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Brunner Literacy Center celebrates a decade of serving Dayton-area adults



Credit: Photo by Kathy Coffey

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By Beth Anspach, Contributing Writer

Now the only adult literacy center in the Dayton area, it serves about 250 students

For two decades, one of Dayton's best kept secrets has been open for business near the site of the former Salem Mall. It's the only literacy center for adults in the local area and since its founding in 2011, it has helped hundreds of people prepare for GED diplomas, learn English as a second language, improve reading and math skills they need for everyday living, and prepare for college entry or professional licensure and certifications.

The Brunner Literacy Center was founded by two sisters of the Precious Blood, Maryann Bremke and Helen Weber, both of whom were concerned about the statistics that revealed one out of every five adults in the Dayton area cannot read or write above the thirdgrade level, nor do they have basic math skills.

"Sister Helen was working on a committee investigating the possibility of opening a new high school in Dayton," Bremke said. "We were both involved in education and we decided the need was not for another high school but for helping people earn their GED's and improve their schools."

Bremke and Weber discussed their plans with the Precious Blood Church priest, Father Bill O'Donnell, and he didn't hesitate to offer a then-empty building owned by the church .

"At the time, the Miami Valley Literacy Council (MVLC) was open downtown," Bremke said. "We wanted to find out the ins and outs of managing a literacy center, so we went to a workshop there."

The Brunner Literacy Center (BLC) launched about the same time as the MVLC closed, and it ended up being a windfall for the sisters who were given all the former center's supplies, bookcases and books.

"We opened our doors and put a small sign in our window announcing free GED tutoring," Bremke said. "I can remember we were elated when we got up to five students!"

The first BLC tutors were members of Precious Blood and about 20 recently retired sisters. About a year and a half ago, BLC hired a new executive director, Ashley Lackovich to help them grow the program. Today, the BLC has about 150 active volunteer tutors serving about 250 students.

"In March when the stay-at-home order started, we were able to go online with our programs," Lackovich said. "It was a huge jump for us because we had no online programming before and only a few computers for students. We realized we had to keep going because pauses for our students can be devastating for their education." Literacy is not only something people need for book reading. It's vital to helping them navigate everyday life. Lackovich said that as the world has evolved and technology use increases, people who can't read or write are left even further behind.

"Doing this kind of work isn't necessarily recognized or understood by the community and many people don't know about us," Lackovich said. "Low literacy skills impact every part of life – from ability to maintain employment to understanding how to read basic instructions, leases and important correspondence."

In fact, educating the community about the literacy issues in Dayton and what BLC is doing to help is a primary focus. To help with this effort, BLC is hosting a 10th anniversary celebration event on Oct. 16. Dubbed "A Night at the Library," the event will not only help BLC mark one decade of serving the community but will also act as a fundraiser to support its programs. Former Montgomery County Commissioner Dan Foley is acting as chair of the event.

"I became aware of Brunner mostly because of my dad," Foley said. "He is a long-time Precious Blood parishioner and volunteer tutor and I always heard about all the good work BLC was doing."

Foley said he agreed to chair because of his deep respect for the BLC and because a decade of doing good work deserves to be celebrated.

"From my professional standpoint – and this is critical – literacy helps connect people to the workforce," Foley said. "BLC has done a wonderful job of that. Companies need good people to make the economy work and BLC helps fill the employment gaps with good people."

In addition to the location on Salem Avenue, BLC opened a satellite location at the Day Reporting Center on Gettysburg Avenue. This location serves individuals incarcerated for non-violent offenses. "Over a period of 10 years, we have developed many programs to help people walking through our doors," Bremke said. "They key to this is our one-on-one tutoring concept. We don't offer classes and our tutors really become mentors. They help people by giving them what they need to live their lives."



Top, The Brunner Literacy Center is the only adult literacy program in the local area. It was founded 10 years ago by two sisters of the Precious Blood, Helen Weber (left) and Maryann Bremke. Bremke remains involved with BLC today. Second, Teresa came to the BLC as a tutor because she wanted to help people improve their lives. She is working with her student, Eric. The two have been working together since 2017, and in that time, they have celebrated Eric's new jobs, promotions, and his ability to gain custody of his daughter. Eric is now working on getting his GED diploma. Third, Ashley Lackovich has served as executive director of the BLC for about a year and a half. She is leading the charge for the 10th anniversary gala fundraiser, scheduled for Oct. 16. CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

For more information about BLC and the October event, visit Brunnerliteracy.org.

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