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ABSTRACT

This publication contains stories about 10 outstanding Pennsylvania citizens who realize that a high quality education is essential to meeting life's challenges. These stories describe how 10 men and women faced great obstacles and overcame seemingly impossible barriers to become contributing and productive members of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The obstacles or barriers include a hearing disability, drug abuse, dropping out of high school, an abusive childhood, an abusive marriage, alcoholism, running away, a physical disability, and teenage marriage. (YLB)

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SUCCESS STORIES

ED 368 929



BUREAU OF ADULT BASIC AND LITERACY EDUCATION
PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
HONORS OUTSTANDING ADULT STUDENTS

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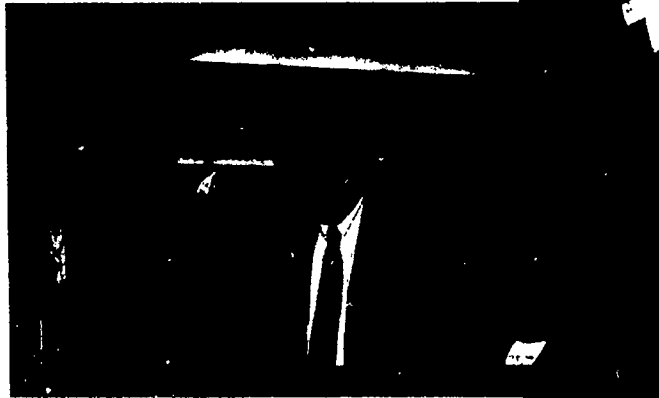
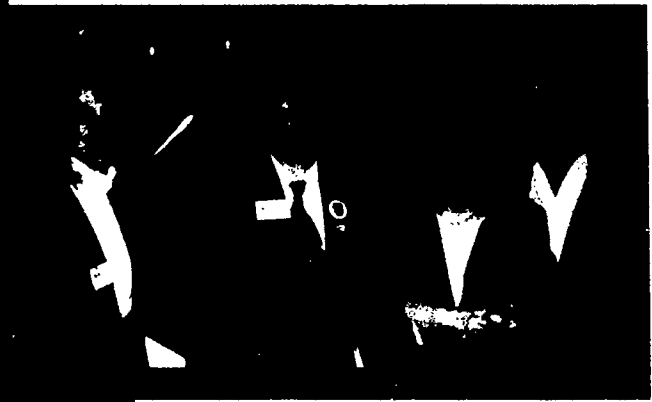
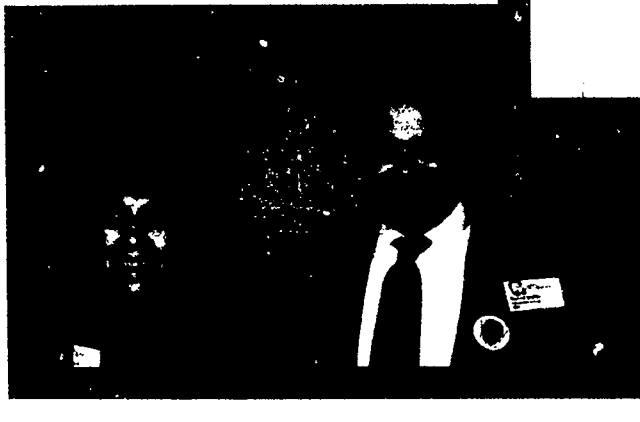
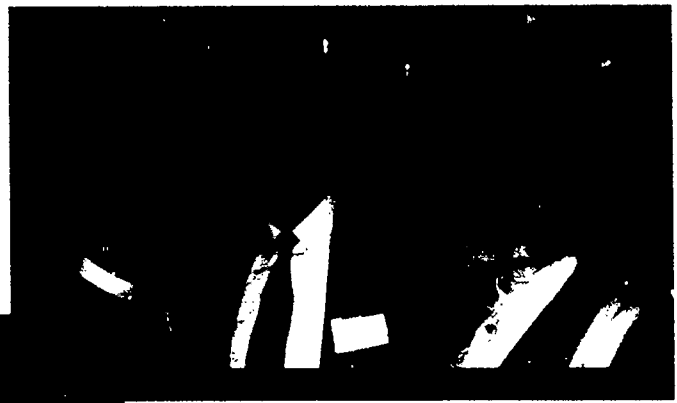
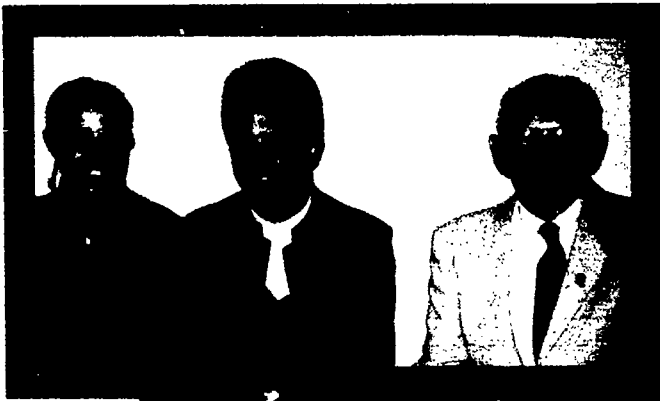
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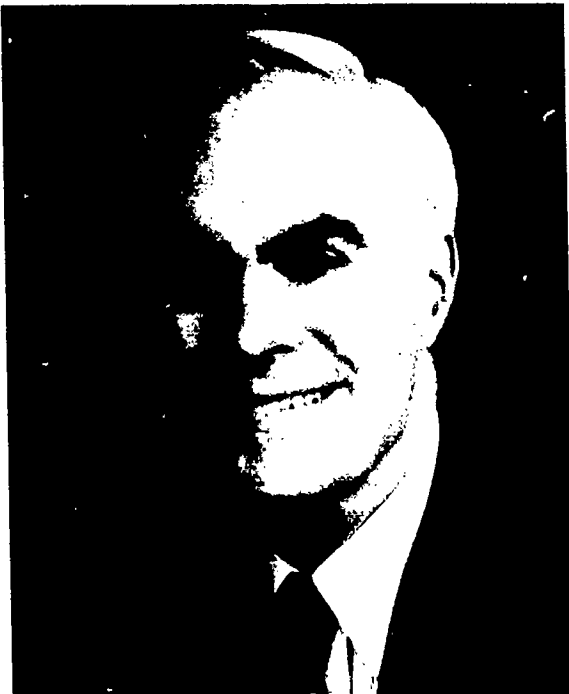
Dear Reader:

