

# LETC Extra!

Issue 7

The newsletter of Language, ETC... (Language, Education, & Technology Center)

April 2002

## LETC Launches EL/Civics Course

Focus is on family

by Sarah T. Wasti

Imagine moving to a new community and not knowing how to use the public transportation system to get to work, or where to turn when your children are having difficulty in their new school, or even how to get help in an emergency.

Add to that not knowing the local language, and you'll have some idea of the many challenges our students face when they come here from their home countries.

In an effort to continue to meet the needs of our student population, Language, ETC has begun a program that helps to assimilate newcomers into the community. The EL/Civics class is a combination of basic language instruction and community outreach information. In addition to giving students the tools to communicate in their new environment, the program introduces them to resources in the community that will help them feel more comfortable.

The EL/Civics class is part of a federally funded program aimed at integrating the Hispanic population into the broader Washington area community. The State Education Agency (SEA) of the District of Columbia has given Language, ETC a grant of \$34,688 to run this pilot pro-



**EL-Civics student Luz Bonilla takes advantage of the child-care portion of the program. She's pictured here with her son, Andres Bautista.**

gram. This program is unique because it also provides much-needed childcare for the students' children. Through UDC's Department of Gerontology, senior citizens are given childcare training and then placed in our program to provide free care and activities for the children while their parents attend the class. Access to day care is a significant hurdle for many students trying to attend classes, and this program improves chances of student participation.

Taught by Nancy Buckley and assisted by Joan Wilson, the EL/Civics class runs for three hours on Saturday mornings. The civics portion – taught in Spanish during the last half-hour of the class – often includes guest speakers or field trips. A recent class featured a guest speaker from the Montgomery County

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## Against Odds, Literacy Student Succeeds

Says LETC, D.C. offer unique environment

by Pilar Laugel

"I want to continue learning until the day I die." Ever since he set foot in our school seven years ago, Marcos Hernandez, 36, has had a thirst for learning which he hopes will never end. Driven to migrate to our country by conditions in his native El Salvador 14 years ago, Marcos had never had the opportunity to attend school. He found work cleaning and scaling fish and through sheer determination moved up to cutting fish, a specialty in the field. He worked for this company for more than 11 years, working holidays and sometimes seven



**GED student Marcos Hernandez says he never wants to stop learning and that Language, ETC is helping him reach that goal.**

days a week. Marcos and his wife, Maria, have three boys, aged 12, 11, and 9. Although

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## New Technology Tops Donor News



Language, ETC would like to extend a very special thanks to donors **Larry and Lynn Johnson**. Their extremely generous contribution of a new Dell Power Edge server has enabled LETC to launch an Internet instruction course with a high-speed connection.

Computer students are now also learning Windows 2000 Office products like Excel, Access, and PowerPoint. The Johnson brothers had visited LETC's language lab last fall and were admittedly very impressed. When it was suggested to them that a new server would enable a better learning environment for the students, they jumped at the chance to donate it. Their gift not only benefits the students, but has advanced LETC on an organizational level, as well.

**The Advisory Board Foun-**  
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## Executive Director's Note



**Pilar Laugel**  
Executive Director

*On crocuses and cardinals...*

As the crocus peaks its head out of the winter soil and the cardinals grace our gardens with their fiery plumage, we feel a sense of renewed hope for a beautiful spring. Language, ETC shares in that feeling of rejuvenation, as renovations are well underway to create more efficient classroom configurations, add new carpeting, and freshen up the paint; all thanks go to the Catholic Archdiocese of Washington, our very generous landlord!

I thank the students, staff, and volunteers for their continued patience during this time. While change is very exciting, some accommodations must be made along the way. The reconstruction project will be extensive and in progress for quite some time. We will make up class time missed in late February by extending all sessions by an additional week. The parking lot, unfortunately, will have fewer spaces when everything is completed. In

the end, however, we will have a beautiful building for our adult learners and volunteers.

We were sorry to say goodbye to Father Jose Somoza, the pastor of Our Lady Queen of the Americas Church for the past 17 years. It was Father who invited me to start a language program here in January of 1993. Father Somoza transferred to a diocese in Kendall, Florida. We will miss him and we all wish him well.

The new residents of the fourth floor will be none other than His Eminence Theodore Cardinal McCarrick and the two new Auxiliary Bishops of Washington, DC. Bishop Francisco Gonzalez, the new pastor of OLQA, among his many duties, has already moved to the new rectory on the third floor along with Father Agustin Mateos, the new Assistant Pastor and Father Jesus Gomez. We are very happy to have them both.

