



Literacy Council for Josephine County

“Changing lives through learning since 1986”

SPRING/SUMMER, 2019

106 N.W. F St. #18, Grants Pass, OR

The road to a better life starts by taking the right turns

Jon Mitchell believes that life is all about choices.

And while he admits to making some poor choices in his past, he considers his choice to seek help from the Literacy Council to be one of his best.

“I’m living life a lot more wealthy than ever before, and I don’t mean money at all,” Jon says.

After a year of marathon studies with tutor Dee Pierce, in January Jon took and passed his Construction Contractors Board test, earning him his Oregon contractor’s license. He and a partner have since set up their own business, U Name It.

“The name kind of says it all,” he says. “Anybody needs anything done, I’ll figure out how to do it. We’re getting some wonderful customers, getting some wonderful work.”

Jon, now 44, has spent most of his life in Grants Pass, growing up in a “rough” family environment. And though he attended North Middle School and Grants Pass High School, “I didn’t have an education. I never learned to read or write or spell,” he says. “I felt out of place, I felt unwanted. I felt different from other people, in a bad way.”

Jon didn’t know it then — nor did his parents or teachers — but he had — and still struggles with — dyslexia and ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder).

Both conditions made learning difficult. He was put in special education classes. He became something of a “wild child,” turning to drugs at age 14.

“I made bad choices,” he says simply.

At one point, he chose to get as far away from Grants Pass as possible, moving to Bangor, Maine, with the two young daughters he was raising on his own. A year or so later, they moved to Burwell, Nebraska, population 1,000.

There, Jon farmed, raised cattle and “learned how to be a father and raise my kids,” he says. “That small town was like a family.”

When major back surgery laid him up for two years, a teacher friend helped him cope, reading to him, showing him math and teaching him life lessons.

“She taught me a lot, taught me to have dignity for myself,” Jon says.

Jon returned to Grants Pass five or six years ago.

“I knew I needed an education,” he says. “I didn’t want to work at Taco Bell, I didn’t want to work at the mill. I wanted a contractor’s license.”

He called the Literacy Council and started working with Dee.

“When a dyslexic student comes to us, we typically put them into our Dyslexia program which can take two to three years to complete,” Dee says.

“This didn’t work for Jon, who wanted to pass the contractor’s



Jon Mitchell earned his contractor’s license — with help from the Literacy Council — and now runs his own business.

test ASAP. Since he was only mildly to moderately dyslexic, we took the chance that he could pass.

“We focused on test-taking skills and how to figure out long words he had never seen before. He worked very hard and did a remarkable job.”

But it wasn’t easy.

“Oh, I got really frustrated. I got really confused. I got really scared. But I stuck with it and stayed afloat,” Jon says. “Dee pushed me when I needed it.”

For the first time, maybe ever, Jon feels his life is on track.

“Getting clean was a choice. Learning to read and write was a choice. This is the best thing that ever happened to me.”

But Jon knows he won’t physically be able to do construction work forever. He’s thinking about getting into counseling.

“I’ve gotten so much from people it would be nice to give something back,” he says.

Now that sounds like a fine choice.

— Story by Kathleen Alaks



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on Facebook

CALENDAR

Upcoming Board Meetings

Meetings are at 12:30 p.m. on the third
Wednesday of the month, at the Literacy Council
office, 132 N.E. B St., Room 23, on the third floor
of the Newman United Methodist Church offices.

The next meetings are:

June 19	Sept. 18
July 17	Oct. 16
Aug. 21	Nov. 20

If you would prefer to receive the Literacy
Council's twice-yearly newsletter via email, let us
know, by contacting us at jocoliteracy@yahoo.com.
Include your name and address as well as the email
address we should send it to.

Meet our newest board member Grace Chou

**Q. Tell us a little about your
personal history, educational
background and career path.**

A. Like many people today, I
have had a number of careers.
I grew up in the Midwest and
Deep South. I have been a
nurse, physician, parent, and
teacher.

**Q. How and when did
you get involved with the
Literacy Council?**

A. I had noticed a call for tutors in the Courier
a couple of years ago. I had just retired from a part-time teach-
ing job at a local elementary school and becoming a tutor for the
Literacy Council seemed to be a natural transition.

**Q. What, if any, other volunteer work do you do in the communi-
ty? What other clubs or groups are you involved with?**

A. I have been active in the PTA at the school my daughters attend.
I have also been involved with the Southern Oregon Chinese
Cultural Association which organizes the annual Chinese New Year
Festival in Jacksonville. In the more distant past, I served on the board
of directors for the Youth Symphony of Southern Oregon, served as
medical consultant to Lovejoy Hospice, and worked with the OMSI
Super Science Saturday project.

