



## Family Literacy Academy at Lake Wales

Year-End  
Newsletter  
May 2023

### Executive Director's Column - Race to the End

As we finish the seventeenth year of operation and prepare for our eighteenth, I have to marvel at all the Academy's accomplishments in focusing on those things that make possible the positive changes in the lives of our students---all made possible by the overwhelming individual, corporate and institutional support that has blessed us this year. We can look to the innovations in our preschool program, the hard academic work of our students and teachers and volunteers in our GED program and the restructuring and renewed

Focus on our ESOL efforts. In addition to the academic directives, we have been able to tackle some of the root causes of low academic performance, thanks to our broad-based efforts by the Academy Task Force on brain development and the generosity of the Lake Wales Veterans and the Florida Literacy Coalition for their focus on the impact of food insecurity on our families. We are also dealing with the research on the environmental causes of poverty and

low academic performance. It is time to treat the causes of poverty and food insecurity while focusing on solutions.

This is also an appropriate time to credit all the wonderful efforts of our teaching staff and volunteers whose tireless efforts make our programs work so effectively, meeting the challenges our strong community support finances. We are so fortunate to have that support, and the willingness of an active Board of Directors to provide us the oversight of our efforts. Together, we are making a positive difference in peoples' lives.

Of all the people who have been strong advocates of the Academy and provided guidance throughout our existence, we need to mention Roxann and Ashley Campbell. Roxann has been our mentor since our start with the Barbara Bush Family Literacy Foundation; Ashley, her husband, was an avid supporter of Roxann's fabulous abilities and had strong interest in the Academy. Tragically, Ashley unexpectedly passed away, leaving an unfillable void. We dedicate this newsletter to Ashley.

And let's begin....

As the saying goes, “It’s not over until it’s over.” That is particularly true of this year’s GED program at the Academy. Towards the May 18th end of the semester of our seventeenth year of

operation, there was a great flurry of activity by the GED students in both the daytime and nighttime classes to take one last test – or to sign up for one during the period of the summer break - in order to complete their goal of obtaining their high school diploma.

That flurry did not end with the last day of class (May 18). At a breakfast meeting with the morning class on May 18, students were sent home for the summer recess with bags of books, study assignments for adults and suggestions for activities for their children (including daily reading) and dates for scheduled subject tests. Now, that applied to everyone except Jessica Shrum, Michael Ocasio and Marissa Brown, all of whom achieved their diplomas earlier in the year - and Jessica Martinez.

Jessica Martinez has been with us for many years, since the night classes at Janie Howard, when all she needed for her high school diploma was a few points to pass her Math requirement. She has been a most devoted and diligent student, despite her perseverance those few points evaded her. So she scheduled her next retake test for the last day of class at 12:30, reviewed her materials during breakfast with the aid of Math tutor Marissa Brown and left for her test with the well-wishes of fellow students and staff. We heard from Jessica a few hours later with, guess what! She passed the test with three points to spare! Jessica became our fourth GED recipient of the year, and our 124th overall. (I think the Martinez family is still celebrating.)

What’s next for Jessica? More time with her family! Polk State? She is certainly capable !





The evening class was much the same – students taking scheduled tests towards their GED, signing up for them or preparing for tests already scheduled and then leaving with bags of books and materials for the summer break. It has been quite a busy and successful year.

Completing the GED is not easy. The process can be lengthy and progress on it depends almost entirely on the student, and sometimes, the luck one draws on the makeup of the test. Once registered, a student is given tests to determine academic status before staff develops a strategy to meet the four component subject parts of the final GED test - Language Arts (including reading and writing), Social Studies (including economics, graphs and charts), Science and Mathematics (including basics, algebra and geometry). Based on their performance on the initial test, students are given subject books, group instruction and individual tutoring to prepare them for practice tests and then final subject tests. After obtaining passing “GED-ready” scores in all four subject areas, students have completed the requirements for their high school diploma.

Sound difficult and time consuming? It is and staff often quips “I couldn’t do it.” In fact, even the national GED system honchos dropped the initial passing grade for the individual subject tests from 150 to 145 to be equivalent to regular high school grading.

Take into account that students who enroll in the Academy come with a variety of academic experiences – from homeschooling until the second grade (yes!) and beyond, formal school attendance until sixth grade, dropping out in the 12th grade to completion of high school but not passing final exams. And each student comes with a story. Our job: work with all of our students, building their confidence and providing the best of learning experiences we can.

