MARY WISE
Benicia's Model ESL Program

A member of the WLA conference audience asked Lynne Price how to start a literacy program when there is interest but no funding. Lynne smiled and said emphatically, "Just do it!"

Price spoke with authority on the subject. Her session, "Adult Literacy and English as a Second Language (ESL)," focused on her work as coordinator for the ambitious adult literacy and ESL program at Benicia Public Library (BPL) in California. (A city of 65,000, Benicia is about forty miles northeast of San Francisco.) BPL's adult literacy program began in 1987, when the library joined California Library Literacy Services (CLLS), a program initiated in 1984 with LSTA grant money. The CLLS website is **literacyworks.org/clls/**.

Price took a circuitous route to becoming a literacy coordinator. After earning a Christian education degree, she worked in a school where individualized education programs (IEPs) are prepared for students. Price discovered that parents couldn't understand the IEP meetings because they couldn't read. She decided she wanted to help these parents and other adults like them. She pursued this goal at San Francisco Public Library before coming to BPL.

The adults who come to the library for literacy help are not called students but "learners," because they want to learn. The learners are busy people with full lives—they just need some assistance with one aspect of their lives. Core concepts of the program are:

- Everyone is a reader.
- Detective/discovery process.
- Equal partners.
- Teach to strengths.
- Learner-centered.
- Learners are responsible for their learning.
- Learning is fun!

Learners fill out a "roles and goals" form which asks them, "What do you want to do that you can't do now? For you, family, job, community." A learner's goal is not just to read better but, for example, to read USA Today or to read books to a child. Every learner gets a three-ring binder to track his or her progress.

ESL learners at BPL meet in public areas at the back of the

Above: Lynne A. Price.
Top right: Promotional material for BPL's popular ESL fundraising event, its annual trivia bee. Photos this page by Mary Wise.

Mary Wise is a catalog librarian at Central Washington University Library.

library, out of the building's general bustle. With the help of about thirty volunteers, one full-time employee, and six part-time employees, the program currently enrolls 130 learners. Elements of the program, which operates Monday through Friday 10:00 A.M. to 7:00 P.M. (Friday till 5:00 P.M.), includes one-on-one tutoring, a computer learning lab, a monthly tutor exchange, ESL classes, free child care for participants, learner book groups, a learner writing group, a Families for Literacy group, and a monthly newsletter.

One-on-one tutoring is a strength of the program. ESL instructors choose the program's volunteer tutors, who receive eleven and one-half hours training, including orientation from successful tutor/learner pairs. There is also a monthly tutor exchange, in which volunteer tutors talk about challenges they face during tutoring sessions. These monthly exchanges help connect the tutors with each other and keep them energized and motivated. Volunteers tutor for a minimum of two hours per week. All tutoring is done from a learner-centered perspective. Getting the best match between a tutor and learner is a key to success.

The program's computer lab consists of five computers on carts, which are wheeled out of a closet during lab times. Learners currently not paired with a tutor can use the lab on their own. The computers are loaded with a small number of good-quality programs from Rosetta Stone which show the learner real images and text with native speakers pronouncing words and sentences, a method similar to that which children use to acquire a first language.

The program's ESL classes are very popular, but Price found that people had difficulty attending the classes due to lack of available child-care. So the library added to its services free child-care for attending parents. Trained instructors conduct the ESL classes. Learner book groups were organized for those in the ESL classes. Groups are comprised of up to ten learners, who can either read print books or listen to recorded books. The book groups are classified as intermediate or advanced, and stress fluency and language cadence.

Families for Literacy is a program segment for adults that models reading aloud to children under

In the session "Digital Excursions in Washington Territory," Judy Pitchford and Marlys Rudeen of the WSL updated WLA conference attendees on highlights of WSL's digitization project and on some of the technical aspects of digitizing historical records. The Washington History Project collection contains census records, naturalization records, and other datasets available in a searchable database.

The census records include some pre-territorial census material and part of the federal census data for 1860. The site also has the Social Security Death Index, physician licenses (1872-1938), records of Seatco Prison at Bucoda (1877-1888), and other record sets. Volunteers from genealogical societies and local historical societies provide indexing for the project. Anyone interested in volunteering may contact Tracy Workman at tworkman@secstate.wa.gov or (360)704-5258.

The historical maps collection is divided by time period and type of map. The collection covers 1834 to the present and includes agricultural and economic, vegetation, boundary, geological, military, and highway and railroad maps, as well as nautical charts and shoreline and tidal maps (see **www.secstate.wa.gov/history/maps.aspx**). Historical newspapers and "Classics in Washington History" have also been scanned and made searchable. The collection includes materials covering territorial government, Native Americans, exploration and travel, and regional history resources. The search feature allows researchers to search across titles and express searches with Boolean logic. Some of the titles now available include the *Illustrated History of the Big Bend Country*, *History of Old Walla Walla County* by William Denison Lyman, *Life of Father Pierre-Jean DeSmet*, *Dr. John McLoughlin: the Father of Oregon* by Frederick Van Voorhies Holman, and *Miners' and Travelers' Guide to Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, and Colorado* by John Mullan. Newspapers include *The Columbian*, the *Walla Walla Statesman,* and *Washington Pioneer*.

The materials are scanned in-house using specialized equipment. A Zeutschel 5000 planetary camera is used to create threshold scans in Photoshop software. Document pages are saved separately as archival .tiff files with 300-600 dpi resolution. Additional images are created from the source file then run through optical character recognition (OCR) software to create a searchable page. Project members scan newspapers from archival microfilm using a Nikon Super Coolscan 9000. This scanner was designed to scan negatives and individual frames of microfilm. Because the film is not always of good quality, WSL staff must clean up the images to facilitate searching and reading online. OCR doesn't produce good results from newspapers, so staff must create indexes. The process is both labor- and storage-intensive.

Viewing the images requires a free download of a DJVU plug-in from Lizard Technologies. The plug-in compresses very large image files into a format quickly deliverable over the Web and provides useful features such as the ability to zoom in and out, pan, and adjust colors. The software allows even maps to load quickly and appear crisp even at high zoom.

The data files and tools that the Washington History Project provides are great examples of using technology to access our history. The issue of provenance can wait for another conference.

Judy Pitchford (left) and Marlys Rudeen.
Photos by Cameron Johnson.

5 years old. Participants receive free books and are building family book collections at home.

To advertise the program, the library puts up a big banner in the park and sets up a booth in the local farmers' market. Library staff and volunteers deliver publicity cards around the city to locations likely to be visited by people needing the service. Because state money for ESL programs is earmarked for community colleges, BPL must fund its program with a mix of tax revenue and private donations from organizations like Families for Literacy.

BPL's most popular fundraising event is its annual trivia bee. Three hundred people attended the most recent one in February. A local designer creates a theme each year, with this year's theme being "Trivia Bee 14: The Orient Express." As always, the competition was fierce this year for the coveted "Trivia Toad" trophy. The bee invites participation by individuals and teams. Entry fees are $300 for teams and twenty dollars for individuals. This year, about fifteen local businesses entered teams. Participants are assisted by appropriately costumed teens. Donated raffle prizes are also awarded.

The trivia bee is a vital supplement to the program's modest $130,000 budget and is great publicity for the program.

For more information about Benicia Public Library's ESL program, visit **www.ci.benicia.ca.us/literacy/literacy.html**.