



the Lantern

Summer 2025 • Volume 20, Issue #3

A newsletter of the Presentation Lantern Center

A Story of Courage, Persistence and Hope

Imagine standing in line at a grocery store for 12 hours, hoping to buy basic food for your family. You work full time, but like most people in Venezuela, your wages can't keep up with soaring prices. Bread is \$12 a loaf, and milk can cost up to \$15 a gallon—if it's even available. After rent and bills, you're left with just \$30 to stretch over two weeks, thanks only to support from family who fled the country.

That was the life for one of our language learners. Faced with poverty and desperate for safety and opportunity, she risked everything. She and her sister used their savings to make the dangerous 2,500-mile journey from Venezuela to the United States. She crossed the treacherous Darién Gap, a jungle filled with deadly animals, raging rivers and violent cartels. Many don't survive the journey. She did.

At the U.S. border, she was able to legally request asylum, a right protected by international law, but the next challenge was just beginning. It takes many months, sometimes years, for an asylum seeker to get a work authorization (i.e., a work permit), if they are ever even granted one by the government. Without legal work authorization, she walked long distances to her jobs—rain or shine—and earned cash by cleaning houses, babysitting and mowing lawns.

She survived thanks to occasional help from friends and the the Lantern Center's Urgent Student Need Fund, supported by generous donors like you. The Center also connected her to counseling services when the weight of her journey led to moments of deep despair.

She spent 125 hours working one-on-one with her English tutor at the Lantern Center. This consistent, caring relationship was, in her words, "the only constant in my life this past year." Through additional English classes and tireless dedication, she reached high proficiency and found a job paying three times the minimum wage.

Now, she not only supports herself but also helps supplement her mother's income in Venezuela, where food insecurity remains overwhelming. Recently, she proudly walked to the Center to hand-deliver her first donation—a crisp \$100 bill—along with a bag of lunch treats for staff. "You saved my life," she said.

Because of your support, we stood alongside 253 immigrants last year, offering 4,878 hours of tutoring, resources and hope. Your generosity funds essential staff, emergency assistance and educational materials that volunteers use to support our students on their journey. In 2025, we expanded our Urgent Student Needs Fund to help immigrants cover critical expenses such as obtaining passports, attending immigration appointments and applying for work permits.

Thank you for being part of this life-changing work.

Megan

With gratitude,
Megan

On June 23, the BVM community launched a powerful, year-long Immigration Reform Campaign, affirming their deep commitment to justice and compassion for immigrant families. To kick off the effort, they gathered a dedicated group of local advocates, including our own Megan Ruiz, who are working tirelessly to support immigrants across northeast Iowa.

Pictured with Megan, representing the Sisters of Charity, BVM, are Patrick Maddux, Director of BVM Life and Mission, and Angie Connolly, Director of Communications; along with Ry Meyer, Immigration Attorney, and Tracy Morrison, Executive Director—both from Catholic Charities.



Staff Voices: What Inspires Us



“I feel honored when someone says we are ‘just like family’ to them.

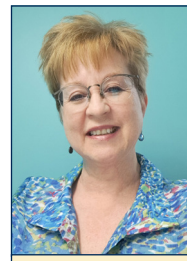
It’s incredible to be part of a place where everyone is greeted with a smile, handshake, or hug, and where they can practice and improve their English without being judged or criticized. I love that we are there for people. We get to share some of their happiest moments and are trusted to be there for them during their hardest times, too. The gratitude people express for free tutoring and support provides immeasurable joy.” —Megan



*Megan Ruiz
Executive
Director*

“Being part of the Lantern Center team has been a life-changing experience for me.

I love supporting our students as they learn English and overcome language barriers while adjusting to American culture. They carry hope, resilience and courage with them through every step of their journey in our community. It is an honor to walk alongside them and be part of their story of growth and belonging.”—Ann



*Ann Lorenz
Community
Outreach
Director*



*Sue Ellis
Education
Director*

“It gives me great joy to witness the confidence of our students grow from week to week as they gain skills in using English.

I also enjoy special moments when a student comes to their tutoring session bursting with pride because they got a job or used English to talk to their child’s teacher. I have the responsibility of pairing students and volunteer tutors, which I take seriously. It is rewarding to watch the development of these pairs grow over time and see the amazing friendships that are forged. Every tutor truly makes a difference in their student’s life in each two-hour weekly session.”—Sue



*Sara Millhouse
Business Support
Coordinator*

“Every day I work at the Lantern Center, I meet people who have overcome incredible adversity to be here and who are adding so much to our rich community.

