For over a quarter of a century, LitNet has been known as a place that extends a warm welcome and helping hand to anyone seeking educational support, no matter their background or nationality. Last year, our Board of Directors took time to develop a strategic plan for our next quarter-century, evaluating past successes and future needs. As part of that work, we re-examined LitNet’s guiding principles-- our mission, our vision, and our values. Our hope is that our restatement of those principles will not only better guide our work, but inspire others to join in celebrating the diversity, flexibility, compassion, and community that defines LitNet.

Our Mission

LitNet seeks to transform the lives of adult learners, both immigrant and U.S.-born, through the power of literacy, education, and advocacy. Literacy is a gateway, not just to education, but to personal success and social inclusion. Our mission statement recognizes our need to both educate and advocate on behalf of our adult learners.

Our Values

We believe that everyone has a right to an education. We believe in the power of literacy to transform lives. We believe that challenges in life and learning should be met with patience and flexibility. And we believe that a connected community is a stronger community. These core values guide all that our staff, volunteers, and Board do.

Our Work

LitNet welcomes adult students from more than 20 different countries who speak a total of 14 different languages. More than 90% of LitNet’s students are

(Continued on p. 6)
Before leaving, we want to say thank you for your help and to share our LitNet experience!!!

One year ago, Loïc and I arrived in Lenox for living our “American dream.”

We had strong knowledge in English (grammar, vocabulary, conjugation...) but we definitely needed to improve our language!

Mary Spina & LitNet association helped us to meet our English tutors: Harriet Weitstone and Sibylle Baier.

To me, sharing experiences and living real situations (like visiting a museum, doing shopping, having dinner...) are the best way to progress.

They help us to feel more confident, especially when I started my job of Café Server at Canyon Ranch.

By the way, we learned so much about American lifestyle, local and cultural life.

We are so thankful, we couldn’t dream better tutors... Harriet and Sibylle are friends and we did some lessons all together with my husband too.

Not only we learned so much with them, but also, we get amazing friends forever!!! We already miss them.

Our stay in the Berkshires was unbelievable and we promise we will come back to visit our tutors and friends.

Take care and thank you!
Armelle & Loïc

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“WE ARE SO THANKFUL”
A note from Armelle and Loïc, two LitNet Students from France

The mission of the Literacy Network of South Berkshire (LitNet) is to transform the lives of adult learners, both immigrant and U.S.-born, through the power of literacy, education, and advocacy.

LitNet provides free, individualized, one-on-one instruction in reading, high-school equivalency test preparation, English for Speakers of Other Languages, and citizenship test preparation. Our professional staff and trained team of volunteer tutors offers generalized educational support and promotes access to a network of community resources.

LitNet is privately funded and relies upon the generosity of businesses, foundations, and individual donors to advance our mission.

LITERACY NETWORK OF SOUTH BERKSHIRE
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LITNET RECEIVES MAJOR GIFT FROM LENOX FAMILY FOUNDATION TO EXPAND U.S. CITIZENSHIP PROGRAM

In July, LitNet announced the receipt of a $50,000 gift from the Matthew and Hannah Keator Family Foundation to enhance LitNet’s citizenship program and expand its reach.

LitNet student Juan Cabrera recently completed the citizenship process after studying diligently with his tutor, Marty Sennett. Juan, who is originally from Mexico, passed his exam in August and was sworn in as a U.S. citizen in September. He explained, “I’m grateful to have found the Literacy Network. They helped me to pass my Citizenship Test. I thank them for all their help.”

In the coming months, LitNet will be expanding its existing citizenship training and support program to help more students like Juan succeed. The program will provide improved access to information and online study materials, offer specialized tutor training, and enhance collaborations with other local agencies that serve the immigrant population. The cornerstone of this project will be the creation of a scholarship program to defray the cost of the application process, which typically runs more than $700.

As a tutor, Marty was excited to hear about this gift to LitNet. He reflected on his experience: “It’s a privilege to help someone prepare for their Citizenship Exam. These students have waited long and worked hard for a chance to acquire something that many of us who were born in the United States take for granted.”

Marty explained that studying for the citizenship exam involves more than simply memorizing facts. “By the completion of their studies, the students have a sound understanding of how our government is designed to work, and how our laws and the Constitution have evolved over time within the framework of the original document. They also gain an appreciation for the rich diversity of individuals and cultures who have contributed to our nation. It’s tremendously rewarding to play a small part in continuing that tradition,” he declared.

Matthew and Hannah Keator, who are both multi-generational residents of the Berkshires, were inspired by LitNet’s exceptional track record and the people associated with the organization. They were eager to commit resources to strengthen LitNet’s efforts to help students achieve their dreams of attaining U.S. citizenship.

The Keators explained, “We salute LitNet of Berkshire County for their efforts in helping people to learn the English language. In addition, we want to support the assistance they provide to those who share the dream of becoming citizens. That pursuit is something we encourage and celebrate.”

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LitNet Launches New Website

In February 2018, LitNet launched our newly re-designed website! Thanks to a grant from the Robbins-de Beaumont Foundation, we were able to revise and update our site to create a modern, effective, and easy-to-navigate resource for the LitNet community. The new site is fully responsive so that it can be viewed clearly on phones and other mobile devices. It also includes a multi-language translator, quick-contact forms, an interactive events calendar, and a comprehensive digital library of teaching resources for tutors.