In this publication, **Success Stories: A Celebration of Achievement**, you will read about 10 outstanding Pennsylvania citizens who realize that a quality education is vital to meeting life's challenges. These 10 men and women have faced great obstacles and have overcome seemingly impossible barriers in order to become contributing and productive members of the Commonwealth.

Ellen and I strongly support adult basic education efforts in our state. My administration is committed to improving the quality of life in our Commonwealth, and has backed up that commitment with increased funding for adult literacy programs.

The education of Pennsylvania's citizens is essential to our ability to compete in a global economy. When people cannot read or do basic math, they cannot participate in their fullest potential in the home, marketplace, or workplace.

State government must continue its support of adult literacy programs. But, each Pennsylvania citizen also must be actively involved in eliminating illiteracy. Teach someone to read; volunteer at your local school or learning center. Through your efforts, we help all Pennsylvanians achieve success.



Perhaps reading these stories and sharing in the celebration of learning that each of these 10 adults exemplifies will inspire each of us to bring the job of learning to every Pennsylvanian. Together, we can make literacy a reality for everyone.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robert P. Casey". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Robert P. Casey
Governor

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

ADAMS COUNTY

Outstanding Adult Student: Harold Speelman
Sponsor: Lincoln Intermediate Unit 12

4

BERKS COUNTY

Outstanding Adult Student: Julie Bermudez
Sponsor: Reading Area Community College

6

BUTLER COUNTY

Outstanding Adult Student: David Wolfe
Sponsor: Midwestern Intermediate Unit 4

8

GREENE COUNTY

Outstanding Adult Student: Mary Rogers
Sponsor: Community Action Southwest

10

LUZERNE COUNTY

Outstanding Adult Student: Helena Jimenez Mojica
Sponsor: Luzerne Intermediate Unit 18

12

MERCER COUNTY

Outstanding Adult Student: Shun Mei Nemet
Sponsor: Mercer County Vo-Technical School

14

MONTGOMERY COUNTY

Outstanding Adult Student: Bernadette Osborn
Sponsor: Eagleville Hospital

16

NORTHAMPTON COUNTY

Outstanding Adult Student: Amy Uhler
Sponsor: Bangor - Pen Argyl Adult Education

18

PHILADELPHIA COUNTY

Outstanding Adult Student: Lillian Metzcher
Sponsor: Lutheran Settlement House Women's Program

20

Outstanding Adult Student: Ruth Salters
Sponsor: Germantown Women's Educational Project

22

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HAROLD SPEELMAN

Adams County

*Sponsor: Henry P. Wardrop
Lincoln Intermediate Unit 12*



▶ At the age of three, Harold Speelman's hearing was damaged by a high fever. He was raised by his grandparents who were non-readers. His parents were poor, uneducated and already raising 10 other children in an abusive atmosphere. He grew up scared, not knowing where

to turn for help. His family was unable to provide medical attention for him, and it was not until he was 22 that he was fitted for two hearing aids.

Enrolled in public school, he did not progress because of his hearing problem. Because he was constantly ridiculed by the other children, he suffered from low self esteem. At the age of 10, he was placed in classes for children with special needs. At 17, he dropped out to work in a furniture factory. After four full years in high school, he was still unable to read and did not have the confidence to ask for help. Harold also faced opposition in the workplace. If he did not understand directions or hear a question, his coworkers would make fun of him. He secluded himself from others because he was unable to hear their jokes and stories. When he was 40, the Easter Seal organization provided assistance in improving his speech and teaching him lip-reading. Although fitted with two hearing aids, he still is unable to hear if there is a loud background noise.