We will keep you posted on the progress our students make during the summer break. We may have more GED’s or our students may wait to complete their goals in August when we start our 18th year. I know you want to hear because of your support for their efforts. We are very proud of their accomplishments to date and look forward to helping them on their academic journey as we take on new students to approach their own.





“With the school year coming to an end, we can reflect on the English skills that have been learned and polished. Students have improved on their reading and comprehension, and sometimes must be reminded to slow down to focus on pronunciation. Those past tense “ed” verbs can be tricky!

Recently, the ESOL class has been busy reviewing key English lessons. We are also discussing ways students can continue improving their English over the summer. Students are encouraged to read in English to themselves or to their children. Free books are offered to students throughout the year. Watching television with English subtitles is another option for listening and reading English.

Over the last couple of months, students have enjoyed reading an episode each week of Lucy and the Piano Player, a novella designed for ESOL students. New English vocabulary and phrases are introduced in each episode as the plot thickens. There are reading comprehension and vocabulary activities following each episode, too. We have the last episode to read, so we are hoping there will be a happy ending for Lucy and the Piano Player.

Which brings us to the happy ending of another successful school year. Our ESOL students have worked hard and will hopefully be confident using their English skills in applying for jobs and being a part of our community.”

This entry is thanks to the hard work of Donna Berenger, ESOL Daytime Instructor, who, along with Nighttime Instructor, Sondra Annotti, provides extraordinary services to those wanting to improve their use of English.

# Preschool News

The title 'Preschool News' is written in a large, black, sans-serif font. The word 'Preschool' is on the top line, and 'News' is on the bottom line. A green five-pointed star is positioned below the 'P', a yellow spiral is below the 's', and a red smiley face is positioned above the 'o' in 'Preschool'.

Once upon a time, in a place called Family Literacy Academy, people came from far and near searching for wonderful treasures. Those treasures included earning a GED and developing a better grasp of the English language.

They soon found that there were many treasures to be found in this new place. They would find people who supported them in all areas of their life. This support included a special place where their children could not only play and have excellent care, but they would also learn many skills and would be encouraged to find their own wonderful treasure – the love of reading books. Childcare was the name of this place. As their children walked through the door to childcare, the parents were now able to continue their journey to find their own treasure.

Childcare was a magical place filled with colorful walls, and centers filled with toys to encourage imaginative play, teach academic skills, help develop small

and large motor skills, as well as many books to develop that love for reading.

It was also a place filled with teachers who greeted the children each morning with a smile, hugs, and just a lot of love. These teachers worked daily to help these children acquire new skills and then continued to help them improve these skills. I guess you could say that they planted many seeds in the children and then worked diligently to make sure that they had everything they needed for abundant growth to occur.

As this year ends, the doors to this magical place will close, but just for a little while. It is time for a well-deserved rest. However, we must take a moment to think back over the year and see if treasures were found. We had parents that now have a GED and those who are farther along on that journey. We have parents who have improved their English and are more confident in working within our community.



## Preschool News (cont.)

What about our children? Yes, they have truly blossomed over this past year. We are thrilled with the skills they have learned, the development they have made, and their abundant joy when reading and sharing a book with a friend. We celebrate this beautiful bouquet of young learners in our end of the year dramatic play center called the “Flower Shop.”



Our goal is to plant a seed for becoming a future business owner or work in a business where they know how to provide high customer satisfaction. The students take customer



orders for flower arrangements, fulfill those orders, and take payment for completed orders.

The teachers have seen the children manage the products with care, check the orders to make sure they were completed correctly, and accept cash or credit cards for payments.



The customers all leave with a smile on their face.

So as the fun of summer begins, we hope they all live (and learn) “happily ever after.”



Can't you tell why our preschool runs so well? Yes, that's because of our lead teacher, Robin Jolley. Thank you for your generous commitment of time and effort.

Thanks to the Lake Wales Care Center for serving as the source for many of the items in the “flower shop,” and other educational stations featured in the preschool---as with so much more over the years, at no cost to the Academy.

# COMMUNITY EVENTS

## WORK WITH ARTS COUNCIL

This year we had an opportunity, thanks to the GiveWell Community Foundation, to introduce our students and their children to the benefits of exposure to the arts with the start of a “Mommy and Me” program from the Lake Wales Arts Council. This innovation focused on preschool and included reading to the children and engaging parents and their children in an arts related project. Discussions are ongoing with the Arts Center to continue the program next year.

Several of our families’ children will receive scholarships to attend the Lake Wales Arts Council Art Camp this summer.

