

# IN OTHER WORDS

*The official newsletter of the Volunteer English Program*



"Because the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world are the ones who do."

— STEVE JOBS

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## STUDENT VOICES

Below is a story written by a VEP student about her experience as an immigrant. To submit a student-written story, essay or poem for future editions of the newsletter, email [volunteer.english@volunteerenglish.org](mailto:volunteer.english@volunteerenglish.org).



Student Yang Zhang

"Thank you ... for helping me when I needed it, teaching me a lot of American ways of doing things, and allowing me to adapt to life and work here better and faster."

- Yang Zhang, student

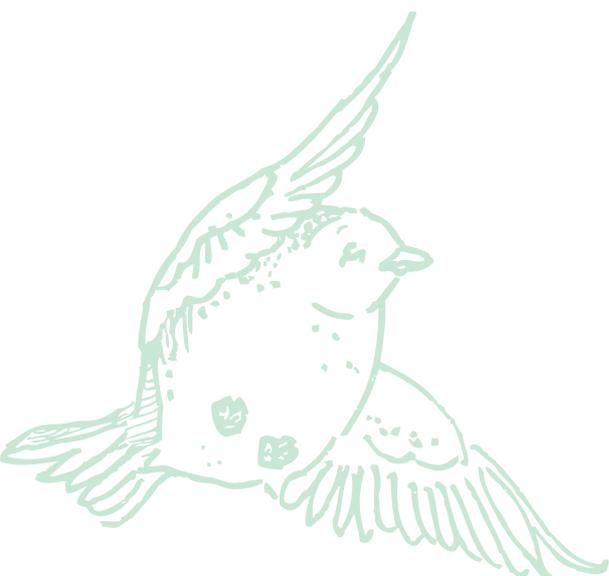
### VEP student Yang Zhang shares her recent successes in passing her naturalization test and obtaining an internship that turned into a paid job in a new field.

It took me two full years from submitting my naturalization application to taking the test. I was able to pass the exam successfully. I must thank [my tutor] Gail Gordon for her great help in the process, taking me through American history, culture, mock exams, and more. Gail texted me yesterday before the exam to encourage me. Everyone's greetings make me feel very warm. I think I am very lucky to meet you here and have a lot of help from you.

Thanks to VEP for giving me the opportunity to learn English and arranging Gail to be such a good teacher. Also, I want to share good news. I was offered a three-month unpaid part-time intern job in Clinical Data Management. This is my first job offer since I came to America. This is a brand new field for me and I am learning many new technology applications every day. I cherish this job opportunity, and I work hard everyday, even if it is not paid. My efforts have been well rewarded. I got a new offer from this company recently. It's a six months part time job offer. I've never dared to expect so much. At the beginning of June, my unpaid internship was coming to an end, and at the same time I started the next six months paid. It was a huge surprise for me, like passing the naturalization test.

Thank you again for giving me the opportunity to learn, and thank you to Gail for helping me when I needed it, teaching me a lot of American ways of doing things, and allowing me to adapt to life and work here better and faster.

Thank you so much, all of you!



## TUTOR UPDATE

### Leigh Daly's "Third Act"

"This adventure that we are on has been eye-opening, fun, and sometimes tense (when merging onto a highway), but it's always very rewarding and a great third act!"

- Leigh Daly, tutor

Shortly before I retired from Pfizer in September 2018, I came across Jane Fonda's TED Talk on "Life's Third Act" – what you can do to make your last decades successful and use them to make a difference. I knew I needed to define my own third act and find something useful to do after retiring, but I really didn't have any solid plans.

A new friend mentioned that she taught English three hours a week as a VEP tutor, which sounded interesting and worthwhile. I worked with two students for several months each before they discontinued their sessions (one got Covid and the other started her MBA).

In February, Rachel introduced me to H. and one of her two daughters, S., who all came to the US from Egypt in November 2018. H. and S., who translated during most of the Zoom call, had the biggest smiles, which gave me hope that somehow even with H.'s limited knowledge of English and my non-existent knowledge of Arabic, we'd find a way to communicate. Through our sessions I slowly learned about H.'s family and her culture, what she left behind in Alexandria, and some of her challenges living here. During one session H. shyly asked if I would help her learn to drive. I hesitated before H. said that we would use her car and that she already had her permit. With some thought of "what am I getting myself into??" I said yes.

Driving with H. has opened up some great opportunities to explore. S. often joins us – providing much-appreciated translation – on our "field trips," which take place after our English sessions or on weekends. We have been to Lancaster County to buy veggies from an Amish stand, as well as BJ's and Walmart, where they both learned how to navigate self-checkout lanes. When H. got a full-time job at Boscov's, she drove to Coatesville (on the scary 30 bypass!) to get a SEPTA bus pass. Then we went to Exton Mall and walked through Boscov's, talking about the signs above some of the merchandise racks. I took notes as we went through the departments, and forwarded them to her to review with one of her daughters.