Q. What's the best book you've read lately?

A. The Earth Sea series by Ursula LeGuin

Q. Who are your favorite authors?

A. I tend to read mystery, espionage, and fantasy literature with the
occasional non-fiction biography or historical work thrown in. I am a fan
of Frederick Forsyth, Michael Lewis, P. D. James, Ursula LeGuin, and
Kjell Eriksson

**Q. If you were stranded on a desert island, what one book
would you want to have with you?**

A. "Robinson Crusoe" by Daniel Defoe

Q. If you could have one superpower, what would it be?

A. Shapeshifting

Q. What one thing do you want to do that you haven't done yet?

A. Visit all the national parks

**Q. What would you like to see the Literacy Council do to
improve its value in the community?**

A. The Literacy Council is such a valuable resource for this commu-
nity. I think it should continue its efforts to make everyone aware that it
is available.





New reimbursement program helps students with some expenses

Donor gifts help directly with student successes

Last year, the Literacy Council board instituted a new program: the Student Achievement Award.

Because our donors have been so generous the past few years, the Literacy Council board voted to start a type of rewards program, reimbursing students for all or part of the fees or costs of significant achievements related to their studies.

This can include such things as the costs related to passing a driver's test, obtaining a driver's license or passing a citizenship test. This year, we



Jon Mitchell wants to use his awards money to do projects for others, like building this sturdy trailer cover for one of our students.



Patricia Oros received a partial reimbursement for the cost of taking her citizenship test, which she passed in January.

have been able to provide two students with Student Achievement Awards.

Patricia Oros contacted the Literacy Council for help preparing for her citizenship test. She worked with tutor Grace Chou, and in January she took her citizenship test, passing with a 100 percent score.

We were able to reimburse her \$100 of the \$725 test fee.

Jon Mitchell sought our help to take a test to get his Oregon contractor's license. (See Page 1.)

He worked with tutor Dee Pierce, and in January took and passed the Construction Contractors Board test.

We were able to reimburse him the entire \$60 test fee.

Jon has since set up his own business and plans to apply his award check to jobs he does for charitable purposes.

For example, Jon stepped up when one of our students needed a cover for the trailer he was living in. Jon built him a sturdy wood frame and attached two tarps that cover the entire trailer like a fitted roof.



Progress reports: Our Tutor-Student Coordinator Bette Mohr shares stories about some of our tutor-student teams:

- One ESL student's English has improved so much that she is now allowed to be a waitress in the restaurant where she works. Her English is good enough to converse easily with customers.
- A new student from Thailand is working diligently to learn English words. Her tutor says, "I don't know how she can learn so much in a short time, but she does it."
- A student from the Dominican Republic, learning basic English, brings his two well-behaved children to listen to the lesson and play quietly with the toys and books. At the end of the lesson, his wife comes in and "voluntarily" reinforces the lesson — whatever she sees written on the whiteboard! The tutor laughed when he told me this, saying that these tutoring sessions have become something of a "family affair" and rather fun.
- Another tutor says he is having a great time with his student from Mexico, who works in a sink factory here. They play basketball, take walks, and sometimes go out to eat together — all the time practicing English. The student's sister says that he really looks forward to his English lessons twice a week.
- A very loyal student in the Barton program just loves his sessions. He calls them "going to school." His tutor says he is making steady progress. The student recognizes this too and is very proud of it.
- And this from student Emma Miramontes: "I came to America when I was 15 years old. In 1985, my parents brought me and my six siblings to Grants Pass. I still remember the cold chill in November and the pretty leaves on the ground. Now that I am here, I really enjoy beautiful Grants Pass, where I work very hard. I don't miss anything about Mexico. I am still struggling with my English because it is a very hard language to learn. I really enjoy having my friend Ramona help me. I like reading books about history that are true stories. I have learned to write better and pronounce words. I like to write stories about my family and me. I like America. It is beautiful, especially the mountains. It also has many opportunities to do good things."



WHAT: Literacy Council book sale

WHEN: Saturday, June 8, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

WHERE: Oregon Books & Games parking lot at Seventh and E streets in downtown Grants Pass

PROCEEDS: It all goes to support the all-volunteer Literacy Council for Josephine County, which offers one-on-one tutoring free of charge in reading, writing, GED, ESL, dyslexia and citizenship.

The Literacy Council for Josephine County
106 N.E.W. F St. #18
Grants Pass, OR, 97526