## OLMSTED DAY

The Academy participated in this year’s celebration of the Lake Wales Heritage group recognition of the Olmsted Plan to make Lake Wales a garden city by planting trees throughout the community (according to the Plan, specific trees are designated for specific streets).



Dressed as a tree and calling herself “Treesa”, our preschool lead teacher, Robin Jolley, conducted interactive sessions with children and their mothers, armed with story boards, reading books about the value of trees and parks to cities, and the importance of Olmsted to Lake Wales. The story time was a major focus of Olmsted Day in the Park.



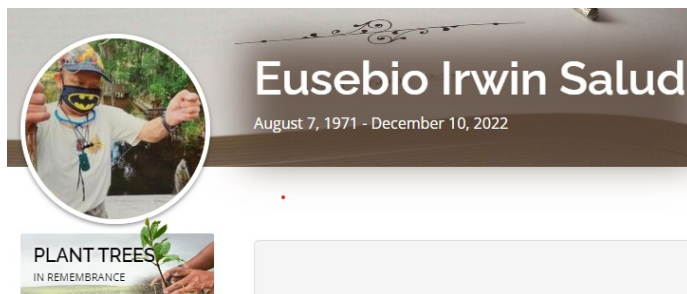


## COMMUNITY EVENTS (cont.)

### TREE DEDICATED IN MEMORY OF ERWIN SALUD

When the sad news of the death of our then Academy President Bolet Salud's oldest son reached the Board of Directors, a decision was made that a fitting memorial to Irwin would be the planting of a tree in his name on the shores of Lake Wales. The Lake Wales Heritage group, committed to fostering the resurgence of the Olmsted Plan to make Lake Wales a garden city, planted a twenty-foot oak near the Pram Fleet building at the lake to honor Irwin. In accordance with the arrangement with the Board, the tree will have life-time care.

To begin the dedication ceremony during Olmsted Day at the Park, a bagpiper led an assemblage of community leaders to the site, where the President of Heritage, a representative of the Academy and Dr. John Salud (Irwin's father) spoke in remembrance of an always cheerful and friendly popular member of the Lake Wales community.



### TASK FORCE ON BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

At the last Task Force meeting, the following actions were proposed for the following dates:

September 8, International Literacy Day. Community viewing of the movie "No Small Mind" explaining the importance of reading to and working with children ages 0 to 5 to assist in sound brain development. Panel discussion to follow.

November 11, during National Family Literacy Month, City Commission proclamation, Preschool Activity Day, when stations of interactive preschool activities will be demonstrated to inform parents, preschools and day care centers what they can do to foster sound childhood development.

During Literacy week, January 29-February 5, Additional demonstrations of relevant activities. Group discussion. Assignments have been made to develop teams to flush out details, such as station heads and sponsors.

This will be an important set of programs, helpful to parents and institutions concerned with improvement of childhood development in Lake Wales.



## **COMMUNITY EVENTS (cont.)**

### **LAKE WALES ALL VETERANS CENTER**

The Academy thanks the Lake Wales All Veterans Center for providing 25 food bags per week for Academy students throughout the spring. This has been a major help with a number of our families who are trying to provide food in the Lake Wales area, which is designated as a “food desert.”

The All Veterans Center has scheduled to resume weekly coverage with the start of our classes in August.



<https://www.allveteranscenter.org/>

### **FLORIDA FAMILY LITERACY COALITION GRANT**



To address the problem of the impact of “food deserts” on our families, the Florida Literacy Coalition granted the Academy \$10,000 to provide assistance with distributing food to our families, basically supplementing food access, as well as

education on nutrition and shopping tips. The Academy is extremely grateful for the Coalition’s rapid response to one of our families’ most serious needs and greatest impediments to their efforts to improve their lives.

<https://floridaliteracy.org/>

### **UNITED WAY’S VISITATION ON PROGRESS OF OUR PRESCHOOL**



Annually, a team of United Way of Central Florida employees and citizens from Polk County visits the Academy to hear of our progress in the preschool prior to recommending our funding level for next year. Several individuals, such as Jennifer Mueller, President of our Board, Board member Colette Braunstein, Preschool head Robin Jolley and parent Marissa Brown, related the innovation in and progress of the preschool.

Response from the United Way team: good work and “Why don’t you ever ask for more money?” That will not be a problem in the future when the need arises!

