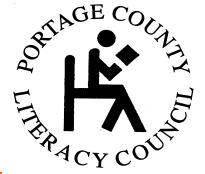




Literacy Lines



Portage County Literacy Council, Inc.

Highlights From Tom's Desk

In January, English classes resumed for adults in the community who were anxious to learn or improve their English listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. By June, ninety-eight individuals had participated in weekly classes and, of these, 75 had achieved the goal of improving one literacy level as defined by Department of Education standards.

In March (the last Thursday in March to be exact) the Literacy Council held its Second Annual Un-Scrabble Fundraiser with considerable success. Over \$10,000 were raised with the help of sponsors: Worzalla Publishing Co, Delta Dental, Ministry Health Care, Worth Company, Noel Group and UWSP-Multicultural Affairs to support Literacy Council programs. Through the spring, sixty-five Literacy Council volunteer tutors met individually with their assigned learners to address specific learner literacy goals.

On the first of July, PCLC was awarded a continuation grant from the US Dept. of Labor, Faith-based and Community Initiative for 2006-07. This was particularly gratifying in that only twenty-four of the fifty 2005-06 recipients nationwide were funded for a second year.

The new grant along with continued United Way support allowed us to provide six weeks of summer English classes that included outings to a dairy farm, a nursery, a summer concert in Bukolt Park, the historic village in Plover, and the Schmeekle Reserve during which each of the students asked prepared questions.

After an August break, English classes resumed again at beginning, intermediate and high-intermediate levels. Emphasis continued to be on very basic skills for the beginners such as time, money, greetings, and basic vocabulary for numbers, measurement and directions. The intermediate group (no longer needing interpreters) concentrated on conversational skills needed in the community and workplace and moved writing notes and simple sentences to writing paragraphs. The high-intermediate group communicates well verbally but continues to address grammatical English both in speaking and writing.

There are currently forty-one adults enrolled in PCLC classes representing twelve nationalities: Thailand, Laos, Mexico, Columbia, Brazil, China, Tibet, Ukraine, Poland, Russia, Armenia, and Germany.

2006 continues to be an extremely successful year for the Literacy Council thanks in a large part to your interest and support. We enter the winter with significant gratitude!

Tom Parker, Executive Director

Celebrating Success

The following is a series of articles developed by Jeff Bendis, volunteer and retired corporate executive. In the final analysis, our organization is dependent on relationships. PCLC is simply made up of people, with histories, skills, needs and connections, that participate individually and collectively toward a goal of community inclusiveness. Competence in a common language allows for development of further relationships that promote understanding, tolerance, and economic self sufficiency. Here are a few of the over 150 stories of volunteers and adult learners that make up the Literacy Council connections.

The Vangs - A Very Special Stevens Point Family

What an incredible story that begins with **Mai C. Vang**, who along with husband **Zoov**, came to America in 1979 from a Hmong refugee camp in Thailand when Mai was a twenty-one year old mother of three. When they arrived in Minnesota, having been sponsored by a cousin, none of them spoke a word of English. "I couldn't read, write, or speak any English," said Mai. "But, Zoov, who knew about America from his schooling in Laos, said we would be safe here."



Ginny Ellingson and Mai C. Vang

From her earliest childhood years, Mai wanted to go to school, but her family - like most Hmong families - sent their daughters to work in the fields and, those who could, sent their sons to school. "I remember crying myself to sleep when my brother went off to school and I thought all the time about someday getting an education."

Now, in America, she had her chance. Mai began to take English lessons for just a few hours a week and continued when the family moved to Wausau in 1984. Then when Mai and Zoov moved to Stevens Point in 1986 to find a better home, raise their growing family, and allow Zoov to open his own tailoring business, Mai concentrated her efforts on the children and new business. She wanted the children (boys and girls) to cherish and take advantage of their educational opportunities. Mai's own English improved with constant contact with customers and the children learning English at school.

"My brother told me about Tom Parker, who was his Literacy Council tutor. By the time I met Tom he had become the director of the Literacy Council and, he suggested that I continue to study English and work toward a GED at Mid-State Technical College," said Mai. Obtaining a degree was so far off her personal radar screen that Mai couldn't believe what Tom was telling her. Was it really possible to get some sort of a diploma?

She also didn't know that a GED stood for General Education Degree and was similar to a high school diploma.

But, bulldog that she is, Mai enrolled in school and with Tom's help once again, was put into a more advanced class. Tom found a tutor for Mai - one Ginny Ellingson - who we'll talk about later. "Ginny was the perfect tutor," according to Mai.