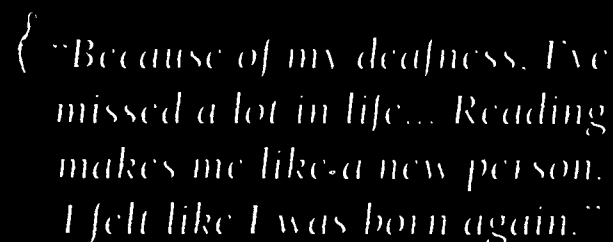
In 1988, his wife, Phyllis, saw an article about literacy in the *Gettysburg Times* and called the Adams County Literacy Council. Matched with a tutor, he completed all four Laubach books, then continued in an ABE class en route to fulfilling his dream of getting a GED. His biggest obstacle in class involves hearing vowel blends and word endings. It makes

spelling difficult and frustrates him because he wants to write and feels that his spelling is holding him back. He received a lot of criticism for attending classes, even though he tried to keep it a secret at work. He was afraid that he would be fired, if he admitted he couldn't read.

Harold readily admits that learning to read has given him self-confidence. He serves as a member of the Advisory Board of the Adams County Literacy Council and attends the New Reader Book Club. In 1991, he received the literacy council's Outstanding Student of the Year Award. One of his more memorable experiences was his attendance at a two-and-a-half-day seminar on adult learning at Villanova University. As he continues to learn in an evening GED class, the isolation that he felt because of his hearing and sight problems has become a thing of the past. Harold is a quiet person, but beneath his unassuming exterior is a dedicated family man and a student who over-

came personal tragedy to get where he is today. When he gets his GED, he believes he will have the job security to provide a stable

home for his family.



"Because of my deafness, I've missed a lot in life... Reading makes me like a new person. I felt like I was born again."

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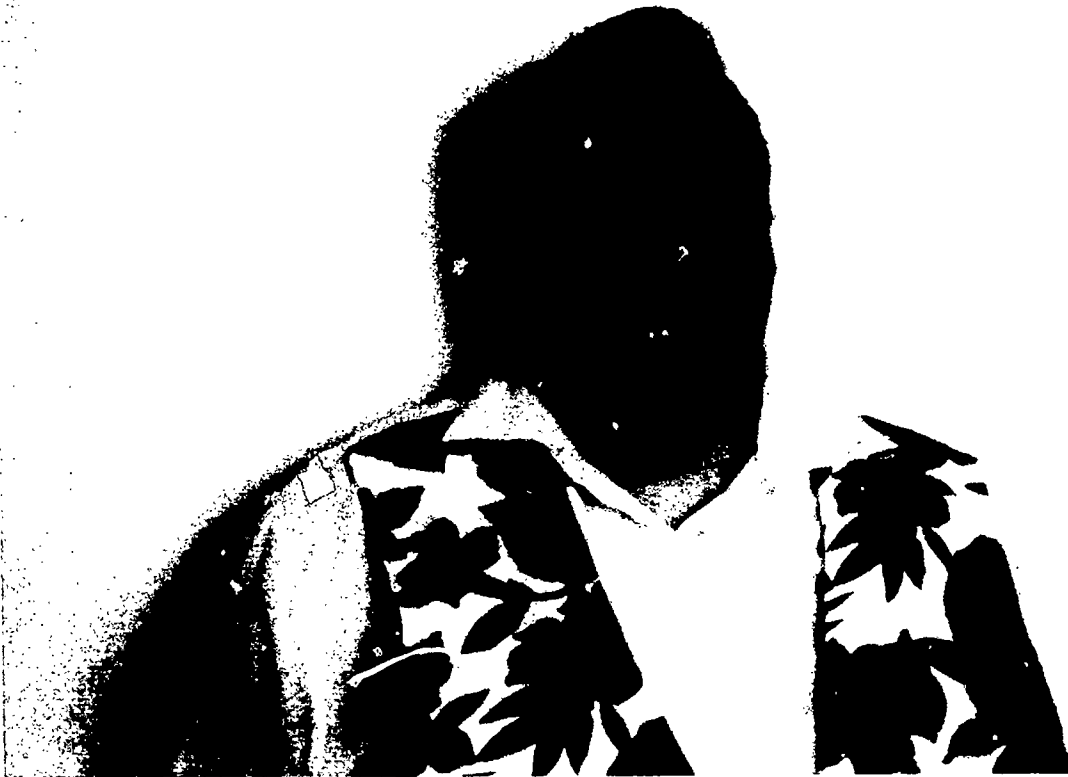


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JULIE BERMUDEZ

Berks County

*Sponsor: Mary Schmidt
Reading Area Community College
Work-Study Program*



▶ Julie Bermudez is one of 12 children, none of whom finished high school. Her lively spirit prompted her to start running away from her restrictive home when she was only nine. By the time she was 13, her parents decided to curb her by arranging a marriage with a 36-year-old

man. At age 14, Julie found herself pregnant and in an abusive marriage. Embarrassed at having to explain her bruises, despondent over the death of her six-month-old son who had leukemia, and dissuaded by her husband from continuing school, she quit after completing 8th grade. Pregnant again at 16, she saw herself trapped in the same cycle as her mother, living with a man who wanted her to be uneducated, unassuming, totally dependent and fearful. She moved back with her parents. When her child, Victor, was born, she left him with her mother and went out to find the world. The part of the world she found included alcohol, cocaine and, eventually, heroin.

