

## Path to Citizenship a Challenging One

Photos and captions from feature article by  
LARRY R. HUMES, Gondolier Guest Writer



Carol Burns, a civics instructor with Literacy Volunteers, has a passion for teaching. She remains in touch with many of her students from her earliest days as a college professor. She admires the drive her current students have to become American citizens.



Carol, third from left, makes a point to her students about questions that may be included on their citizenship test. Students in this class emigrated to America from Poland.

Pick up your pencil and see if you can answer the following questions:

- How many amendments does the Constitution have?
- What do we call the first 10 amendments to the Constitution?
- The House of Representatives has how many voting members?
- What stops one branch of government from becoming too powerful?

The above-listed questions are just four of a hundred that immigrants must be prepared to answer in order to become naturalized citizens. Did you get them all right?

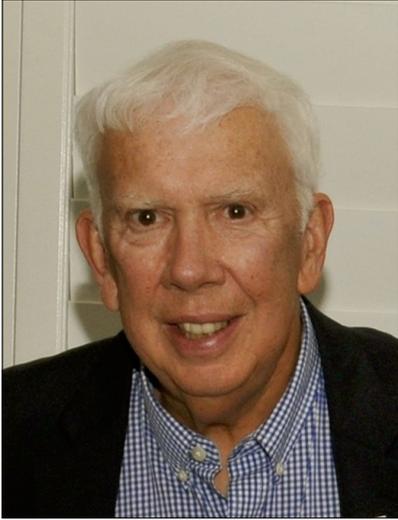
Sponsored through Literacy Volunteers of South Sarasota County, Carol offers the free seven-week citizenship course in both the spring and fall.

She said the government does make handbooks available that contain the information about America that is covered on the test. "I have got this down, because I don't use a book in my course." People are visual learners. Others are oral learners. Carol tells the class a story about the history and beginnings of the United States. She uses a map of the U.S. so that the students can see, as well as hear, and connect with the locations as they evolved from colonies and territories to states.

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*Literacy Changes Lives!*

## ***President's Corner - Making Progress in Challenging Times***



Jim Patterson

With the help of our tutors, Literacy Volunteers of South Sarasota County continues to move forward with our mission of assisting adults in their quest to improve their literacy skills.

Volunteer tutors continue, as you will read in this issue, to engage their students through distance learning strategies such as Skype, Face Time, Zoom and email. This approach allows both participants to meet without travel—in the comfort of their own homes at a time convenient to all parties. If you want to try out any of these methods, please contact Kim, Peter, or Karen for both technology help and lesson ideas.

During the Fall of 2019 and during the Spring of 2020, your LVSSC has worked to improve our financial position in a changing economic climate. We have a number of grants pending and had a successful author event with David Baldacci. We are expecting continued help from the United Way and remain grateful for our partnership with the Sarasota County libraries.

We are looking at continuing to improve tutor training by advancing a buddy system designed to link new tutors with other tutors with previous teaching experience.

As we all look forward to seeing our lives returning to normal as the virus is contained, it is our hope that the summer months will provide a restful time of renewal for our tutors, our students, our staff, and the board of directors.

Best wishes to all.

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### ***A Message from our 2020-2021 Board President***

As the incoming Board President, I want to introduce myself to you. I am honored to be working with the outstanding people who make LVSSC a successful and meaningful organization. It will not be easy to fill the shoes of Jim Patterson, our current president, but with his help and the help of a great leadership team, I will do my best. I look forward to a great year and many success stories from all of you.

Most sincerely,

Penny Corell



## Video Chat Tutoring for Distance Learning



Joe Mrusko

For many LVSSC tutors, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought routine tutoring to a screeching halt. Joe Mrusko, video chat tutor, on the other hand, has continued to tutor his student twice a week in spite of social distancing and shelter-at-home guidelines. We asked Joe some questions about how he got started video chat tutoring and here are his comments.

### **How did you learn about LVSSC?**

I was introduced to ESL tutoring by a neighbor in early 2019. I enrolled in the Tutor Training Workshop where I was taught smart ways to tutor adult ESL students. Video chat was not a part of my training sessions. However, I was somewhat familiar with SKYPE.

### **How did you get started using Skype to do video chat tutoring?**

I first met my ESL student at the Start Now! office where I was introduced to tutoring face-to-face with a student. Because I am a Snow Bird and planned to return to Pennsylvania in May, I asked my student if we could continue our sessions via SKYPE and he agreed. We continued our twice weekly sessions throughout the summer with great success.

My student and I continued SKYPE lessons after my return to FL in October 2019.

### **What is your method for video chat tutoring?**

I send copies of the lessons to my student prior to each session (attached to an email).

We have been using a series of lesson books for our sessions. We began with “That’s Life” book 0. Next, we used “Life Goes On” and “Challenger”. Meeting twice weekly for an hour and a half allows us to advance through the lesson books at a fast pace.

