



the Lantern

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A newsletter of the Presentation Lantern Center, Dubuque, Iowa
Sponsored by the Sisters of the Presentation, Dubuque, Iowa

LANTERN CENTER

Welcome



By Megan Ruiz, Executive Director

I am quite honored to have been chosen by the hiring committee among many qualified applicants and interviewees to be the Presentation Lantern Center's newest executive director. I am pleased to have recently begun this journey of serving local immigrants and refugees in conjunction with the Board of Trustees, our education director and business coordinator, as well as over 80 dedicated and tremendous volunteers. I have long revered the Center and its mission and have referred students and friends here over the years. I believe the careers, personal endeavors, and volunteer experiences I've had throughout my life have culminated in the fulfillment of this dream come true. I have learned so much about this field throughout my former careers, as an ESL instructor for youngsters to adults, an academic advisor, and disability services provider; yet, I know that there is still a tremendous amount to learn in order to further our mission, and I look forward to every moment of it.

My excitement about and passion for meeting people from other cultures began in the late 90's as a student at Western Dubuque High School, when I became good friends with a foreign exchange student from Mexico. The following year, I began working at Area Residential Care and became fast friends with an extremely hard-working and caring immigrant family from Bosnia. I became enthralled with immigrants' stories, language, background, culture, food, drinks and learning about the incredible hardships the family had borne with courage and perseverance in order to make it from a refugee camp in Bosnia, to Dubuque, IA. As the years went on, my fascination with and love for immigrants and learning about new cultures intensified. So much so, that after being a conversation partner and involved in international clubs and the Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) clubs for a couple of years at UNI, I decided to pursue my master's degree in that field. It wasn't until I began to teach though, both internationally and in the Dallas, TX, area, that I came to understand the plight of most immigrants.

I found as a teacher of many immigrants and advisor to some, that even if a person immigrates to a new country in the best of situations, it is an incredibly stressful, exhausting, and oftentimes a confusing and difficult process at best, to become integrated

into and accepted by a new culture and "foreign" environment. Newcomers to an area do not understand people's colloquialisms, idioms, and their connected speech is QUITE different from what is learned in school (e.g., "Whatcha gonna do?" instead of "What are you going to do?"). After getting "settled," which can take years, perhaps one no longer feels quite so much like a stranger in a strange land; however, what point do you become "American?" Importantly, at what point are you no longer a "refugee," a "documented" or "undocumented" immigrant or no longer have to identify as the awkwardly termed status "alien" and can confidently say "I am from the United States"?

Jose Antonio Vargas, Pulitzer Prize winning journalist and former White House Correspondent, challenges us to "Define American." He defines an "American" as "someone who works really hard, someone who is proud to be in this country and wants to contribute to it." Vargas says "I'm independent. I pay taxes. I'm self-sufficient. I'm an American, I just don't have the right papers. I take full responsibility for my actions." Vargas was brought to the U.S. by a family member at age 12, to escape the desperate situation in his native country. A compelling documentary about the story of his and millions of other children raised in his situation (a.k.a. "childhood arrivals") is the film "Documented." Almost everyone in the United States today is an immigrant. Many in Dubuque are proud of their Irish or German heritage, and SO many other heritages since the Industrial Revolution. I agree with Vargas' definition, and based on my experience as a Dubuquer, am certain most others in the community do as well.



Megan Ruiz and Jose Antonio Vargas

Lantern Center Volunteers for the Win!



Pictured: (left to right): Sahr Lebbie, a student of two years with the Lantern Center, who recently became a naturalized U.S. citizen; volunteer tutors Jim and Suzanne Heinle, and Wahlert student Julia Norton at our Citizenship Celebration and game night on Oct. 24th.

by Jolynn Wall, Director of Education

Presentation Lantern Center (PLC) volunteers come from a wide variety of backgrounds. These backgrounds help our students reach their goals and dreams in adjusting to life in the United States. Recently, one of our 2018 citizenship success story students, Sahr Lebbie, took and passed a very difficult English placement test in hopes of acceptance into the LPN program at NICC. He is now focusing his tutoring sessions on math and its language with his tutor, Jim, a retired math teacher. He will also be working on expanding his knowledge and understanding of anatomy and physiology with a retired nursing program instructor, Sr. Susan Ivis, OSF. Both students and volunteers are grateful to be able to share the learning of specific subjects together.

This fall we also welcomed student volunteers from the University of Dubuque, Loras College, Divine Word College, Wartburg Seminary, and Wahlert High School who helps support PLC staff. Volunteer Julia Norton, states that volunteering at the PLC "has opened my eyes to the many cultures that live in Dubuque, and that we have more in common with each other than I realized." If you have been a supporter but never volunteered, we would love to have you fill out an application to help our mission of welcoming, advocacy, and education.