After she moved to a subsidized housing project with her son, Julie often found herself with no food for her child and no one to help care for him. She would lock him in his room at night so she could go out. She still remembers the morning she literally crawled into her apartment and caught a glimpse of her son's face with the light shining on it. She was horrified by the revelation of what she was doing to herself and her child. She determined then and there to change their lives. She explained to her son what she had to do and how she would need his help. With the support of this exceptional child and her own amazing determination, Julie overcame her drug habit without outside treatment.

Shortly after that, compelled by her

son's request for help with his schoolwork, Julie attempted General Educational Development (GED) classes for the first time. But, she wasn't yet ready to make the commitment. Two years ago, she registered for classes again. Soon after she was paired with a tutor, she was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. Refusing to have a radical hysterectomy, she suffered through chemotherapy only to find the cancer recurring a year later. Another round of chemotherapy resulted in her losing her hair, but not her determination. She continued to attend classes and her tutoring sessions and passed the GED test in April 1993.

She is now enrolled in nursing classes at Reading Area Community College. She also works part-time at a day-care center and volunteers with the elderly at a nursing home. Her goal is to earn her nursing degree in 1996 so she can be off welfare and start saving for the future. As a GED student, she inspired her classmates and the professional staff with her upbeat *we*

"Once you start your GED classes, you're never alone."

can do it approach and the obstacles she's overcome. As a GED graduate, she is still inspiring oth-

ers by volunteering for the adult education mentor program, speaking with students in classes and helping at registration. She is interested in speaking to at-risk high school students about her experiences. Her dream is to have all her siblings finish high school. So far, one brother has earned his GED, and she has enrolled one sister in classes.

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DAVID WOLFE

Butler County

Sponsors:

Angelo Pezzuolo & Elaine Nagel

Midwestern Intermediate Unit 4



David Wolfe quit high school after the 9th grade. Labeled as a bad kid with a lousy attitude who frequently slept when he even bothered to come to school, David frustrated his teachers to the point that one of them suggested: *Why don't you just get out?*

He did and so did his three sisters. His community, a small rural area with a strong work ethic, supported healthy young people who were willing to work. He soon got a job at Warehouse Foods.

During the next 14 years, he earned promotions and raises and held the position of produce manager/buyer. At the time the company closed in 1989, he had married, had two children and owned property. The rough times made him realize the necessity of further education, and he enrolled in the Slippery Rock GED class sponsored by the Midwestern Intermediate Unit. He rediscovered his academic potential and in a few months passed the GED with more than 300 points.

David applied to Slippery Rock University and was accepted on the basis of his GED scores. Some friends were supportive, but others laughed at what they said was a foolish waste of time and money. When he went to his former high school to get his transcript for college admission, the secretary told him: *You can't do it; it's too late for you.* But David said: *The GED success gave me renewed confidence.*

During the six years from the start of GED classes to the completion of his bachelor's degree in June 1993, his wife worked full time. He worked evenings, weekends and summers at any job he could find. When he had difficulty concen-

trating because of distractions at home, he began spending time in the library. *I was determined and studied twice as hard to avoid failure,* David said.

Upon graduation, he volunteered to help students in his old GED class. In mid-July, he was hired by the Intermediate Unit as an ABE/GED instructor. He works days at Job Training Placement Act (JTPA) sites and two evenings a week as an ABE instructor. He is very enthusiastic and helps new adult students over their initial nervousness. He notes that students think they can't pass the GED test. He thought that, too. However, they usually surprise themselves.

David plans to start work on a master's degree in the spring. Eventually, he hopes to teach social studies in a public school. He's ready to make a difference for those at-risk students. One thing is certain, he will be a lifelong learner. He is devoting a large portion of his life to giving *all the positive reinforcement I*

can to anyone trying to better themselves.

"I have come to believe the recipe for success is: setting goals you believe in; maintaining a positive attitude; hard work."

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MARY ROGERS

Greene County

*Sponsor: Barbara Mooney
Community Action Southwest*



▶ Mary Roger's early years were difficult. Her biological father committed suicide when she was a baby, and she didn't know her biological mother until she was seven. She was adopted as a baby and was physically abused by her adoptive father. By the time she was a teen-ager,

she was very angry. Mary had a degenerative joint disease that made her very awkward. Her self-esteem was low, as she was constantly teased about her weight and her awkwardness.

At the age of 16, in 10th grade, she thought it would be better to marry a man 40 years older than herself than to be in school. Her uncle by adoption, he had always treated her well – that is, until they were married. Then, he started physically and emotionally abusing her. Mary started drinking and became an alcoholic. When her husband had a stroke in 1976, she took care of him until his death two years later. In 1977, she married another alcoholic and endured abuse in this relationship until 1980, when they both quit drinking and started attending church.