My teaching method is to introduce a new lesson at each session and follow that with a review of the last lesson. I begin by reading the first paragraph out loud and then have my student read the paragraph. I read the next paragraph and my student follows reading the same paragraph. We continue this back and forth reading until the complete story is read. I listen closely and correct pronunciation as needed. Then we work on the exercises and quiz worksheets.

### **What are the benefits of video chat tutoring?**

My student and I enjoy using SKYPE for lessons because there is no traveling required. We meet each other from the comfort of our own homes. SKYPE is very time efficient.

SKYPE video chat tutoring has been especially beneficial during this time of the Coronavirus pandemic because all of the public meeting places are closed. We would have nowhere to meet for a face-to-face lesson!

### **Have you had any issues using video chat tutoring?**

Loud background noises can make hearing my student difficult. A quiet room is needed by both teacher and student. A severe thunderstorm can cause a loss of the SKYPE signals requiring a session restart.

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Carol's passion for teaching lends itself well to helping immigrants prepare for American citizenship. A retired theater professor from the University of New Hampshire, she spent decades teaching students of all ages as well as directing and producing musicals and plays.

She is certified to teach English as a second language and spent time in Vietnam and Japan early in her career teaching children and business executives alike.

As one student put it, "She is a wonderful teacher. My English isn't very good. I couldn't read, but she taught me the words and now I can read. She very patient and talks very slowly. She understands me and helps me. I am very appreciative of her."

There are nearly 22 million naturalized citizens in America today, about half of the overall immigrant population of 44.5 million (FY 2017).

The annual number of naturalizations ranges from more than 600,000 to nearly a million.

The application fee today for citizenship is \$725. If applicants fail the citizenship test, they are given a chance to retake the English and/or civics tests. Their second interview and test would happen within 60 to 90 days after the first interview. If they don't pass the second time, they will need to pay again and reschedule. Carol teaches to the test, and her students pass it the first time.

According to Carol, "They want to be citizens. They are going through a lot and they're spending a lot of money to do it. They are resilient because of the countries they came from. They want to be able to vote and to enjoy freedom of speech."

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Joe Mrusko is a retired Professional Engineer with a BS Mechanical Engineering (Penn State), MS Electrical Engineering (RIT), and MS Statistics (RIT). He worked at Xerox in Rochester, New York, for 16 years designing copiers and then 29 years in southeast Pennsylvania at GE Aerospace-Martin Marietta-Lockheed Martin (GE Aerospace was sold to Martin Marietta. Later, Martin Marietta and Lockheed merged to form Lockheed Martin).

Joe moved to Venice, Florida in September 2017 because he was tired of the southeast Pennsylvania cold winters.



For more information about video chat tutoring:

**Peter** at [venice.literacy@gmail.com](mailto:venice.literacy@gmail.com)

**Karen** at [north.port.literacy@gmail.com](mailto:north.port.literacy@gmail.com)

**Kim** in Start Now! Office

[start.now.north.port@gmail.com](mailto:start.now.north.port@gmail.com)

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**Adult Literacy Fact**

Literacy Volunteers of America and Laubach Literacy merged in 2002 to form ProLiteracy.

## Coordinators Managing in the Coronavirus Crisis

Coordinators Karen Bridegam and Peter Norrman have challenging jobs in normal times. Now they are juggling their tasks from home while the libraries are closed. This is quite tricky because much of their work is face-to-face with students who have limited English. Most of the students are uncomfortable speaking on the phone. In this environment their problems and needs are much greater.



Karen and Peter normally spend time with tutors, answering questions and providing them with the training materials they need. Now all this is done by phone and email.



There are tutors still working with their students in some fashion, be it Skype or Zoom, text messages, email messages, phone conversations or even homework mailed to students. Everyone is concerned for the students who can't stay in touch. Are they okay? Have they or their spouse lost a job? Can they help their children with online schooling? We know there are some who cannot.

Karen and Peter have roles that go beyond their normal Coordinator duties at this time. We are proud of the way they are handling this.

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## TUTOR NOTES

One volunteer tutors a man who needed to learn more English in order to keep his job. He was able to demonstrate that he was learning more English after every tutoring session. His boss is pleased, and the student still has his job.

Another tutor sends her student "homework" including pictures for story telling and help sheets from manuals to use in their phone tutoring sessions. Her student didn't feel comfortable talking on the phone at first, but each time she seemed to feel better. Her goal is to be better at conversations in English. She's very motivated and uses her materials at home to be creative.

The Skype video chat program is being used for regular tutoring sessions as well as numerous informal emails, reported another tutor. The student's comprehension is improving rapidly, and he is using other different sources, either those suggested by the tutor or self-procured.

