



Backside News

FEBRUARY 2009

FEBRUARY EVENTS:

9TH—HBPA FREE PANCAKE BREAK-FAST AT TRACKSIDE 9:30AM-11:30AM

11TH—VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) PROVIDED AT TRACKSIDE 3PM-7PM

21ST—LIBRARY WORK DAY 12PM-3PM

UPCOMING EVENTS:

MARCH 17TH—CHURCHILL VITA 10AM-2PM

MARCH 17TH—VOLUNTEER MEETING AT CHURCHILL 7PM

MARCH 31ST—CHURCHILL VITA 2PM-6PM

FEBRUARY CENTER HOURS:

MONDAY
TRACKSIDE 4-7PM

TUESDAY
TRACKSIDE 4-7PM

WEDNESDAY
TRACKSIDE 4-7PM

THURSDAY
TRACKSIDE 4-7PM

FRIDAY
TRACKSIDE 4-7PM

“I Am an AmeriCorps VISTA”

Written by: *Melissa Johnson*

You have seen us around the Learning Center and you know we call ourselves “VISTAs” but have you ever wondered what that really means? What is a VISTA? What do they do? How does one become a VISTA?

In 1963, President Kennedy had a vision for a program that would provide vital services in urban and rural poverty areas. However, it was under the Johnson Administration that the vision was realized. The VISTA program was created under The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. The purpose of the program was to serve the needs of the poorest Americans. In 1993, President Clinton signed the National Community Service Trust Act which merged VISTA with the Commission on National and Community Service program created under President George H. Bush in 1990. The new program was called AmeriCorps VISTA.

Today, AmeriCorps consists of many different programs: AmeriCorps State, AmeriCorps National, AmeriCorps Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) and AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC). There are other programs but these are the main four. To read more about each program, visit the AmeriCorps website at: www.americorps.gov.

VISTAs commit to one year of service on a project at a nonprofit organization or public agency. Ultimately, these organizations must be working to diminish poverty in the United States. Many

VISTAs in Louisville serve at Jefferson County Public Schools with programs such as Every I Reads. Others work at nonprofit organizations such as The Backside Learning Center, Arcadia Community Center and Kentucky Refugee Ministries.



Melissa and Rachel—2008-2009 AmeriCorps VISTAs

Becoming a VISTA definitely has benefits. It provides individuals who have recently graduated from college with the opportunity to gain work experience that cannot be obtained in an entry-level job. But the VISTA program is not limited to recent graduates. People of all ages can become a VISTA. However, to become a VISTA for the one-year term, the individual normally must have a college degree. Summer VISTAs are the exception. A Summer VISTA serves two to three months at a site and can be a high school graduate.

Other benefits to becoming a VISTA are: a modest living allowance, healthcare benefits, childcare assistance (if applicable) and student loan forbearance or deferment while in service (if applicable). Upon completion of the one-year commitment, a VISTA can choose to receive an Education Award which can only be used to pay off

student loans or to pay for college in the future or the VISTA can choose a post-service stipend which does not have restrictions on how it must be spent. The VISTA also is given one year of noncompetitive status for a federal government job upon completion of service.

Since opening in 2004, nine VISTAs have served at The Backside Learning Center. Samantha Wagner was the first and only VISTA from 2004 to 2005. In 2005-2006, two VISTAs served at the Center: Anne Kaiser and Stephanie Beaver. In 2006-2007, Matthew Lebrato and Emily Laybourne served. In 2007-2008, Rachel Brokaw and Elizabeth Ortiz served. In the summer of 2008, the Center had its first Summer VISTA: Diana Bautista. Rachel Brokaw renewed her commitment for another year in August of 2008 and was joined by Melissa Johnson (myself) in December 2008.

Organizations like The Backside Learning Center depend upon the service of VISTAs. As a young nonprofit, The Backside Learning Center couldn't accomplish its goals or fulfill its mission without VISTA workers. The VISTA workers perform critical functions at the Center and assist in creating infrastructure for sustainable programming.

If you are interested in becoming a VISTA, Rachel and I would be glad to answer any questions you may have.

In my opinion, the greatest benefit of being a VISTA is the opportunity to help others.

Student and Volunteer Profile

Interview with Jack and Luís

Written by: Kevin Oberhausen

Luís currently works at the Trackside Training Facility and has been a frequent visitor to the Learning Center. While his main interest in coming has always been to use the computers, he recently started taking English classes as well.

Learning Center volunteer Jack Cox teaches Luís every Monday and Tuesday at Trackside, but Jack has also taken him off-track for real-world experience speaking English. Jack and Luís were photographed and interviewed at the Trackside Computer Lab.

Where are you from?

Jack: Mexico D.F. (laughing)

Luís: Mexico D.F.

What do you do?

Jack: I work at 7 Counties, Community Mental Health. I also teach at UofL. I would work here, but I need pay to feed my family (laughing).

Luís: I work on the racetrack. I'm a groom.

Why do you want to learn English?

Luís: I need to talk in two languages.

Why do you teach English?

Jack: I would hate to be in a different country and not understand what is going on.

Do you like learning English?

Luís: Oh yes.

Do you like teaching English?

Jack: I like teaching Luís because he is smart.

What kind of teacher is Jack?

Luís: He's a good teacher...but poco mal (laughing).

What kind of student is Luis?

Jack: He remembers a lot. He has perfect pronunciation, but he's shy. He needs English for pizza and Best Buy (smile).

What has Jack taught you?