Mary became involved in the Mon Valley Unemployment Committee. She was chairperson for the Greene County Chapter, taking part in writing agendas and lobbying activities. As part of the fight against welfare liens, she

traveled to Harrisburg and even met with Governor Robert P. Casey. She soon realized: *I have a brain, and I'm*

smarter than I thought I was. Other members of the committee encouraged her to get her GED and put her skills to use.

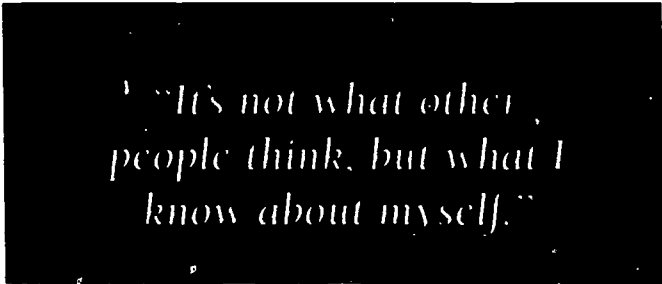
In 1992, when she entered ABE classes hosted by Community Action Southwest her self-confidence was low, and she doubted whether she could pass the test.

Despite her joint disease, which makes walking difficult, and her continuing activities with the unemployment committee, she rarely missed a class. Coming to class one day, she fell down a flight of stairs but got up and continued on into class. From then on, she decided to use the entrance for students with disabilities.

In the fall of 1992, after spending countless hours on her own studying, she took her GED test and passed. She has enrolled in New Choices, gone through the JTPA process, and plans to take a computer course the next time it is offered. Her husband, who has been diagnosed as having lung cancer, is very supportive of her efforts. Indicative of her determination is the fact that she has lost 115 pounds since taking her GED test. Her self-esteem and self-confidence have increased, and she is teaching herself to type and play guitar. She is interested in a future involving business or paralegal training and is looking into college courses. She is active in her church,

volunteers for the food bank and encourages others to continue their education. Despite her disability, Mary wants to work and

donate her time to help other people.



"It's not what other people think, but what I know about myself."

CELEBRATION °



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HELENA JIMENEZ MOJICA

Luzerne County

Sponsor: Frank J. Nardone

Luzerne Intermediate Unit 18



▶ Helena Jimenez Mojica was only nine years old when her mother died, leaving her and her brother and sisters with an alcoholic father. Because her father could not care for her, she was sent to live with her grandmother. As Helena got older, it was difficult for her grandmother to handle

her. After several disagreements, she ran away from home. When she returned to her grandmother's house, she was first placed in foster care and then in a detention center with some 50 other girls. She found herself in the company of drug addicts and criminals.

After three years in the detention center, she was able to convince her case worker that she did not belong there and was transferred to a smaller group home for another two years. She was doing well and was allowed to return home to begin the 11th grade. When she went to register, she was told that she would be put back to the 10th grade, but she decided to continue in school anyway. In New York City, school can be very dangerous and frightening, and at 17, she decided it just wasn't worth the effort.

By 18, Helena had a son. It was a difficult pregnancy and she did not have a stable home life at the time. She moved in with relatives, and then moved from house to house. Her son was born with a disability, and he requires special braces to help him walk. He will eventually need surgery to correct his disability.

Wanting to raise her son in a safe environment, Helena and her boyfriend, the father of her child, moved to Wilkes Barre. In 1992, she enrolled in Luzerne Intermediate Unit (IU) 18's adult literacy program and began studying for the GED. When her first attempt to pass the GED test was not

successful, she was referred to a Special Point of Contact (SPOC) program sponsored by the IU, Wilkes University, and the Luzerne County Human Resources Development (HRD) Department. This program specializes in individual instruction for students with serious deficiencies in reading and math. After seven months of tutoring, Helena was back in GED classes. After another three months, she tried the test again but once again failed. Her lack of understanding both in English and Spanish was a true barrier. She refused to give up. She resumed her studies and passed the test on her third attempt.

Helena is an enthusiastic promoter of adult literacy and was instrumental in persuading her boyfriend to return for his GED. She also is encouraging her sister to return to classes. On a recent visit to her former class, she encouraged the students to: *Ask questions. Make sure you understand and keep asking until you do understand.* She of all people knows how important it is to keep trying.

In 1993, Helena and her boyfriend graduated. Since then, they were married and now both

attend Luzerne County Community College. She would like to pursue a career in child development. She loves working with children and often volunteers at her son's day care center. With their new education and their old determination, Helena and her husband are well on their way to providing a better life for their family.

"It's not easy but if you keep trying, later on you'll see the difference."

CELEBRATION ◊



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SHUN MEI (LINDA) NEMET

Mercer County

Sponsor: Jan Morgenstern

Mercer County Vo-Technical School



Shun Mei (Linda) Nemet was born into a wealthy family of Taiwanese tea merchants. When the family lost their fortune, she worked in her grandparents' tea garden, completed 12 years of schooling and studied the oriental art of massage. She took a job as a waitress in an American

restaurant, where she met her husband, Joe Nemet, an American military man. In 1976, they married, moved to Pennsylvania and settled down to raise a family.

