absolutely new place to live. I was 7 months pregnant. We had a five-year-old Collie named Red. We couldn't think leaving him home! All together we flew about 12 hours from Kiev to Chicago with one stop in Warsaw. It was a difficult flight, especially for Red. We did give a shot to him and he slept in his cage in the luggage compartment of the airplane with a temperature of -50°C. My husband's parents met us in Chicago and drove us to Grand Rapids. They and my husband's sister had come one year earlier. They helped us to survive our first year in new country.

I remember first impressions of Grand Rapids. It is not a big city (after Kiev with almost 5 million population), but beautiful. We liked it and we decided that it would be the best place to raise children and to build a future for us. I really missed my parents and friends but we did it mostly for our kids.

When we recovered over from our flight (especially it was difficult

for our dog, he was like a drunker about 2 weeks!), we tried to live. First we went to the Public School to learn English (ESL). Second we tried to find a job. We applied in many places but nobody called back. Just one friend (from Kiev too) was working in Meijer and helped my husband to find a job in Meijer (night shift). I got my first job the same way in T.J.Maxx. Igor and I have a diploma from Kiev State Universities, but we couldn't dare to dream about a job in our specialties.

Two months after we came, my first daughter, Ruth, was born. I wanted my mom to come to help me. We tried to invite her to Grand Rapids as a guest for a few months but the Immigration Service didn't allow her to come. I always wanted my parent to come to live with me. I really wanted it and after a few years they won a Green Card. Now they have lived in Grand Rapids for almost six years close to me.

Time flies. I couldn't say that our blend into American life was terribly hard, but it wasn't easy. We had before and still have some problems but we are trying to solve them as they come.

We went to college (GRCC) and graduated in two years. After my first job I worked for D&W stores (thanks to Igor, who already worked there). Again we couldn't have our professional job. Later Igor got another job, working as a maintenance electrician in Lacks Int. and still

does. This is close enough to his specialty.

Step by step we tried to solve our problems and to achieve our goals. When we came, we rented apartments, later we bought our first house, not big but just big enough for us. When we had two more beautiful daughters we decided to buy a bigger house. Now we live in a big, comfortable house. I stay home and take care of my three daughters. But I try to find a job for myself. I really want a job in my specialty as a biologist. In spite of my education I feel I will be an immigrant all the time. This is my most difficult task, to find the right job here.

Mainly our life is OK and certainly I can say we found our new home in Grand Rapids. We have all our parents and relatives around us. We have many friends. Of course we miss our friends in Ukraine, but we communicate by phone all the time. Three years ago we visited Kiev and met all of them.

Many immigrants have difficulty merging into American life, some more than others. Keeping two cultures is hard! I hope that "coming of age" problems will not be so hard for our kids. They are from two cultures too. We speak Russian at home and we try to keep our traditions. At the same time our kids are doing well at school they have friends and everything that is necessary for a happy life.

Student and Tutor of the Quarter: Nataliya Rapeyko and Ruth Baron

Nataliya and Ruth have been working together since August 2007. They meet each week at the Cascade Library. Nataliya is very well educated in her native Ukraine and is working hard at finding a job. She would like to work for the Van Andel Institute. She and her tutor, Ruth, not only practice speaking English together, but also work on polishing Nataliya's résumé.

Ruth is always looking for new materials to challenge Nataliya and soon they will begin reading the "One Book, One County" novel together. The women share a special friendship and enjoy spending time laughing and learning together.

We are delighted to have Nataliya and Ruth as part of the Adult Tutoring Program!

Ruth and Nataliya at a typical tutoring session.



Student Writing—My Experiences After My English Classes

The following was written by one of our students, Leticia Cisneros. She is tutored by Shay Kraley.

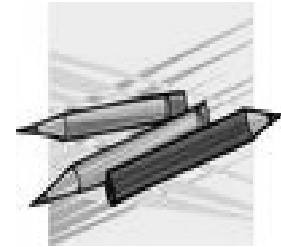
I have been living in the US for thirteen years. I could not take classes for awhile. Now I want to thank my tutor for her help

so that I can learn English, which has helped me in my daily life and work.

Now I can learn medication instructions, and I can talk easily to my doctor.

I want to keep on learning because my grandson will be born soon. I want to be able to

help him with homework when he goes to school. I also want to communicate well with him and other people.



A Heartfelt Thank You



This letter was written by one of our language learners,

Tsegahiwet Fitwi.

Dear Kent County Literacy Council,

Thank you for helping us to learn English. Volunteer people teach us to learn English.

Thank you for working hard with me. Learning is very important to people's lives.

From Tsegahiwet Fitwi

Tsegahiwet currently works with tutor Pam Showalter and has been a LCWWM student since 2004!

When I Was A Young Girl—by Ranka Crnomarkovic

When I was three years old my father died. I lived with mom and five sisters. Mom had to do all the jobs in the house, barn and fields. When we were growing up we started to help with all the work. We helped as much as we could according to our abilities and ages. My sisters and I were attending school but we also helped in the house and in the fields.

Mom was a hard worker and she never said "it's hard for me and I can't do any more" and we followed her example. My mother was always joyful, smiling and full of life. Observing her we learned to face challenges in life. We learned not to let

any obstacle stop us.

My mother did not work in dad's company but she did receive his retirement payment. It was only a small amount to provide for all of us so we found ways to make more money. We all worked together and we planted different kinds of vegetables for our needs, but some like carrots we planted to sell. We had a cow and usually one or two pigs and hens. We had healthy food, eggs, meat, vegetables, fruits and dairy products.

We were proud of our work and grew up happily with our mom. She was a dedicated worker and a wonderful

example for us. We didn't have a lot of possessions but we were carefree and happy. We faced life in a positive way and were delighted with small things. All of my sisters, my mom and I worked hard but we also enjoyed our life together.

Ranka works with our tutor Phyllis Karsina. They have been together since 2004 and have worked for almost 260 hours!

Ranka is originally from Bosnia.



Literacy Center of West Michigan

**111 Library Street NE
Grand Rapids, MI 49503**

*“Building a literate community and
transforming lives by
strengthening reading and language skills.”*

Visit our web site at
www.literacycenterwm.org

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Be An Author! Attention both tutors and students: if you are interested in writing a poem, story, or other selection for the Tutor/Student Newsletter, please submit your creation to:

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