One of our tutors likes to say that ‘This is my happy place,’ and I feel the same way. I’m inspired by everything our students and tutors bring to the table. It’s awe-inspiring to see long-time students who first walked through our door looking scared and uncomfortable, and now they can express themselves, joke, feel safe in their environment, share the gifts of their experiences and connect with others.” —Sara

Rene Celebrates Citizenship!

Megan was thrilled to attend the July 6 citizenship oath ceremony at the Field of Dreams, where 34 new citizens from 20 countries across Iowa were joyfully celebrated—including Rene, a proud new American! Rene, his wife, and both his parents have all studied at the Lantern Center over the years.



Right: Ry Meyer, immigration attorney with Catholic Charities, Rene and Megan.

We are deeply grateful to Katie Fischer and Jerry Enzler for lending their voices to this summer’s appeal, included as an insert in this issue. Their heartfelt message reminds us that the Lantern Center is more than a place—it’s a community built on hope, dignity and connection.

Katie, pictured with her husband Jerry, received the Lantern Award and a 10-year service award at our June 25 volunteer picnic.



A Celebration of Gratitude

On July 25, more than 180 volunteers, students and families gathered at Eagle Point Park for our annual Volunteer Appreciation Picnic—a celebration of the people who make the Lantern Center shine.

The joyful energy of students spending time with tutors, staff and board members was a powerful reminder that the Lantern Center is not just growing—it's thriving. Together, we are building a deeply rooted community of connection, learning and belonging. **To each of our volunteers: thank you for planting seeds of hope—one learner, one lesson and one act of kindness at a time.**

The Lantern Award is our highest volunteer honor, presented each year to individuals whose extraordinary dedication and service shine brightly in our community. This year we were proud to recognize four remarkable recipients. Pictured here (left to right) are board member JoJean Decker, joined by her family; Suzanne Rubenbauer, FSPA and Charlotte Enright, OSF (pictured here with her student). Katie Fischer, another of this year's honorees, is featured on page two.

LANTERN AWARD WINNERS

JoJean Decker
Charlotte Enright, OSF
Katie Fischer
Suzanne Rubenbauer, FSPA



CHAMPION AWARD WINNERS

Mary Klein, Bro. Brian McLauchlin,
SVD, Shirley Meriwether,
Lisa Ruppel and R.R.S. Stewart/
Dubuque for Refugee Children

*Bro. Brian McLauchlin, SVD, Mary Klein, Shirley Meriwether and R.R.S. Stewart, Chair of Dubuque for Refugee Children received our Champion Award.
(Not pictured: Lisa Ruppel.)*



10-YEAR VOLUNTEER AWARDS

Barbara Day, Ann Ernst,
Katie Fischer, MJ Gregory,
Jim & Suzanne Heinle,
Tom Lo Guidice,
Mary Martens, BVM,
Tim & Mary Moothart,
Dianne Roche and Sue Simon



MJ Gregory, Jim & Suzanne Heinle, Katie Fischer, Dianne Roche, Mary Martens, BVM and Mary & Tim Moothart received our 10-year volunteer award—a milestone that reflects their dedication and impact. (Not pictured: Barbara Day, Ann Ernst, Tom Lo Guidice and Sue Simon.)



Schmid Innovation Center
900 Jackson Street
Suite LL5-1
Dubuque, Iowa 52001 W

MISSION

The Presentation Lantern Center offers hospitality, educational opportunities and advocacy to adult immigrants, especially women, who are striving to better their lives.

HOURS

Monday, Wednesday, Friday:
10 AM - 3 PM
Tuesday and Thursdays: 1 to 7 PM

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Craig Takes - President
Faye Finnegan - Vice President
Lynn Fangman, PBVM - Treasurer
JoJean Decker - Secretary

Matt Dodds
Richelle Friedman, PBVM
Marilou Irons, PBVM
Dianne McDermott
Tim Moothart
Tonya Trumm

OUR TEAM

Megan Ruiz
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Ann Lorenz
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Sue Ellis
Education Director
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Sara Millhouse
Business Coordinator
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CONTACT US

563.557.7134
info@thelanterncenter.org

 Visit us at thelanterncenter.org

 facebook.com/LanternDBQ

Save the Date! Let's Shine Together on March 19



Lighting the Lantern returns on Thursday, March 19, 2026, and you won't want to miss this inspiring evening. Last year's event sold out—and we are already planning another unforgettable evening of connection, inspiration and celebration. Mark your calendars now!