Tutors are learning too! Several tutors have reached out to our coordinators saying they would like to tutor their student remotely, but don't know how. After some coaching over the phone and trial sessions with a coordinator using the video chat program Zoom, our tutors are developing new skills.

## *An Evening with David Baldacci*

On March 12, Literacy Volunteers celebrated a great evening and our best success at fund raising. Thanks to the generosity of David Baldacci and his Foundation, we were able to raise a substantial amount to help cover operating expenses. David shared his time and talent with us because he believes in supporting adult and family literacy in the United States by fostering new and promoting existing adult literacy and educational programs.

This was our second annual Evening with an Author. The community supports this type of event because of the opportunity to see a popular author in person, the gala atmosphere, and because Literacy Volunteers' services are so necessary in South Sarasota County.

Thank you to our sponsors for your encouragement and donations.

Wish You Well Foundation (Michelle & David Baldacci's Foundation)	Jim & Pauline Patterson
Coach House RV	Rosanne Nietupski
Jan Gallas	Venice Apothecary
Gulf Coast Community Foundation	Venice Sunrise Rotary
Redenta & Steve Picazio	Jim & Karen Woods
Boone Law Firm	Joyner Family Insurance
Judith McGinty & Joe Pokorney	

Thank you to Plantation Golf and Country Club for providing the elegant venue.

Thanks to professional photographers Rob Christy and Brenda Mitchell who graciously donated their time to take photos at this event. Attendees could be photographed with David Baldacci while he signed their books.

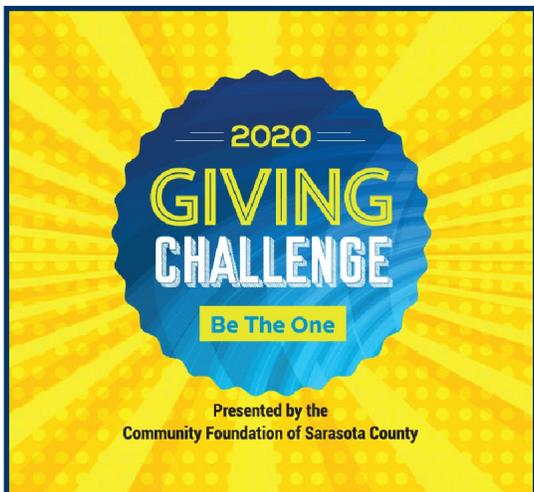
Nearly 300 supporters of literacy attended the event and enjoyed David's entertaining and humorous talk.



David Baldacci and Penny Corell, Vice President of Literacy Volunteers of South Sarasota County



## Thanks to Our Supporters Who Joined the Giving Challenge 2020



After skipping 2019, the Giving Challenge returned on April 28 and 29 from noon to noon. Literacy Volunteers successfully attracted over 85 donors with donations ranging from \$25 to \$125. These donations will be a big help with our operating costs.

The event was sponsored by the Community Foundation of Sarasota County. The Patterson Foundation matched all donations up to \$100 which amounted to \$7.5 million going to 687 nonprofit organizations in Sarasota, Manatee, Charlotte, and Desoto counties.

If you missed it or preferred not to donate via the internet, writing a check still works! Make your check payable to Literacy Volunteers and mail to 300 Nokomis Ave. S., Venice, FL 34285, and note 2020 Giving Challenge on your check.

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## LITERACY VOLUNTEERS VS. COVID-19

With the arrival of COVID-19 and stay-at-home requirements, Literacy Volunteers tutors are unable to meet their students in person and classes can't be held in the libraries. But that doesn't mean there is no learning going on!

In fact, distance learning has become very important for LVSSC adult students just as it has for kids in school. We are fortunate that our Coordinators will not be furloughed and can continue to work at home, staying in touch with tutors and students to facilitate continued learning. LVSSC is exploring a variety of ways to continue helping adults who want to learn English or improve their reading and writing that will work with "social distancing."

Approaches include everything from phone calls, to texting, to snail mail, to emails, to Skype and Zoom. Some tutors are finding themselves in the role of students as they learn how to host an online session. Peter, Karen and Kim are ready to assist any tutors who want to give it a try.

If you are a tutor, missing the excitement of helping a student learn English, or you want some suggestions about how you can get back to work without leaving home, call your Coordinator. They are ready to help you explore the options!

**Literacy Volunteers  
of South Sarasota County**  
300 Nokomis Ave. S.  
Venice, FL 34285

*Literacy Changes Lives*



**FIRST CLASS**

**Literacy Volunteers of South Sarasota County**

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

**Mailing Address and Venice Literacy Office:**  
300 Nokomis Ave. S.  
Venice, FL 34285 Phone: 941-861-1352  
venice.literacy@gmail.com

**North Port Literacy Office, 13800 S. Tamiami Trail**  
North Port, FL 34287 Phone: 941-861-1320  
north.port.literacy@gmail.com

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