## Coordinator's Comments



**Melissa Zervos**  
ESL Coordinator

April celebrates National Volunteer Week so I first want to say thank you to the more than 130 volunteers that work with Language, ETC. We could not offer the wide range of classes and schedules without the exceptional dedication of the volunteers. All the time, effort, and enthusiasm they offer is inspiring, especially those that come back session after session, year after year, and never tire.

Unfortunately, this will be my last update on ESL teacher activities for the newsletter. I will soon begin a new job with

Montgomery County schools in Maryland. I have enjoyed my two years here immensely and feel satisfied that together we have revised and made even stronger an invaluable community literacy program in Language, ETC. The revamped ESL program, the upturn in teacher training participation, and the creation of a student database are just a few of the triumphs of our team that I will look back on with pride.

I wish all the students, volunteers, and staff of Language, ETC continued success!

## Caspar Leaves the Nest

It is with heavy hearts that the staff, students, and volunteers of Language, ETC



bid farewell to Caspar, the school's unofficial cockatoo mascot, in March. He now resides in an exotic bird refuge in Maryland.

## New Secretary Joins Staff

Diana Berrocal, a first year nursing student at the University of the District of Columbia, is Language, ETC's new weekend secretary. In addition to answering phones, registering new students, and logging data entry, Diana also coordinates the complimentary breakfast treats for the volunteers.

Originally from Jaco Beach, Costa Rica, Diana came to the US in July of 2000 and is happy to be working at Language, ETC because, she says, she really likes to help people and there are plenty of people to help at the school.

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### NEWSLETTER VOLUNTEERS

Michele Cona, managing  
Sarah T. Wasti, contributing

## EL/Civics continued

School District. Maria Bonilla, a guidance counselor at Takoma Park Middle School, discussed with the students the services available to parents of school-age children and answered questions about after school activities, the Head Start program, and working through disciplinary and behavioral problems.

Other civics activities have included a guest speaker from the DC Metropolitan Police Department who explained the role of law enforcement in the U.S., which often differs from students' home countries, making them feel more at ease around police officers. The class also took a field trip to the local library where students got their first library cards and checked out Spanish-language books.

Student Eliel Lopez, who has been away from his family in Guatemala for two years, finds the class very helpful, and has visited the library on his own after learning how to use it in class.

One recent in-class civics activity introduced students to an important aspect of American history by sharing the words of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s *I Have a Dream* speech and discussing civil rights in the U.S. The class is also planning an upcoming field trip to Mt. Vernon.

As Nancy explains, many

students at Language, ETC are recent immigrants, while others have lived here for several years, but the majority of them live in a very insular community, rarely taking advantage of social services, programs and opportunities available in the region. The class aims to change that by combining the survival English skills of names, dates, places, activities, with learning about crime safety, day care, and filling out forms for government services, among other things.

Student Jose Trejo from El Salvador believes that the class is important because he needs to improve his English



**EL-Civics student Jose Trejo**

to better communicate at work and what he has learned in the civics portion has given him more confidence.

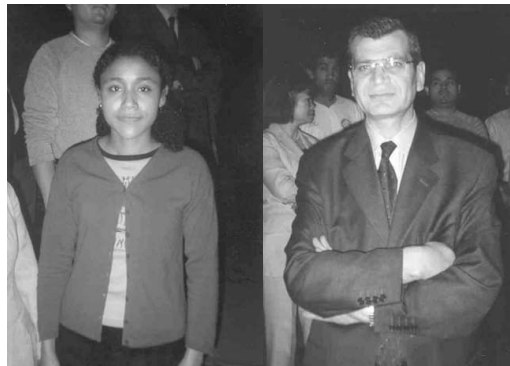
With the help of the SEA, Language, ETC hopes to continue this successful program in the future. When speaking of the students in this program, Language, ETC executive director Pilar Laugel says, "It makes them feel like they belong."

### Did you know that...

- ✓ 1,979 students registered for the 2001-2002 school year.
- ✓ All regions of the metropolitan area are represented in our student population: 65% from DC; 16% from Montgomery County; 8% from Arlington, Alexandria, and Fairfax.
- ✓ Our students range in age from 16 to over 60.
- ✓ Our students come from 50 different countries! In addition to 18 Latin American countries, we also have students representing the Central African Republic, Eritrea, Morocco, Nepal, Japan, Turkey, Ukraine and Vietnam, among others.

## Another Round of Winners!

As is custom at the end of each semester, Language, ETC awards 2 students with a computer and 2 students per instruction level with scholarships. Winners are chosen through a lottery based on attendance and grade point averages. Pictured below is computer and scholarship winner, Maria Dolores Tinoco, left, and scholarship recipient, Nuh Tuncer, right.