Luís: How to pronounce the words. The past, present and future.

What has Luis taught you?

Jack: He teaches me some things about pronunciation and grammar too. He always corrects me when I write on the board (laughing).

Luís: (laughing)



Luís and Jack

FEBRUARY CLASS SCHEDULE:

ESL - MONDAY-FRIDAY
5:30PM-7PM

SPANISH- TUESDAY
5:30PM-7PM (Childcare
Provided)

COMPUTER QUESTION & ANSWER SESSION - WEDNESDAY
5:30PM-7PM

THURSDAY NIGHT IS GAME NIGHT & CONVERSATION TABLES
5:30PM-7PM

Team Notes

Written by: Rachel Brokaw

At the Learning Center, we count ourselves successful whenever we help our students meet their goals, whatever they may be. Last year, the Learning Center helped Humberto Figueroa meet several of his goals. He first came to the Center for English class, but when we discovered that he had attended acting school in Mexico, we connected him to resources through the extension services from Iroquois Library that led to his introduction to

a local Spanish acting group.



Humberto—Student of the Month May 2008

Last summer he decided that he wanted to pursue his education in English at the local community college. We researched the application requirements, helped him through the process, and

found volunteer tutors to help him prepare for the placement exam. After several months of classes there, his goal was to move off the racetrack.

This fall we prepared him for an interview at a local hotel and helped him practice the language skills he would need for his new job. He got the job and now has an apartment with several of his classmates.

In many ways, Humberto is a Learning Center "graduate," and we are very proud to have contributed to the success he has had in building his life in Louisville.



Class in the Spotlight

CENTER WISH LIST:

- Any book for adults written in Spanish
- Bilingual books
- Audio books with accompanying texts, particularly shorter or easier books, poetry or adult-appropriate learning-to-read books
- Spanish-English dictionaries
- Soccer shoes (size 8, 8 1/2, 9, gently used is fine)
- Soccer balls
- Class supplies, especially notebooks, binders, pencils, dry erase markers
- Uno card game
- 2 Updated GED textbooks in English
- 2 Updated GED textbooks in Spanish
- 10 Pimsleur Inglés: English for Spanish Speakers with Audio CD textbooks
- Popcorn & oil packets for theater popcorn machine
- "Goo Gone" (Cleaning product to get library stickers off our books)

Written by: Rachel Brokaw

In an effort to bridge the communication gap on the backside, the Learning Center has always tried to offer Spanish classes as well as English. Last winter was the first year we continued that service at Trackside. We have done the same this year, with class meeting every Tuesday evening, thanks to volunteer teacher Jackie Masouda.

Jackie, a Spanish student at the University of Louisville, restarted the Spanish class in June 2008. Spanish is a volunteer-led service, and we had been without a volunteer teacher since 2007. Americorps VISTA Elizabeth Ortiz had filled in for part of the winter, but we had no one to teach when we came back to Churchill Downs. While at Churchill Downs, Jackie improved the way we teach Spanish by incorporating native speaker teaching

assistants. Several of our advanced English students volunteered as assistants, including José Arriaga, Elias Pérez, and Roberto Gonzalez.



Jackie teaching Spanish class in June 2008 at Churchill

Alayne Wright, who is usually a volunteer, has been a faithful student in Spanish class since it restarted. "I really admire the guys and care about them, and wanted to converse with them." She said the teaching assistants were able to add native knowledge to the class: "It was great. They tweaked things a little for us."

Now that the class has moved to Trackside and

our teaching assistants are all in warmer climates, the class has grown. Rolanda Simpson, a trainer at Trackside, and her friend Lu Caldwell, are two new students who started this January. "It's just too new right now!" Lu said about the hardest part of learning a language.

Rolanda explained why she wanted to take the class: "My husband speaks Spanish. I have little kids and I work back here."

Helping her students cross the language divide at work and at home is one of the things Jackie likes best about teaching. She said, "It's rewarding to help people feel more comfortable in their environments."

Jackie's words sum up one of the Learning Center's goals in teaching both Spanish and English, and we appreciate all she does to help us meet that goal. Thanks, Jackie!

VOLUNTEER CORNER

VOLUNTEER NEEDS:

CONTRIBUTE TO THE NEWS-LETTER: If you would like to write an article for the newsletter about a class or student you teach/volunteer with--please contact Melissa at the Learning Center. Her e-mail is mjohnson@derbymuseum.org. We would love to have your contributions!

LIBRARY WORK DAY: Saturday February 21 12-3 PM. We received a grant to create an English learning lab & update the literacy collection in our library. Lucy Anne has been working

hard on the cataloguing, but we still have a lot of new materials that need to be labeled & shelved, and also a little rearranging to do. If you are interested & available, please let Rachel Brokaw know.

VOLUNTEER MEETING:

The next volunteer meeting is **March 17th at 7pm** at the Backside Learning Center at Churchill.

OUTRIDERS SOCIETY

The Outriders Society is the volunteer organization of the Kentucky Derby

THANK YOU ALL FOR YOUR HARD WORK AND TIME!

Museum. Since we are a Derby Museum program, all Learning Center volunteers are eligible to join, and your volunteer hours count towards Outriders benefits.

Benefits include: Museum Membership, Backside Tours, Annual Horse Farm Tour, Personalized Outriders Jacket, etc. In addition, all Outriders receive discounts in the Derby Café and the Finish Line Gift Shop.

For more info on the Outriders Society contact Julie Henry at 637-1111, x336 or online at: <http://www.derbymuseum.org/>