Ten years later, when Joe was laid off, she enrolled in the Mercer County Vo-Tech ABE class and attended for four months. During this time, she not only learned English, but taught her fellow students a wealth of information ranging from Chinese food to Chinese art. Linda left school to work not only one job, but often three part-time jobs. She also went into business giving oriental massage.

In 1991, with her husband working again, Linda re-enrolled in the Mercer County Vo-Tech Program. After four months in ABE classes, she began studies in GED. Although her husband was laid off several times during this school year, she managed to make ends meet at home without having to quit school again. In May 1992, she earned her high school diploma and received a certificate for perfect attendance.

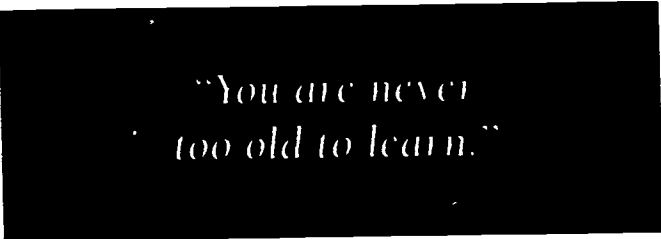
She had come to school every day – 30 miles over rural back roads in all kinds of weather, always smiling and usually bringing something extra – food, games and new students. She has been responsible for the enrollment of at least a dozen new students and when the ABE program needed a new teacher, Linda was able to recommend one. At the same time, she was working at a new part-time job, keeping house, running her busi-

ness and continuing to be involved in her children's busy social schedules.

After completing a full-time office technology class with perfect attendance, she was hired as a secretary by a literacy program in the area. As a past ABE student, she is able to put new students at ease and assures them that they have made the right decision in returning to school. She has continued to expand her knowledge of computers and has been able to advise her supervisors in computer usage. Her massage business is profitable, and she still holds a part-time job, as well as continuing her interest in the ABE programs she attended.

Linda is a member of the advisory committee of the Mercer County Vo-Tech, a member of the board of directors of her GED alumni council and is involved in local Chinese-American activities. Whatever she does, she continues to recruit students. She would like to continue her formal education as soon as the opportunity arises.

But until that time comes, she uses her time to read, research, investigate and learn as much as possible on her own.



*"You are never
too old to learn."*

CELEBRATION °

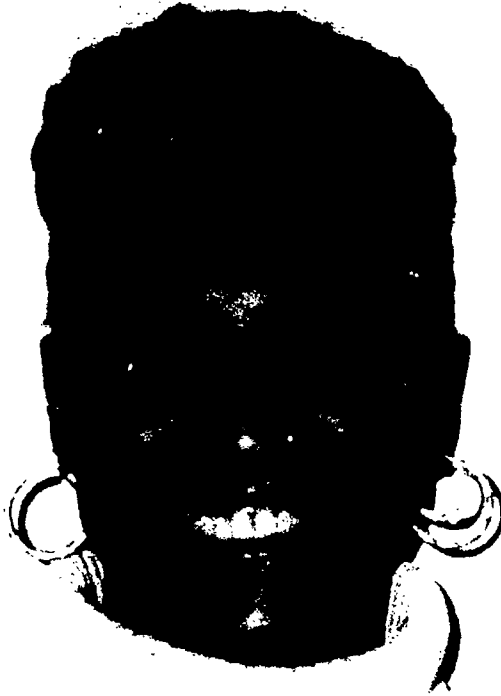


ACHIEVEMENT

BERNADETTE OSBORN

Montgomery County

*Sponsor: Kathleen Marks
Eagleville Hospital*



▶ Bernadette Osborn was the youngest of five children, 13 years younger than her next sibling. Her father was an alcoholic, and her mother, concerned with her own problems, seemed remote from her children. Bernadette grew up knowing she was unexpected and

feeling unwanted. At home, she was abused physically, sexually, and emotionally. In school, she was often absent and had few friends. By the age of 12, she was drinking and dating her husband to be. At 16, she was out of school and married. At 18, she had her first child while her husband was stationed in Vietnam.

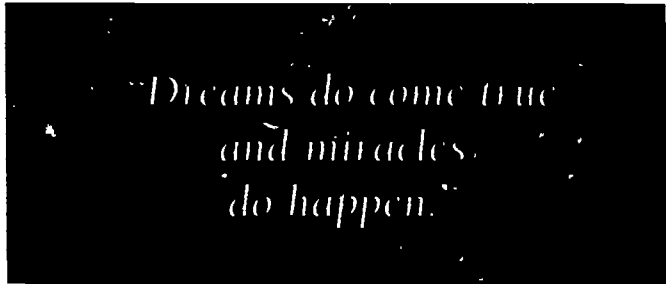
After he returned, she lived through four years of his drinking and abuse before ending the marriage. Her initial drug experience was one of curiosity. As it accelerated, it became one of refuge from rejection. By the time Bernadette presented herself for treatment at Eagleville Hospital, she had spent 15 years repeating this pattern of drugs and abusive relationships. Her father had died from alcoholism, and her ex-husband had been murdered. On the positive side, she had two lovely daughters.