<https://uwcf.org/>

## KARENA BATISTA's SUCCESS

We remember the wonderful story as covered by local press articles of how Karina, a young mother of four children, scared by numerous childhood issues and facing unknown future prospects, found the Academy and its two caring social workers and a pathway to a promising future through education. It took eight years to gain her GED, but with encouragement and prodding by Academy staff and her children, she succeeded! She went to work for a local day care where she excelled, and then took a job with Victory Ridge Academy. Karina's children, proud of her accomplishments, exclaimed "Now we'll have to finish School." They did and two went on to Polk State College.

And now for Karina's latest coup. She enrolled at La Salle Technical in Plant City, earned straight A's, and graduated as **VALEDICTORIAN** as a medical assistant. Top that!

## ELVIA MARTINEZ RECOGNIZED FOR EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS

Last year, Elvia Martinez capped her educational goal of obtaining her high school diploma by passing her GED while attending the Academy. That was only the beginning! Right after completing her GED with the Academy, Elvia enrolled at Polk State, where she has sustained A's and B's in pursuit of a degree in social work. Her scores and organizational abilities as a student do not surprise us—she impressed us with that same diligence at the Academy.

Recently, the Lake Wales branch of the American Association of University Women recognized her for her accomplishments in education to date and awarded her a \$1,000

scholarship to assist her to complete her studies. Our reaction: this comes as no surprise, but it is welcomed and well deserved! Her family: her husband has been very supportive, as are her children, many of whom attended the Academy's preschool while Elvia studied down the hall. (A most notable memory of Elvia - while pursuing her GED studies at home during the pandemic with all her children doing their school assignments at a long table in their yard, interspersed with breaks involving water balloons.)

## SUMMER RECESS BEGINS

After a long and productive year of diligence preparing for high school diplomas and improving English, while their preschoolers prepare for entering school with all the skills required for success, most of our students started their summer break to coincide with their school-age children's schedule.

Families received a bag full of books to continue Read 20, art supplies, activities to encourage language skills and build vocabulary, suggestions for community summer programs to enroll their children and subject material for the adults to study. Summer break is well deserved by both students and staff!

For those students who have yet to reach completion of their goals, the Academy will resume classes August 28<sup>th</sup> 2023, in its eighteenth year!

If you are aware of any students who want to enroll in GED or ESOL classes please call us at 863 604-8012.

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## THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT !!

Throughout the past year the Academy has had wonderful support from so many - volunteer teaching and tutoring, individual, foundational, institutional and corporate funding, joint venturing, following our efforts-and kind words and thoughts.

Our thanks to all of you, for without your support, we could not have accomplished all that we have. We pledge that we will continue to provide the same educational opportunities we have always tried to provide, with the goal of helping all willing residents to improve their search for a better tomorrow for themselves and their families.

And a great big **HAPPY 98th BIRTHDAY** to the Academy's favorite **AUNT MARTHA !!!**

Have a safe, relaxing and productive summer. See you in a few weeks !

## THANKS TO OUR VOLUNTEERS

We are so lucky to have strong support from volunteers from the community who make the Academy work so well. Thank you for all you do. They are:

- Sue Frantz - Chief Math Instructor (& GRAND POOBAH) in both GED classes
- Carol Myatt - Writing & Reading Instructor in both GED classes
- Randy Lo Patin - ESOL Tutor
- Dr. Bill Barringer - Math & Science Tutor & Instructor (daytime)
- Lee Turnquist - Math Tutor & Instructor in both GED classes
- Nancy Turnquist - GED Language Arts & ESOL Tutor during the day GED classes
- Sally Knight - Language Arts Tutor in the night GED class
- Mike Carter - Language Arts & Math Tutor in the evening GED class
- Nita Propst - Social Studies Instructor in both GED classes
- Susan Brown - Child Care in the Preschool at night
- Melissa Massey - All Around Tutor & Overall Jack of All Trades in the day class



## Our Sponsors are



*Mountain Lake  
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as well as:

- ♦ American Association of University Women/Lake Wales
- ♦ Kiwanis Club of Lake Wales
- ♦ Lake Wales Noon Rotary Club
- ♦ Good Shepard Episcopal Church
- ♦ Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors
- ♦ Thrivent Financial
- ♦ All Veterans Center

and several generous individuals

*The Family Literacy Academy at Lake Wales is a 501  
(c)(3) charitable organization*

If you wish to help us with  
volunteer or financial  
support, please call :

**(863) 604- 8012**

[www.flalw.org](http://www.flalw.org)



Florida Literacy Coalition, Inc.

See our new video on Facebook:

[https://www.facebook.com/  
familyliteracyacademyatlakewales/](https://www.facebook.com/familyliteracyacademyatlakewales/)

