

# massachusetts reads and succeeds!

A monthly series dedicated to the people and the organizations whose efforts in literacy make Massachusetts a great place to live and learn.



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Is someone you know a Literacy Champion?

Each year the Massachusetts Literacy Champions Awards Program recognizes and rewards multiple individuals whose efforts in literacy education make our communities great places to live and learn.

to submit an application, visit [www.massliteracy.org](http://www.massliteracy.org). Application deadline is **August 30, 2007**.

The Massachusetts Literacy Foundation, in partnership with Verizon is proud to support these awards.

Applications for the 2008 awards are now being accepted. For more information about the Literacy Champions and



## Technology Lights the Way

At the bottom of Dolores Thibault-Muñoz's emails, there is a quote that reads, "Like the moon, come out from behind the clouds, shine!" Her personal philosophy? Perhaps. But coming from the Executive Director of the Cleghorn Neighborhood Center, this lovely verse reads more like an exhortation – an encouragement – to the adult students whom the center serves. Like the other six winners of Verizon's 2007 ESL Technology Grants, the Center provides opportunities and support that help English language learners shine brightly indeed. And with a total of \$150,000 in awards from Verizon, these exemplary programs will be casting their light more broadly and deeply than ever before.

Much of this light will actually come from the glow of computer screens. Technology, used in two different ways, is woven tightly into the seven programs. First, technology serves as a means to expand learning opportunities, as in the case of the Boston Adult Literacy Fund's LearnerWeb and the Worcester Public Library's ESOL Education Project. These programs are reaching out in innovative ways to students who have been stuck for months – or years – on waiting lists. Other programs, like the Cleghorn Neighborhood Center, Cambridge College and Northern Essex Community College, utilize technology to enhance the learning of program participants. Two other organizations – Framingham Adult ESL Plus and the Massachusetts Career Development Institute – will use their funding to incorporate both the elements of expanding opportunities to waiting list students while also deepening the learning of enrolled students.

Overall, what's most striking about these programs is the passion with which the administrators talk about them. In animated conversations directors and coordinators related stories

about the students and their families, the community's volunteers, and the partnerships they've formed with other agencies. But the other outstanding feature is the seriousness with which they discuss their program's outcomes. As Peter Bowman, Verizon's Regional Director of Public Affairs, noted, "These recipients were chosen because of their focus on, and their achievements concerning, program outcomes." The recognition is well-deserved, because although none of the seven winners were so bold as to say so, it is clear that their work is about changing lives.

Growing up, it had always seemed that there were kids who were good at English, and kids who were good at math. Literacy, armed with books and journals, had staked its ground against technology, with its calculators and Mac computers. Yet despite what appeared to be an uncrossable gulf, the 2007 ESL Technology Grant winners managed not only to introduce literacy and technology; they actually married them. Here's to their long and happy life together.

by Lauren Leikin

### The 2007 Verizon Massachusetts ESL Technology Grant Winners are:

Boston Adult Literacy Fund; Cambridge College; Framingham Adult ESL Plus; Massachusetts Career Development Institute (MDCI); Northern Essex Community College; United Neighbors of Cleghorn; and Worcester Public Library.

For more about the winning programs, please visit: [massliteracy.com](http://massliteracy.com)

Meet Judy Langley, Massachusetts Literacy Champion. She doesn't wear a pocket protector and it's hard to imagine her dressed in the Beatnik black of the Geniuses behind the Bar at the Apple Store. Except that Judy Langley could out-genius the best of them.



For one thing, she can "speak both English and technology," she says, a rare gift when it comes to the computer gifted, one that served her well in her past corporate career in Canada and now, in her present one, as the Technology Coordinator of the Literacy Learning Center at the Plymouth Public Library.

There, she assists ABE instructors, ESOL tutors, and all of their students with computers. Assists, but does not teach, Langley would say. In fact when Judy Langley hears the uninitiated educator or politician proclaim that "teaching computer," is crucial to the field of literacy, she says she has to bite her tongue. "We don't teach computers here," she says, "We use them as a tool to facilitate learning."

And now that the Department of Education's (DOE) assessment for Adult Basic Learners and Non-Native speakers is exclusively computerized, Langley's got her work cut out for her. But unfazed, she says she "saves a few dead mice for students who are intimidated or afraid," and describes how to use them by comparing the motion to the pivot of a driver's foot from brake to gas. But guaranteed to assuage the worst of their fears, are the programs that Langley, herself, creates for them.

Simple tools Langley would say, to support a teacher's unit, or help a student study. But a well-honed tool can be a thing of art, designed to make the most challenging tasks, easy, and even fun.

Take, for instance, her Citizenship Quizzes that she began designing three years ago, after looking at the Department of Homeland Security's Citizenship Practice Test. "They had two large documents to download to study. Lots and lots of information. It's written at a high school level and difficult for native English speaking people to understand, let alone an immigrant." She also saw that the questions were randomly organized and that the DHS only provided

the single correct answer to each.

So she began by dividing related questions into three categories that became three quizzes. Then she designed the quizzes using Powerpoint software, Print Shop, and Windows' built-in voice recorder. Bring a quiz onscreen, and students see on a blue background, the informal Comic Sans large point font pose a question in bright yellow print, and below it, a choice of four possible answers, three made up by Langley with "a bit of humor" and one that is correct.

Now a student could decide whether the Pilgrims came to America a) for gold b) for spices, c) for religious freedom, or d) for free land. And by clicking a megaphone icon, the student could choose to hear Langley pronounce the possible answers in her soft and reassuring voice. If then, students are still uncertain, Langley designed a big orange "button" to appear on the right side of the screen, that – reminiscent of Alice's "Drink Me" bottle – says on it: "Hints."

The program is bright, friendly, non-intimidating, unpatronizing, and as Langley hoped, funny – and with all of Langley's click-on supporting material, like song

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samples, charts, maps, and photographs, some of which Langley took herself, students are not bound to get bored. Nor will they be

discouraged, since Langley's made sure that the quizzes teach and don't drill, and that they de-emphasize what students don't know, in favor of emphasizing they will know, if they keep practicing.

And soon, Langley's Citizenship Quizzes, suitable for grades four to adult, will be available to other literacy programs and schools when Langley copies it onto CDs. "If I can foster this," she says, "why not save someone else some time?"

Until then, she'll spend her time adding DHS's forty-five new questions to the program, while she continues to dream up other projects and improve upon those she's already finished. But call Langley creative, she'll deny it with a laugh and insist that she is solely a "mathematical, logical, organized thinker." But she's also an artisan to the benefit of all her apprentices, an artisan of the Technological Age.

~ by Peggy Rambach, author and 2006 Literacy Champion

Visit [www.massliteracy.org](http://www.massliteracy.org) for additional information on the Literacy Champions.