Nothing came easy to her, and the GED was no exception. She was withdrawn, genteel and committed to learning. She rarely spoke, but never stopped working. When she finally took the GED test, she was the only one in her group who didn't pass. Determined to see this through even though her treatment at the hospital had ended, she worked on her own, retook the test and gained the 10 points she needed to pass.

She moved into an apartment, started work and within six months, she had her

two daughters living with her. Two years later she married. When this did not work out, Bernadette and the two girls moved out on their own. This past summer, she enrolled in college and, in January, she will become a full-time student pursuing a nursing degree. She says that she can now stand on her own and take care of herself and her children.

Besides working, attending school and parenting her two girls, Bernadette is very active in Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), Narcotics Anonymous (NA), and Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACOA). She also sponsors other recovering women spreading the message of sobriety, learning and growing. Bernadette is a butterfly the metamorphosis is remarkable. She leads by example: this former drug-addicted, high-school dropout now proudly states: *My daughter and I are both college students.*



*Dreams do come true
and miracles
do happen.*

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AMY UHLER

Northampton County

*Sponsors: Linda Martin &
Janet Herr*

Bangor - Pen Argyl Adult Education



▶ In 1980, as a 10th grade student, Amy Uhler was hospitalized with Crohn's disease. Suddenly the high school activities she enjoyed, such as basketball and band, were off-limits due to doctor's orders. As an 11th-grader, she became pregnant and was hospitalized for the first

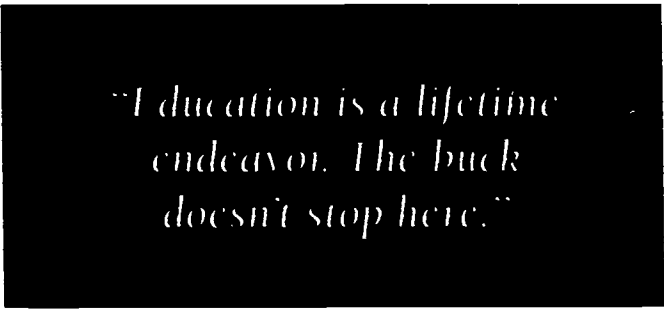
three months of her pregnancy. Her Crohn's caused her to lose 11 pounds, and it became impossible to stay in school. Besides, as a member of a large family whose mother and two siblings were high school dropouts, she did not see any value in education.

She married Roger, the baby's father, and during the next five years, they added two more children to their family. Her husband had to work long hours to support his young family, which put stress on the marriage. This stress increased when her two nieces came to live with the family after they were abandoned by their mother. Amy faced the realization that she had no marketable skills. Now, the education she gave up so easily became a treasured goal.

In 1987, she signed up for GED classes at the Bangor-Pen Argyl School District. Armed with a new appreciation for education, there was no stopping her. She completed the required 45 hours of classes for her diploma from the school district, as well as the state. Health problems again presented an obstacle. Amy had to take her last GED exam the day before

she was scheduled for a hysterectomy. With a snow storm approaching, she arranged to take the test during the daytime hours. She knew better than to put it off until her recovery was complete. After receiving her GED in 1988, Amy took in two nieces who had been abandoned by their mother.

Thinking about how she enjoyed teaching Sunday School, she decided to be an elementary school teacher. She enrolled in Northampton Community College. Through their literacy corps, she received training as a tutor and began helping with a GED class. Her mother loaned her \$100 to apply for admittance to East Stroudsburg University and her mother-in-law helped out by caring for the children. Going to school was now one of the things Amy did well. She managed to get the kids ready at 6:00 a.m., go to class all day and stay up to midnight to study. Even a case of pneumonia during the last semester did not hold her back. She graduated Cum Laude on May 22, 1993, with her whole family at graduation to cheer her on. She is currently substitute teaching in nine local districts while looking for a permanent position. One of her goals is to establish a scholarship for other GED students.



"Education is a lifetime endeavor. The buck doesn't stop here."

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LILLIAN METZCHER

Philadelphia County

*Sponsor: Alice Redman
Lutheran Settlement House
Women's Program*



▶ Lillian Metzcher attended special education classes from the age of six to 16, when she left school in order to work at a hospital and in a movie theater. She lived with her grandparents and spent a lot of time caring for them. Her mother lived with them as well, but was not recog-

nized as a part of the family because she was sickly and unstable. Lillian was told that her father had died.

When she was 18 years old, she got pregnant and married the father of her child. She is still married to him and they now have five children. Of these, one is deaf, one is retarded and a third has a learning disability. Getting them into special schools and programs presented a challenge for Lillian. She understands the need for them to get an appropriate education because Lillian herself is officially labeled *learning disabled*.