When H. gets her driver's license, we'll turn our focus back to studying the civics questions required for her citizenship test. This adventure that we are on has been eye-opening, fun, and sometimes tense (when merging onto a highway), but it's always very rewarding and a great third act!

### VEP's Newest US Citizen

Longtime tutor **Arlene Stevenson**, a native Canadian, recently reached her long-term goal of dual citizenship. Over the past ten years, Arlene has tutored six students, in addition to facilitating one of VEP's regional community conversation groups. In addition to gaining US citizenship herself, one of Arlene's students also became a naturalized citizen as a result of working with her. Congratulations to all!



Tutor Arlene Stevenson

## PROGRAMS

### Seventh Annual Tutor Summit: Balancing Opportunities for English Language Learning

VEP tutors and staff gathered virtually on Sunday, July 17th for a day of education, enrichment and engagement at our seventh annual **Tutor Summit**. By offering this traditional in-person gathering virtually once again, we are able to invite professional speakers from around the globe, provide universal and practical topics to discuss, and continue to give our tutors a platform on which to share.



Professor Paul Nation

This year's summit featured a live, interactive talk with **Paul Nation**, Emeritus Professor in Applied Linguistics at the School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies (LALS) at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, who joined us from his home in New Zealand. Professor Nation's specialist interests are the teaching and learning of vocabulary and language teaching methodology. Mr. Nation is best known for his framework which identifies key areas of language teaching focus, labeled "The Four Strands." He also emphasizes the benefits of extensive reading, repetition, and learning strategies. There are multiple takeaways from this event that tutors may use with students. These include publications, word lists, graded readers, free books, language teaching videos, vocabulary tests, and vocabulary analysis programs available [online](#).

Thank you to all the tutors for attending this annual event. During the summit, VEP celebrated the announcement of **Cherie Wright** as our **2022 Hamilton Tutor of the Year** recipient. In 2014, VEP established an award to recognize one or more tutors who rise to the top and best emulate our founder, Mrs. June Hamilton. Recipients of this award dedicate a significant number of hours to their students, act as "door openers," introduce VEP to new community partners, volunteers and ideas, and go above and beyond in responding to staff requests to represent the organization as an ambassador.

Since joining the "VEP without walls" outreach to the Phoenixville area in 2015, Cherie has guided 8 students through 366 hours of instruction. She has also created inroads for VEP at the Chester County Economic Development Council, assisted us in training new tutors, and continues to support operations through her generous contributions.

I've enjoyed being involved with The VEP Tutor Summit for the last seven years. Each event has been unique, with wonderful guest speakers and opportunities for all to learn and share. Truly an important day to thank our tutors!

- Liz Maser, tutor

### WCASD Strings Fest Benefits VEP



VEP was grateful to once again be the beneficiary of the annual **WCASD Strings Festival** this past May. 100% of audience admission fees directly benefit our adult language program. This ongoing partnership between the WCASD Strings Department, community and VEP is a natural fit, as VEP tutors know well the many benefits of using music as an ESL tool. In addition to teaching vocabulary and pronunciation, music helps students understand rhythm, stress, intonation, and pacing. Music is an entertaining and engaging way to teach dry grammatical concepts - and students often remember these rules better when they find themselves humming a tune throughout the week.

## PHILANTHROPY NEWS

VEP is fully funded through philanthropy and grants. We are grateful for all of the supporters who believe in our mission..

### Bonnie Friedman Legacy Gift

Legacy gifts enable individuals to create a powerful philanthropic legacy by making a direct impact on the causes important to them. For **Bonnie Friedman**, one such commitment was to VEP upon her recent passing. According to her husband, Jim, after she retired, Bonnie couldn't just give up teaching cold turkey. So she became a VEP tutor and eventually served on the Board. She soon learned that the job was more than just being a tutor. She had students from Japan, Cambodia, Turkey, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Bonnie, like other tutors, was motivated by her students' hard work. One of these students, Bijou, arriving in the US within days of 9/11, now serves as the Deputy Regional Director for West Africa & Haiti for Corus International, an NGO which delivers holistic, lasting solutions to overcome the interconnected challenges of poverty, health care access and climate change for some of the world's most fragile settings. As Bijou recalls fondly, Bonnie and her family were more than just language tutors -- they became her family when she had no one else to guide her, helping her find a safe place to live, buying her first car, and establishing permanent residency status so that she could pursue her goal of a master's degree in International Economic Development.



Bonnie Friedman with her student, Bijou Kuzimbu

## FUNDER NEWS

### Chester County Fund for Women & Girls, Girls Advisory Board

VEP recently received two grants from the **Fund for Women & Girls**, including from the **Girls Advisory Board (GAB)**, to support immigrant and refugee services for women and girls.