Each year, our annual event brings together friends, supporters and community champions who believe in the power of welcome, learning and belonging. It is a chance to reunite with old friends, meet new ones and light the way forward for immigrant and refugee families. Individual tickets are \$90. Visit www.thelanterncenter.org for event updates!

Sponsor Early, Shine Bright!

Early sponsors will be recognized in the months leading up to the event, including in our October 2025 newsletter. Want to learn more or reserve your sponsorship? Email Ann Lorenz at ann@thelanterncenter.org. Our 2026 sponsorship levels are as follows:

Shining Star – \$5,000
Beacon of Light – \$2,500

Ray of Hope – \$1,000
Share-A-Table – \$500

35 Flags of Inclusion

One of last year's most moving moments was the display of 35 international flags, coordinated by Emily Shedek, Public Relations Specialist with Divine Word College, and her mom, event co-chair Mary Klein. Each flag represented a student's home country—filling the ballroom with a vibrant reminder of the diversity that strengthens our community and a powerful symbol of why we do this work. The flags filled the room with color and pride, transforming the ballroom into a celebration of cultures, resilience and shared hope.



Friends of the Lantern Center

We are truly grateful to our community for their incredible support!
Gifts received April 9 - July 8, 2025.

Community Foundation Donor Advised Funds

Thomas & Catherine Boxleiter
Donna Wahlert

Great Great Day

Anonymous
Linda Barbaro
Faye Finnegan
Ellen Fliehler
Ronald Hoefer
Robert King
Sandra Larson
Connie & Mike Murphy
Greg Orwoll
Art & Dianne Roche
David & Teresa Salyer
Lois Schueller
Karen Zeckser

In Honor of

David Harris & Becky Taylor-Harris
Sharon Gaul, EXIT Realty #GaulGives
Maura McCarthy, PBVM
Sisters of St. Francis
Sue Simon's Birthday
Robert Beck, Karla Braig,
Douglas & Jean Cheever,
Sue Davis, Doug Henry,
Beverly Kolz, Deb Otto

Diane Repass, Anne Rooney,
Jennifer Simon and Sue Simon

In Memory of Maryann Caudill-Lo Guidice

Tom Lo Guidice
**Polly Cross, niece of Geraldine
Duffy, PBVM**
Family of Raphael & Joan Montag
Anita Welch
Beth Driscoll, PBVM

General Gifts

Catholic Financial Life - Matching Gift
Douglas & Jean Cheever
Church of the Resurrection
Community Foundation of
Greater Dubuque
Linda Connolly
Paula Connors & Paul Opperman
Rick & Rae Ann Dickinson
Divine Word College
Louann Doering, PBVM
Sue & Michael Ellis
Charlotte, Enright, OSF
Lynn Fangman, PBVM
Faye Finnegan
Jerry Enzler & Katherine Fischer
Richelle Friedman, PBVM
Terry & Paula Friedman

Richard & Colleen Gitter
M.J. & Dick Gregory
Aaron & Zoe Johnson
Mike & Jean Kelly
James & Nancy Klauer
Angie & Paul Kronlage
Greg & Stacey Lickteig
Stephen & Sharon Loeffelholz
Tom Lo Guidice
Ann Lorenz
Lois & James Loughren
Molony Foundation
Lucille Nicholson
Winston Dwark Persaud &
May Burt Persaud
Relay Iowa, Inc.
Katheryn Reuter

St. Peter Lutheran Church
Loren & Becky Shellabarger
Sisters of the Presentation
Bonnie Ulfers, PBVM
Ronald Wetjen

Grants

The Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration awarded two \$10,000 grants to support urgent student needs. One grant helped launch our new "Ride to Success" initiative, which assists learners with transportation costs so they can keep pursuing their goals.

The Women's Giving Circle of the Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque honored us with \$1,500 grant for our Urgent Student Need Fund specifically to help our women language learners overcome financial barriers to success.

We are proud to be a United Way agency!