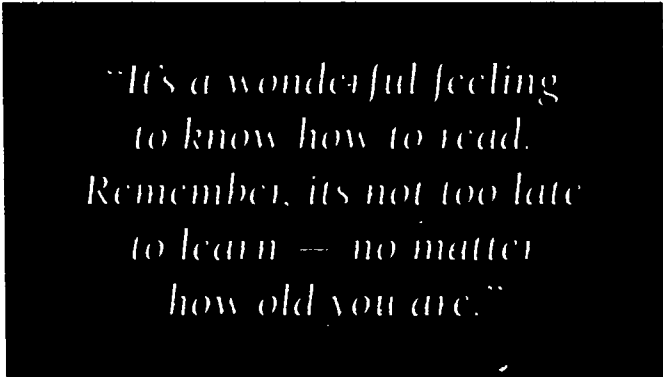
For most of her life she believed that she was retarded. She first realized she was capable of learning when she enrolled in the Lutheran Settlement House Women's program in February of 1989. She wanted to learn how to read, write checks and take care of her home in case anything were to happen to her husband. Her family was not supportive of her decision to return to school. In her late 40's, she thought she was too old for school and was fearful that the other students would make fun of her the way they did when she was a child.

When she entered the program, she could not read enough to take the placement test. Since then, she has gone from a beginning literacy class to the GED class, raising her reading level from 1.0 to 9.0 in four years. She also has achieved other

goals such as learning to use a computer. Lillian has written her own autobiography and appeared on public television. She volunteered to take part in the Mayor's Commission on Literacy's Power Learning Project and has been a key figure in the encouragement and success of others in the project.

She is still attending classes twice a week with nearly perfect attendance and volunteers about 18 hours a week as a tutor in beginning reading classes. Lillian helps train new tutors by coming to the training sessions and explaining what she does as a tutor and a learner. In June 1993, she received an award for being one of the two most dedicated tutors in the program. She also serves on the advisory board of the local Domestic Violence Prevention program and spends time each week as a domestic violence prevention volunteer. Her goal for the future is to pass the GED test and become a teacher. She is constantly

encouraging other learners to remain dedicated to their goals and is an advocate for adult learners, as well as for literacy programs.



*"It's a wonderful feeling
to know how to read.
Remember, it's not too late
to learn — no matter
how old you are."*

CELEBRATION OF



ACHIEVEMENT

RUTH SALTERS

Philadelphia County

*Sponsor: Marie V. Knibbe
Germantown Women's
Educational Project*



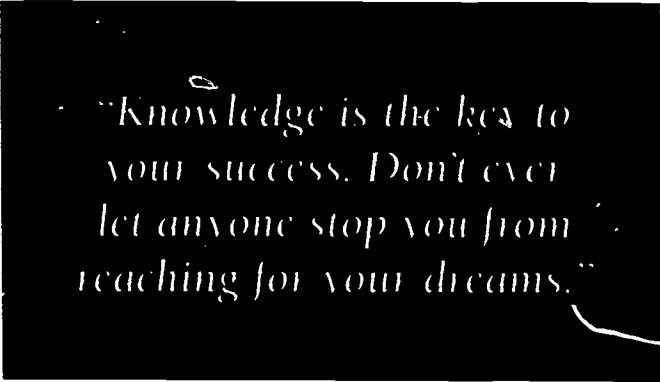
Ruth Salters entered the Germantown Women's Educational Project in the fall of 1992 with the goal of getting her GED. She had completed 11th grade and entered 12th grade when she dropped out of school. All she needed to graduate was English 4 when she married

and moved out of the state. She hoped to complete her degree in her new home but things did not work out that way. In 1983, she returned to Pennsylvania without a degree. She now has an 11-year-old daughter and a 10-year-old son. Her son, Fred, has Menkes Syndrome, a rare disease in which a simple common cold can easily develop into life-threatening pneumonia. She must often drop everything when he is ill to care for him both at home and during frequent hospitalization.

Throughout the 1992-93 academic year, Ruth continued her GED studies despite one serious hospitalization of her son. In spring 1993, she took and passed the GED and that summer participated in graduation ceremonies. During her time in class, Ruth was a motivating model to her classmates as she consistently persevered in the face of great challenges. She played an important support role in the lives of many other students and offered tutorial assistance to students who needed help with the material she had mastered. Ruth also participated in video taping a promotional piece about women facing educational challenges. Now that she has completed her goal, she continues to be a promoter and supporter of the program, taking part in staff planning meetings and contributing valuable suggestions. She is a candidate for membership in the program's board

of directors.

Her future plans include going to college to study special education. Because of her extensive experience working with children who have special needs, she plans to continue in this field as her career. Ruth is a member of the Home and School Association and volunteers at her son's school. She helps in the classroom, assists the teachers with the specialized care her son needs, and helps to conduct a range of motion exercises with her son and other students. She also is involved in a community service program at her daughter's school, monitoring students and serving as a teacher's aide. She recently has begun to perform with a drama guild and enjoys the opportunity to act in local theater productions which address community issues such as drug abuse.



"Knowledge is the key to your success. Don't ever let anyone stop you from reaching for your dreams."



*Front row (left to right); Bernadette Osborn , Harold Speelman, Julie Bermudez, Shun Mei Nemet.
Back row (left to right); Amy Uhler, Lillian Metzcher, David Wolfe, Ruth Salters.
Mary Rogers and Helena Mojica are missing from the picture.*

CELEBRATION ◦



ACHIEVEMENT

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