

ZONTA MEMBERS HEAR ABOUT ADULT LITERACY IN LEE COUNTY

September 28, 2009

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Estimates are that as many as one in five of Lee County's population has poor English literacy skills, some from childhood learning issues and dyslexia and others due to immigration. Literacy Volunteers of Lee County (LVLC), a non-profit United Way agency, has the mission of improving adult literacy, which in turn contributes to English language literacy for the whole family. And at the September program meeting of the Zonta Club of Sanibel-Captiva, LVLC executive director Tess Murphy explained to members how she addresses the task.

"Adult literacy is a vital life skill," Murphy said. "Unfortunately, some people are reluctant to admit they can't read." Benefits of improved literacy, she said, include the ability to get or keep a job and improvements in family life such as better nutrition, parent-teacher relationships, and so on. In individual sessions and small group meetings held daytimes and evenings in settings from Cape Coral to Lehigh, Bonita Springs to North Fort Myers, trained LVLC volunteers presently work with about 650 adults. Many are seeking to become U.S. citizens, for which the test now requires a personal interview as well as verbal and written English. Another curriculum addresses qualifying for GED and high school diploma tests. Services to the students are generally free, with LVLC providing tutors and all materials such as dictionaries, picture books and sample application forms. Other services include childcare for parents and a screening program for dyslexia.

The LVLC web site (www.leeadultliteracy.com) explains different situations in which literacy volunteers can help. At Tween Waters Inn on Captiva, for instance, volunteers work on site with housekeeping staff who are Spanish-speaking or who come from Eastern Europe, and whose principal need is to learn English. More volunteers are always needed. Training involves an 8-hour program, for which a modest fee of \$30 is charged to cover materials that the volunteer will use in future tutoring. For information, visit the LVLC web site.

The Zonta club partners with LVLC in a service project based at Brightest Horizons child care center in south Fort Myers, to improve English language and writing skills among mothers whose children are enrolled in the center, and to support teachers and child care workers in interactions with children and parents. Tess Murphy acknowledged Zontian Wendy West, a former LVLC Board member, whose background in teaching and literacy provided the skills to spearhead the Brightest Horizons service project. A second service project that directly helps women on Sanibel, Serving Women on the Islands or SWOTI, is also involved in literacy training.

Funding is a constant challenge, Murphy said. LVLC has a paid staff of just two, herself and program director Kristin Przelomiec. Even with the support of United Way of Lee County, which has offered office space on Gladiolus in south Fort Myers, and an active Board of Directors, LVLC depends on grants, private contributions, and special events to keep its doors open. Later this fall, LVLC will launch a new fundraiser on Captiva: a 5K run, followed the next day by an Aquathon.

The Zonta Club of Sanibel/Captiva is a service organization of professional women working together to provide hands-on assistance, advocacy and funds to strengthen women's lives on the islands, in Lee County and around the world through Zonta International. For information, visit www.zontasancap.com.



Zontian Jan Alden (L) introduced speaker, LVLC executive director Tess Murphy, who was accompanied by LVLC program director Kristin Przelomiec. Zontian Lynne Campean, at right, is a trained literacy tutor.