## Literacy Success continued

they take great pride in their family, they had to face a particularly difficult situation when the two older boys were just toddlers. A routine medical exam revealed that the boys had been exposed to lead paint in the apartment where they lived; parts of their brains were damaged. Presently both boys attend a special school in Virginia. Although a financial settlement was reached with the landlord, the whole situation has taken an emotional toll on Marcos and Maria.

Marcos first came to our school at the beginning of 1995. He did not know how to read or write in Spanish. Now, Marcos continues to come to class four nights a week and on Sunday morning. His math skills are very good. He is currently reading Alex Hailey's *Roots* in Spanish. Despite never having studied English, his spoken English is more than adequate. He is a foreman in a construction company and speaks English with his supervisor. He makes a very comfortable salary.

A few years ago, Marcos decided to move his family to Providence, Rhode Island, where he had some relatives. After a tearful goodbye, he drove off. He arrived in Providence early in the afternoon, visited with his relatives and by three o'clock in the morning the next day was on his way back to D.C. Before arriving, he called me to ask if he could come back to the school. His perception was that the people he met in Providence were not well disposed toward foreigners. He added, "They were not as friendly as the people in Washington, D.C." Rhode Island's loss is our gain! Marcos is an enthusiastic hard-worker and Language, ETC is very fortunate to have him as a student.

Marcos has just joined our Sunday GED class. His long-range goal is to pass the GED exam. Given his determination and his great desire to succeed, does anybody doubt that he will? Best of luck to you, Marcos!

## Donor News continued

ation awarded Language, ETC a service grant in the amount of \$4,900. Ten employees from **The Advisory Board Co., The Corporate Executive Board**, and the **National Journal**, all of them related, served as volunteers here. The Foundation rewards the non-profit where their employees volunteer depending on the number of hours each devotes to the organization. They want to instill the spirit of volunteerism in their employees and we're sure the employees appreciate the investment their company makes in the quality of their lives. We certainly do!

A generous donation of 20 used Pentium I and II computers by **The Advisory Board Co.** to Language, ETC has enabled our students to access the Internet from the Center for the first time. Four of the 20 are reserved, however, as incentive prizes to students at the time of graduation.

The office copier and the chairs in the language lab, as well, were purchased with funds donated by the **Advisory Board Foundation**.

M.C.

### ESL Coordinator Needed!

Language, ETC seeks an ESL Coordinator to begin immediately. The ideal candidate would have a master's degree in ESL or related field, be well-organized and enthusiastic as well as flexible to work week-ends. Lots of independence. An excellent opportunity and career booster! Call (202) 387-2222 for more details.

## New LETC Logo Really Says Something

Volunteer donated design services in appreciation of language education

Think about it. Most of us just use our mouths. Many of us even use our hands. And in this town, the average person can do it in three or four different languages!

I'm talking about communicating, and we all have a different idea of what that means. So imagine you're put to the task of creating a visual representation of "communication." Maurice Reid, volunteer, who is a graphic artist for Gensler, took that challenge recently when LETC launched a new logo competition. His design, above, bested the competition by capturing the essence of LETC's mission.

"It's all about listening to understand and



then being able to express yourself until you're understood," explains Maurice, referring to the logo itself. The arcs are pulsing out – much like radio broadcast signals are depicted – from an "L" turned and shaped slightly to resemble an open mouth or an ear. The simple reciprocal action of listening and speaking with patience and purpose is the logo's message. And the LETC staff heard it loud and clear.

**Background:** Maurice grew up listening to family members speak French and later he studied it as a second major, along with graphic design, in college. He credits his family for giving him an appreciation for languages, which helped him sympathize with the mission of LETC. He does similar design work for his company, he added, which is very supportive of his community-service activity.



M.C.

## Renovations Underway in LETC classrooms

New pastor reaffirms Cardinal's commitment to educational programs

Change is coming at a fast and furious pace for many of the classrooms at Language, ETC. Soon, His Eminence Theodore Cardinal McCarrick of the Archdiocese of Washington will make Our Lady Queen of the Americas Church – where Language, ETC is housed – his new residence. The building must undergo many changes, however, to make that possible.

Eventually, there will be fresh coats of paint, updated air conditioning and heating units, along with many much needed repairs.

But exactly what the other changes will be, and when they will take place, is still uncertain, says Father Francisco Gonzalez, newly elected Auxiliary Bishop of Washington, DC and now Pastor of OLQA. Bishop Gonzalez is overseeing the renovations and cautions the other tenants of the church to have patience while renovations are being completed. Although no clear timetable is set, he can say that the first priority was the rectory space, which was completed in early April. Then the Cardinal's residence will be

finished in June 2002. Beginning in 2003, historical restoration and repair will be done on the façade of the building. After that, the diocese plans to conduct a thorough examination of the building's interior structure. The goal is to access the best allotment of individual spaces to satisfy the needs of all the various programs housed in the building.