Mai's dream became a reality on May 15, 2006 when she, proudly wearing her cap and gown, and with her husband and four of her six children in attendance, received her diploma. In this case it wasn't just the American dream, it was the dream of a little Laotian girl who refused to give up.

Mai is now a Teacher's Assistant at Ben Franklin Junior High School and an interpreter for the 7th grade Hmong students. "I love my job," said Mai, "But I'm continuing my education at Mid-State in the evenings taking classes in computers and typing." Mai will, apparently, forever be a student.

At the close of the interview, Mai said, "Be sure to write that Tom and Ginny changed my life."

The Vang Story Continues

One of the three Vang children, who made their way from that Hmong refugee camp in Thailand to Minnesota and eventually to Stevens Point, was then three-year old **Mai H. Vang**.

Now Assistant to the Chancellor for Equity and Affirmative Action at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, Mai H. is a graduate of SPASH, received her Bachelor of Science in Education and Master of Science in Education Degrees from UWSP and is working on her Ph.D. in Educational Leadership at UW Madison. Obviously, the pursuit of knowledge apple didn't fall far from the Mai C. tree.



Mai H. Vang

With her degrees in hand, Mai went to work for the School of Education at UWSP as a grant's coordinator and taught English as a Second Language at the elementary school level. Along the way, Mai met Dayle Upham - more about her later - and they began to talk about the Literacy Council.

About getting involved with the Council, Mai said, "It was a no-brainer. Mom had already met Tom and was doing so well with English and her other studies and Dayle was very convincing. For me, it was important to be a teacher in the program for a while. It enabled me to learn about the agency and the people the Council serves."

Part of what Mai learned is that a Literacy Council language teacher becomes much more than a language teacher. So much of learning to live in America - as her mother

had learned years before - is finding out how and where to get things done. Where's the best place to shop for food and clothing? How do I apply for a better job? Where can I get help for my kids in school? How do I get the medical care that my family needs?

"I felt that my students would not view me positively as a counselor if I had not been their teacher," said Mai. "The Council is a tremendous community resource going far beyond teaching people to read and write."

Mai, who lives in Stevens Point with her 12-year-old daughter **Madilynn Moua** and her 10-year-old son **James Moua**, plans to remain a member of the Council Board of Directors and increase her role. "The Council can't exist unless there are people who need us and there seems to be no end of people who need us," said Mai.

And Still, The Vang Story Continues

This time, the main character is Mai C.'s daughter **Lee Vang** who also emigrated from Thailand to Minnesota and then eventually to Stevens Point with the family when she was only one year old.

Also a graduate of SPASH, Lee has a Bachelor of Science Degree from UWSP in Regular Education and English as a Second language. In 2007, if all goes as planned, she will receive her Masters Degree in General Education also from UWSP. This family just keeps on seeking knowledge.

With her degree in hand, Lee is in her second year of teaching at the McKinley Center - a Charter Elementary School. "I love teaching children," said Lee. "And after substituting a couple of times for my sister Mai last year at the Literacy Council, I began to teach my own class this year. It feels good to help the community at both levels - the children and the adults." With their advanced degrees and successful careers, Mai and Lee are examples of the importance of English and education to the families they touch as Literacy Council teachers.

Lee and her husband **Kou Yang** live in Stevens Point with their two children **Austeen**, age 13, and **Tristan**, age 7.

Three members of one amazing family devote their time and energy to the Portage County Literacy Council: as a student, as a board member, and as teachers.

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Students Need Teachers - Mai Vang Needed Ginny Ellingson

"I was born in Kenosha and raised in Union Grove," said **Ginny Ellingson**. "It was sort of a Happy Days existence - for those who remember the TV show by that name." Then it was on to college at Racine Kenosha County Teacher's College to become an

elementary school teacher and then on to Carthage College and finally Cardinal Stritch University where Ginny received a Bachelor of Arts Degree with a major in English and a Master of Arts Degree in Special Education - Learning Disabilities.

“When my son **Brett** was diagnosed with a learning disability, I decided to concentrate in the area of dealing with children with similar problems,” said Ginny. “Teachers are trained to think about how we present information to our students. The problem with children with special needs is not what they are taught, but how what they are taught is being received.” This change in approach requires a very special style of teaching and a very special teacher.

So began a 19-year teaching career in Superior, Wisconsin mostly at the junior high school level. When husband Jim passed away and both Brett and daughter **Lara Pagel** ended up in this area, it was time for Ginny to retire and relocate here as well (such is the pull of children and grandchildren) - Lara you see has two daughters **Alyssa**, age 7, and **Kristin**, age 5. Lara and husband **Mike Pagel** live near Amherst. Lara works for Waupaca County and Mike is a career counselor at UWSP.