This project was realized thanks to the incredible help of developer, technical advisor and longstanding volunteer, Bill Schaepe, as well as the design support of board member Lisa Cavender. The Website Working Group, (composed of tutors Ellen Boshe, Matthew Chester, Kathie Dean, Virginia Giddens, Bill Schaepe, Berly Shearn, Linda Taylor, and Ron Terry), as well as the Education Committee of the Board of Directors provided invaluable support.

LitNet values the success of our students and the growth of our network and community. Our students work with their tutors to achieve their own personal goals – whether that is to obtain a better job, become a US citizen, or simply learn how to better communicate with a co-worker or others in their community. Most of our adult learners have to work hard to balance challenging demands of work, home, and family with their desire to better their education. It’s not easy. Our flexible one-on-one tutoring strives to make their learning simple, convenient, and heartfelt.

LitNet’s Vision

Our vision – what we work towards –is an engaged, welcoming and literate Berkshire County community. During our first quarter century, we have succeeded in creating a wide network of support and friendship between hundreds of adult learners and their volunteer tutors. With your support, we hope to grow that network by many hundreds more over the next 25 years. The larger our network, the stronger our community.

BENEFIT CONCERT FEATURING EMANUEL AX
STRIKES JUST THE RIGHT CHORD WITH LITNET CROWD

May 26th was a wonderful night for those lucky enough to have tickets to the nearly sold-out LitNet benefit concert by world-renowned pianist Emanuel Ax at the Mahaiwe Performing Arts Center in Great Barrington.

LitNet President Lucy Prashker welcomed concert attendees and thanked leading sponsors, Greylock Federal Credit Union and Iredale Mineral Cosmetics, as well as the many other sponsors whose support enabled more than thirty LitNet students and their families to attend the performance.

Prashker highlighted LitNet’s special appeal—the one-on-one approach that creates powerful bonds between tutors and students. She also congratulated the evening’s raffle winner Georgia Massucco, who took home a prize basket containing four Tanglewood tickets and VIP parking passes, dinner at the Red Lion Inn, and a celebratory bottle of champagne from Wheatleigh.

From the moment he sat at the piano, Mr. Ax dazzled the audience with exquisite performances of Beethoven, Liszt, and Mozart, and a Chopin encore, for which he received an enthusiastic standing ovation by the grateful audience.

Alan Chartock, President and CEO of WAMC/Northeast Public Radio, wrote of the event in the Berkshire Eagle: “Manny Ax is, of course, a Berkshire citizen and one of our own. To know him is to admire this humble man who plays the piano better than anyone else. Ax was born behind the Iron Curtain and eventually came to the United States with his parents. He learned the language and fit right in.”

Inspired by the concert, Chartock continued, “LitNet is one of the most worthwhile nonprofits ever... LitNet relies on volunteers to teach our newcomers how to speak the language, which leads to employment, further educational opportunities, and a full American life.”

LitNet is grateful to Emanuel Ax and to everyone who helped make this concert a tremendous success.
Meet Domerica and Marsha

Domerica

Where are you from?
I am from Guadalajara, Mexico.

When and why did you come to the United States?
I came 9 years ago because some of my family is here and there are opportunities here.

When did Marsha become your tutor?
Almost 5 years ago. Before that I worked in a hotel everyday with Spanish speakers and I struggled learning English by myself.

How has Marsha helped you?
She has taught me so much about reading, speaking and writing. She is a wonderful person with a lot of patience. We talk about everything. She encouraged me to start my own business and helped me understand what I had to do. We still meet once a week and FaceTime when she’s in Florida.

What is your business?
My business is Berkshire Burrito. We make and sell Mexican food and smoothies. I started it twelve years ago. I love to cook and speak with the customers. It helps me practice English and learn more vocabulary. It’s a hard business in the winter because it’s slow, but the summer is busy.

Do you have children?
Yes, my son, Angel, is 13 years old and my daughter, Caroline, is 2 years old. I hope they go to college and get a good education, be happy and have good lives.

What are your challenges now?
Raising my children and working so many hours. Learning English is hard. I struggle with grammar, having long conversations, and writing good paragraphs. Also, I miss my country because most of my family is there. I haven’t been back in nine years.

What are your future goals?
My goal is to learn more English and to help others who come here and want to be independent. My dream is to be a teacher one day.

Marsha

What were the challenges when you first started tutoring Domerica?
Helping her was difficult because we couldn’t communicate well, especially on the phone. Her son would have to translate when possible.

How has she progressed over the years?
She has come a long way and is especially proud of being independent. Communicating with doctors, teachers and customers was very important to her. Her English has improved so much. She now asks questions and wants to know the meaning of every word she sees. Being in business forces her to speak well with better pronunciation.

How do you feel you’ve helped her and how are you helping her now?
We read short stories like “Seedfolks.” I ask her questions about the stories as she still needs help with comprehension. Each of us reading the same stories while I’m in Florida is the easiest strategy to work together. We FaceTime for conversation, working a lot on vocabulary. When she was starting her business, I helped her with resources like the health department, credit card system, etc. I understood her situation as I had a food business while raising my two children.

What do you admire about Domerica?
I admire how she handles the many things going on in her life, especially her children and her business. She’s a single mom with a lot of responsibility. Thankfully, she has two brothers here who own businesses and are a great support to her. I admire that she is taking night classes at BCC. How she manages it all is amazing!

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