So it's clearly going to be a long and challenging process. "All these changes...took place sort of suddenly," remarked Bishop Gonzalez, "So we have created a little bit of chaos. Building without stopping the classes is a very hard thing to do."

Difficult, indeed, but *essential*. LETC will continue as usual, he assures us, because the Cardinal is committed to educational programs, especially within minority communities. "Education is essential to the development of the individual."

And making the best of change is key to the development of a strong organization.

M.C.

## Teacher Training Takes Off!

by Melissa Zervos

With National Volunteer Week upon us, I realized a week is not enough time to recognize the volunteer effort that keeps Language, ETC running. Not only are teachers dedicated to giving their classes each week, but they have recently given unprecedented amounts of time, on average, attending training sessions.

Teachers came out in droves to the Saturday morning sessions October through December of 2001, in our first cycle of trainings. We had a great time working on things like Lesson Planning, Language and Communication, Teaching Reading and Listening, Pronunciation and the group favorite Presenting Structures and Grammar.

In February, Language, ETC paid for 15 teachers and me to attend a Pronunciation and Error Correction Workshop, hosted by WATESOL at American University. The workshop was both informative and fun; I hope in the future we will be able to give teachers more opportunities to participate in similar activities.

In March, we had our second and third cycle of training with the addition of a new subject matter, Learning Styles and Lesson Planning. Again, attendance was high and enthusiasm even higher.

With all this training under their belts teachers are able to offer an even better learning experience through the ESL program. It is our goal to offer a new workshop to the series each trimester to help everyone provide the best education possible to our students.



national volunteer week  
APRIL 21-27, 2002

April 21-27 marks *National Volunteer Week* and there is much to celebrate! Did you know...

**44 percent** of adults volunteer in formal programs;

**69 percent** of them volunteer on a regular basis and dedicate more than **24 hours per month**; and

**\$248.8 billion** worth of labor

hours were donated by volunteers nationally in 2001, according to the **Independent Sector**, a think tank supporting the non-profit sector.



**LETC Honors Dedication of Volunteers** with a wine & cheese party. Volunteers received certificates of appreciation at the early April celebration. Pictured above are weeknight ESL teachers and LETC Board members.

## Our Newsletter: In Good Hands

by Pilar Laugel

Michele Cona develops and manages the newsletter of Language, ETC, as well as writes and edits the content. She began volunteering with the Center more than eight years ago, while a freshman at The Catholic University of America. Her involvement in our programs has spanned ESL instruction, launching the newsletter, and after-school tutoring. Michele works for the Smithsonian Institution and teaches ESL two nights a week for the Arlington Education and Employment Program. Thank you for your dedication to our mission.

Sarah T. Wasti has shown outstanding commitment to Language, ETC for more than three years. She has taught Basic A on weekends and now offers her time as a substitute teacher. Sarah began contributing stories to the newsletter last fall to remain active with the Center, as she also recently began a master's degree program in Government at Johns Hopkins University. She attends school at night and works full-time for United Technologies Corporation. Thank you, Sarah, for your valuable creative input and enthusiasm.

## Job Bank Database Offers Wealth of Information

Job bank volunteers log the contact information, skills, and experience of each job seeker into a centralized database to facilitate searches and follow-up. Volunteers are happy to report that now employers can immediately get lists of potential applicants thanks to the database...and diligent data entry!





# What is Language, ETC?

Language, ETC is an adult education center dedicated to improving the lives of immigrants in the Washington Metropolitan Area. It was founded in 1993 by Our Lady Queen of the Americas Church as its Education Center to meet the growing demand for English and literacy courses within the local immigrant community.

Currently, LETC offers courses in ESL, citizenship, literacy, computer training, and GED preparatory courses. Our Job Bank, open Sundays, helps students find em-

ployment, while our Language Lab provides an interactive computer environment at times that suit their busy work schedules.

Enrollment is open to any adults who have come to this country seeking to improve their lives. Although most current students come from Central America, there are also students from Africa, Europe, and the Middle East.

LETC was incorporated in the District of Columbia as a nonprofit organization on January 15, 1998.

## How can you help?

Individuals and organizations are welcome to inquire at Language, ETC at (202) 387-2222 to find out how they

can support LETC services, whether it be through donated funds, technology equipment, or volunteer hours.



Language, ETC...  
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