Typically, about 75% of VEP students are female. VEP not only helps immigrant and refugee women with their English language skills, their tutors are often their first American friend; someone they can trust and ask questions about American culture. We often hear from our students that VEP's one-to-one approach fosters deep friendships that help women feel welcomed in our community.

According to ProLiteracy, two-thirds of low-literate adults are women, and there is a direct correlation between limited or no English language skills and high rates of poverty and reduced health outcomes. These outcomes extend through the generations; research shows that children of low-literate parents are exposed to 30,000 fewer words when they reach kindergarten, and children who have mothers with low literacy levels have a 72% chance of being at the lowest reading level themselves.

English language learning can help break the cycle of intergenerational illiteracy by empowering immigrant women and families with the language skills needed to get better jobs, improve their health, and support their families. English literacy empowers women to more fully advocate for their children in education and healthcare settings. By offering free English language instruction to adult immigrant and refugee women throughout Chester County, VEP is meeting one of our area's most pressing needs- the ability for our newest neighbors to communicate and participate in our community.



Girls Advisory Board



## UPCOMING DATES

### Chester County Open Tennis Tournament Fundraiser Returns in August

Last August, organizer TT Krishnagopal and other residents of Chester County raised more than \$6,000 in proceeds and collected more than 700 pounds of food supporting the Volunteer English Program and the Chester County Food Bank for the first ever Chester County Open tennis tournament. Plans are well underway for the return of competitive play action on August 12th.

This year, the **2nd Annual Chester County Open** will feature doubles tennis action at the Pennypacker Country Club in Downingtown. Registration is live and more details available on the [event website](#). Donations may also be made directly to VEP by [clicking here](#). Proceeds and sponsorships will support VEP. Food contributions will be directed to the Chester County Food Bank. Please help us reach the committee's goal of raising \$15,000 through a fun, community-directed event.



2021 Event Finals (l to r):  
Matt and Joe Muoio (winners),  
Gopi Vudathala (event co-chair),  
Patrick Carretas (runner up),  
Paolo Quimbo (runner up), and  
TT Krishnagopal (event chair).



### Tutor Training Workshops

Volunteer English Program's virtual Tutor Training Workshops successfully prepared over 90 new volunteers last year and 50 in three sessions held in 2022. New tutors develop skills through asynchronous assignments along with live interactive Zoom sessions with professional VEP staff. This past January, we began offering alternating morning and evening workshops. If you have other commitments to work around, we hope you find one that fits your schedule. Live registration opens one month in advance of each session. [Click here](#) for updates, workshop fee, and access.

Our next Tutor Training Workshop will be held on Zoom on **August 22nd, 25th & 29th from 9 am to 11 am**. Thank you for accepting the exciting challenge to teach English to VEP's long waiting list of non-native speakers who live or work in Chester County. Sharing your time and talents make life possible for others.



## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### Board of Directors

VEP welcomes new Board member **Martin McNeil**. During a career spanning almost four decades, Martin McNeil worked in a series of information technology roles for major companies, primarily in the pharmaceutical and healthcare sectors. A native of Kilmarnock, Scotland, he spent his early career in the Scotch whisky industry before moving into pharma with SmithKline Beecham (now GlaxoSmithKline).

His role with SmithKline took him to Belgium, where he managed a multinational team during a major project to convert each country's legacy currency to the euro. His work was noticed on the other side of the Atlantic and in 2001 he was offered a position in Philadelphia with the newly formed GlaxoSmithKline.

Martin worked across multiple divisions of GSK, such as manufacturing, consumer healthcare, research & development and corporate. In 2008 he left GSK to join their former clinical laboratories division which had been sold several years earlier to Quest Diagnostics. Following 13 years as an IT director for Quest, he recently took part in the Great Resignation in order to refocus his time on other activities.

Working with a number of EFL students from Spain for several years introduced Martin to the enjoyment of teaching English as a secondary language, and ultimately to his connection with VEP. An active VEP tutor since 2018, Martin currently has two students in the program while continuing his online sessions with two students in Spain. He has been a member of the VEP summit planning committee for the past three years and has served as an interpreter for Spanish-speaking students in a number of situations.

Martin lives in Wayne, PA, with his wife Jacqui. His stepchildren, boy-girl twins, live and work in Denver and New York City. In his free time, Martin enjoys playing sports, traveling, dining and being creative.

Seats are available on the Board for interested participants. To express your interest in becoming a board member or committee volunteer, [click here for an application](#).



Martin McNeil  
and student  
Fikreta Redzepagic Duzic

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A text version of this newsletter is available for translation in 50 languages by visiting the VEP [website](#).

If you'd like more information about any of the articles in this newsletter, please contact [volunteer.english@volunteerenglish.org](mailto:volunteer.english@volunteerenglish.org).