“When I came here, I wanted to learn more about the community,” said Ginny. “So I looked into part time teaching and other volunteer opportunities.” That effort resulted in teaching home bound students and becoming a Disaster Volunteer for the Red Cross of Portage County. “We’re sort of first responders. We arrive on the scene and help the people cope with the aftermath of the disaster.”

“During my whole career, I would oftentimes wonder what it would be like to teach motivated adults. That’s a major reason I was eager to check out the Literacy Council when I heard that Tom was in need of tutors. It’s a privilege to help any student attain their goals,” said Ginny.

A phone call to Tom ended up with Ginny being assigned to student Mai C. Vang who was working toward her GED at Mid-State Technical College. Two years of concentrated study later - as we now know - Mai C. Vang received that GED.

“While working with Mai, I became aware of the difficulties Hmong people faced before and after they came to the US.” Ginny said. “My respect for her grew and grew as Mai managed her extensive family obligations and found time to master math concepts and English grammar. We met weekly for almost three years and though she sometimes became overwhelmed and discouraged she never complained. I am very proud of her accomplishments but even more proud to call her my friend.”

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Dr. Dayle Upham - A Literacy Council Board Member Who Overcame Incredible Obstacles

Dr. Upham - or as she prefers, Dayle - is originally from Exeter, New Hampshire. She became an Associate Professor of Education at Florida Gulf Coast University just this

past summer. Prior to that Dayle was on the Special Education faculty at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point from 1996 to 2006. Before becoming a professor she taught reading and math and was a resource room teacher in a large middle school. In addition, for two years, Dayle was the lead teacher in a residential school for adjudicated boys ages 8-21. Dayle's field of expertise is learning and emotional disabilities with a specialization in the emotional needs of students and adults with learning disabilities.



Dayle Upham

Dayle received a Bachelor of Science Degree in Elementary and Special Education with a Psychology Minor from Keene State College in Keene, New Hampshire in 1986; a Master of Education in Special Education Degree also from Keene State College in 1988; and a Ph.D. in Educational Psychology and Special Education from the University of Connecticut in Storrs, Connecticut in 1994.

That's pretty impressive stuff, but rather straight forward in the academic world - for someone who can read and write. But that's where Dayle is rather different. You see when she first began her college career she could only read at a 5th grade level and spell at a 3rd grade level. In fact, when she applied for admission to the University of Connecticut to begin work on her Ph.D. she was accepted on the basis of a video wherein she spoke about herself and her accomplishments since she still couldn't read and write sufficiently to take the normal entrance exams. She was the last person accepted that year and was advised that she probably was not going to make it. Well, she proved them wrong as she had proved teachers wrong all of her life. The methods that Dayle adopted to not only survive, but to thrive, in the classroom are truly incredible and quite innovative.

This very special story was captured by Dayle in her biography, [Making the Grade: Reflections on Being Learning Disabled](#), which was published in 1997.

Dayle served as a member of the Literacy Council Board of Directors from 2000 until 2006 and continues to perform as an advisor to the director on adult learning disability issues. She has helped train over 150 volunteer tutors including Ginny Ellingson. Dayle clearly indicated that, "It's payback for a very special teacher who worked with me and never gave up and for the love and support that I received from my family."

Unfortunately, there isn't enough room here to list even the most important of Dayle's publications, presentations, teaching positions, professional organization memberships, and distinctions, which are contained in her extremely impressive 12-page Curriculum Vitae. Dayle certainly has come a very long way and wants to provide others with the opportunity to achieve what she has. "It all begins with sharing the ability to read and write," said Dayle.

I want to support the Literacy Council in the following way:

Sponsor one tutor/learner pair for six months	\$350.00
Sponsor one recognition event for learners and volunteers	\$275.00
Purchase work books for ten students for one ten-week class	\$150.00
Sponsor one ESL teacher for one week of classes	\$153.41
Purchase 3 classroom textbooks	\$106.00
Sponsor annual pre- and post-testing for one learner	\$ 50.00
Sponsor one ESL class child care worker for 1 week	\$ 32.00
Other	\$_____

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State and Zip: _____

Please make all checks payable to PCLC
1052 Main Street, Suite 104, Stevens Point, WI 54481

CALENDAR

September through November
United Way Fund Drive

September 13-December 19
Fall ESL Classes begin
5:00PM Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday
Literacy Council Tutor/Learner Resource Center

January 16, 2007
ESL Classes resume as above

January 15-March 15, 2007
Submit team registration forms for Third Annual Un-Scrabble Fundraiser
Check website www.pocolit.org for details

March 29, 2007
(Last Thursday in March,)
Third Annual Un-Scrabble Fundraiser

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