Whistling While We Work, Celebrating Citizenship, and Lighting the Lantern

By Sara Millhouse, Business Coordinator and Megan Ruiz, Executive Director

It's been a very busy fall at the Presentation Lantern Center! Since joining us 5 weeks ago, Megan Ruiz has been busily getting to know more than 80 tutors, over 60 students, 11 Board of Trustee members, and many Sisters of the Presentation, who sponsor and support the Center. Megan is thrilled that there are an abundance of caring folks in the tristate area and beyond, who she has been joining hands and planning and carrying out events with. Many of these incredible local partners she has collaborated with so far include Catholic Charities Legal Immigration Services, the Dubuque Community School District, Iowa Legal Aid, The Crossing Borders Organization, Pastoral Migratoria, the Knights of Columbus, Dubuque for Refugee Children, Northeast Iowa Community College, the Tri-State Hispanic Council, the Dubuque Community Foundation, and too many more to list.

We have been blessed with the vision, reputation and success built by our founding director, Sr. Corine Murray ('02-'16), PBVM, as well as the leadership for the past two years of Sarah Gieseke, to whom we wished "farewell" when she moved this past summer. We thank our board president, Tim Moothart, for working tenaciously as interim director and chair of the hiring committee, as we searched for the right fit.

Being a non-profit that relies heavily on the generosity of our local supporters, we dove further into fundraising efforts this fall, beginning with a "singalong" fundraiser at Jubeck New World Brewing in September and our first "Lighting the Lantern" international buffet and game night event at Convivium Urban Farmstead in November. Under the leadership of Megan, Tim, fundraising committee member and local legislator Chuck Isenhart (who originally had the vision for the event), and Board of Trustees member Mary Lou Mauss, the event was a resounding success, raising both awareness and funds. Over 85 people attended the event. Two important people were guest speakers: Yer Vang, J.D., and PLC student Sahr Lebbie, CNA. Yer spoke about a myriad of vital topics, starting with her family's personal, harrowing story as refugees many

years ago, following with reasons the world has many refugees, and last but certainly not least, both the impact that a welcoming community can have and the necessity to advocate for and give a voice to the voiceless. Sahr, a multi-lingual, college graduate originally from Sierra Leone, spoke about his admiration and appreciation for the Center, stating that the tutors and staff at the PLC are counted among friends he is extremely grateful for, and also the confidence boost he needed in order to conquer the daunting process of obtaining citizenship. We were pleased with the response of local businesses, churches and religious organizations sponsoring this fundraiser, which brought people together for an evening of new and deeper connections with their fellow community members.

JoLynn Wall now serves as our director of education and hospitality coordinator. She has taken her new role to heart and utilized money from donations and grants to purchase new materials for the Center. She has been recruiting diverse new students and tutors, building connections with our area universities, working with Center volunteer JoJean Decker of Dupaco to provide financial literacy classes for students, and initiated conversational English sessions on Saturdays in November and December.

As our immigrant students and those we serve know, change can be challenging, but it also brings opportunity. It's an exciting time of opportunity here at the Center! We urge you to support us however you feel called to. If you're ever in the Millwork District this chilly winter and would like a tour or to learn more, please stop on in. Grab a cup of coffee or tea and a snack from us, and take a trip around the world by exploring new cultures without the cost and headaches of travel.



SCHMID INNOVATION CENTER
900 Jackson Street
Suite LL5-1
Dubuque, Iowa 52001
563-557-7134

The Presentation Lantern Center is a drop-in center offering hospitality, educational opportunities and advocacy to adult immigrants, especially women, who are striving to better their lives. Sponsored by the Sisters of the Presentation, Dubuque, Iowa, the center is a non-profit organization.

HOURS

Monday, Wednesday, Friday
10:00 AM - 3:00 PM

Tuesday, Thursday
1:00 PM - 7:00 PM

Contact us at
563-557-7134
thelanterncenter@gmail.com

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We welcome your support and prayers. Your generosity touches many lives and hearts from around the world.

Please make checks payable to Presentation Lantern Center.

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PHOTO GALLERY

Lighting the Lantern



Lighting the Lantern, Fundraiser at Convivium on Nov. 18th, photo (left to right) Chuck Isenhart, Tim Moothart, Yer Vang, Megan Ruiz, and Sahr Lebbie.

Jubeck Singalong



(left to right) At Jubeck New World Brewery Singalong, Sept. 28th: Tim Moothart, Norma Fernandez-Pearson, Jim Pearson, Larry Kruse and Bob Sigwarth; Dan Caraway on guitar/vocals.