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Literacy Council has been helping Fort Bend County residents for 25 years

By Natalie Harms | November 13, 2012

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Photo By Eddy Matchette/Freelance

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Wayne Fluke, left, and Ben Amos work together at the Literacy Council of Fort Bend County. Wayne Fluke, left, and Ben Amos work together at the Literacy Council of Fort Bend County.



More Information

If you go

What: Bike the Bend for Literacy

When: 8 a.m. Nov. 18

Where: The ride begins and ends at Foster High School, 4400 FM 723 in Richmond. Three routes are available: 20, 35 and 62 miles.

Register: www.active.com

Details: <http://www.ftbendliteracy.org>

Ben Amos never thought he would have to live without reading a menu or perusing a newspaper. That is until he found himself without this seemingly basic skill.

"I had a stroke a little over a year ago and some of the brain damage that occurred is that I cannot read," Amos, 58, said. "I can write and spell as well as I could before and then not be able to read it back even to myself a few minutes later."

After recovering physically, he sought out a place that would heal him mentally. He came across the **Literacy Council** of Fort Bend County that offers several adult programs such as GED tests, U.S. citizen tests and

college preparation, English-as-a-second-language classes and basic computer skills classes.

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However, there were no classes for relearning how to read, but that didn't prevent the Literacy Council from helping Amos in his recovery.

"I feel very privileged," said Amos, a self-employed business owner; "they created a program for me."

The team at the Literacy Council asked **Wayne Fluke**, a longtime tutor and volunteer teacher, to help.

Amos' brain damage, which is classified as alexia or acquired dyslexia, made Fluke, who's never worked with a student of this diagnosis, apprehensive at first.

But over the months, the two developed a close relationship, spurred by Fluke's dedication and persistence.

"(Wayne) has added such a personal touch to his sessions with Ben," said program director, **Amelia Perez**. "He has definitely done that."

This class customization isn't surprising given the 25 years of nonprofit work done by the LCFBC.

Throughout the 2½ decades, the LCFBC has had about 2,900 volunteers and will educate its 25,000th adult this year, said Executive Director **Brenda Bowman**.

Beginning around the founder's kitchen table in 1987, the organization first offered classes in a room at **Wharton County Junior College**, said former Executive Director Lucia Street.

"But we needed to tutor," Street said. "We snuck a tutoring (session) in now and then but we needed more space to tutor."

LCFBC then rented the Brooks Street location of the **Sugar Land Police Department**, expanding its facilities to offer tutoring and a small computer lab. The organization now is housed at a 6,000-square-foot building in Sugar Land at 12530 Emily Court.

With the larger facility, the Literacy Council was able to help more people. Street remembers the joy of one student in particular.

"One day I was in my office in our center and I heard this noise," Street said. "Someone was running and came rushing in my office and grabbed me and started dancing. She was saying 'I wrote my name, I wrote my name!'"

Street believes that educating the adult population helps impact their children, inspiring educational success in multiple generations throughout the community as a result.

"(We're helping) people to improve their own lives," Street continued. "It's not a hand out, but a hand up."

The LCFBC is facing a literacy problem in Fort Bend County due to the growth in population and diversity.

"It's wild to actually learn how many people can't read and write," Amos said, "and who have gone their whole life without it."

Bowman and the staff are all too aware of the problem.

She said 2009 statistics show that 24 percent of the county's population lacked basic literacy skills.

In addition, about 22 percent to 24 percent lacks a high school diploma, Bowman said.

The classes at the main campus are jam-packed. They are so full that the LCFBC has expanded, creating an outreach program with classes held throughout Fort Bend County.

According to Bowman, the classes held closer to home allow more students to attend and more tutors to become involved.

The fight for literacy has been aided by volunteers, Bowman said.

"We look for someone who is interested in giving a helping hand and giving back to the community," said **Brittany Logan**, event and communication coordinator. "We have different volunteer opportunities."

Some positions include tutoring, teaching classes or helping at events. The next event is Bike the Bend on Nov. 18 at 8 a.m.

Bike the Bend began in 1999 and has been an annual event for the LCFBC. With a \$40 entrance fee after Nov. 9, riders choose a 20-, 35- or 63-mile course through the back streets of Richmond, beginning at **Foster High School**.

The organization expects to raise about \$35,000 to go to regular programming. Students benefit directly from these events, Bowman said, through new supplies and through expansion of the outreach program.



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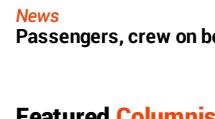
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Amos, who has shown progress in his sessions with Fluke over the past months, sings this nonprofit's praises and considers himself more aware from his experiences.

"A very important thing for the community to recognize is that people out there are trying to better themselves," Amos said; "people who would basically fall through the woodwork in Fort Bend. (The LCFBC is) a ray of sunshine for our community for both cultural understanding and for literacy."

Fluke hopes that fear, something students have mentioned as preventing them from getting help, won't stop new students from seeking this assistance.

"You've got to overcome that fear and make that first step to walk in the door," Fluke said. "You'll find that help is there. We are here, we are patient and we want to help."

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By Natalie Harms

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