



Chrysanthemum

Summer 2016

MERCY LEARNING CENTER

Mercy Learning Center of Bridgeport, Inc. provides basic literacy and life skills training to low-income women using a holistic approach within a compassionate, supportive environment. All women are welcome without regard for race, religion, color, creed, sexual orientation or national origin.



Edna Miller smiles with her student, Mylande.

“I HAVE BEAUTIFUL STORIES”

Edna Miller Retires after 28 Years of Tutoring at MLC

Have you met Edna Miller? If you have spent time at Mercy Learning Center during any of the last 28 years, you probably have. Since 1988, Edna has been a volunteer tutor to so many women that she has now lost count. This year, she sat at a small table for two in a sunny corner of one of the tutoring rooms, gently coaching her last student to read, think, discuss and write.

Edna’s manner, like her appearance, is gentle and light, but her resolve is made of steel. This July, Edna turns 93. Though her mind is sharp, she has somewhat reluctantly decided to retire from tutoring. “I’m going to miss it so much. I don’t know what I’ll do, but I’m going to miss it.”

Edna was one of the very first tutors at MLC, joining just as she was preparing to retire from 23 years as a literacy specialist in Bridgeport elementary schools, including Sacred Heart School, the original occupant of MLC’s building on Park Avenue.

Altogether, she has taught at 637 Park Avenue for over fifty years. “I just love teaching. It’s in my blood.”

Speaking in a measured cadence characteristic of lifelong educators, she spins vivid tales about the women she has tutored. Clearly, she has connected deeply with the experiences of her pupils. “I have beautiful stories. I could write a book!” she laughs.

The impact Edna has had on her students and the Center itself is enormous, and will continue through her legacy of learning and caring. Taking it all in, she remarks about the positive atmosphere at MLC, “Do you ever notice that everybody’s happy? Smiling faces. All the women are happy.” In her humility, she does not realize how much she herself helped build that culture of hope and happiness—one lesson, one day, one student at a time. But we do. Thank you, Edna.

FROM THE PRESIDENT: JANE E. FERREIRA

Dear Friends,

I am grateful for your contributions to the 2015-16 program year at MLC through the giving of your time, sharing your knowledge, donating or simply telling a friend about MLC. Over 900 women are more knowledgeable, more independent and stronger today because of your investment. This newsletter contains stories of dedication, learning and generosity. But there are hundreds more stories at MLC every day. Thank you for helping to educate women and families throughout the year.

In gratitude,

Jane E. Ferreira, President and Chief Executive Officer



SAVE THE DATE!

A View of the Harbor

Sunday, September 25th

Enjoy an evening of cocktails, hors d'oeuvres, a live auction and inspiring stories of education and empowerment, all while enjoying sunset views of Southport Harbor.

Visit mercylearningcenter.org/VOH or call 203-334-6699 to learn more about tickets, sponsorship opportunities and other ways to get involved.



MEET OUR NEW WEBSITE!

Visit our redesigned site, which features all the information you need to become a student or volunteer, new stories and images and easy links to donate!

www.MercyLearningCenter.org



LET'S CONNECT!

Go to www.facebook.com/mercylearningcenter and click on "Like."

"Educate a woman...Educate a family"

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MERCY
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637 Park Avenue
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WISH LIST

What's Most Needed

- Gift cards (Stop & Shop, Walgreens, CVS, Kohl's, Target)
- Baby items (diapers sizes 4, 5 & 6; wipes)
- Non-perishable food
- **And a new roof for our building!**

GIVING AND GETTING

Volunteers Help Care for MLC's Youngest Learners

"The children bring me joy, they give me love. I go home feeling rejuvenated. I think they give me more than I give them."

*Sharon Litvinoff,
Childcare Volunteer*

Like other programs at Mercy Learning Center, MLC's Early Childhood Education Program relies on many dedicated volunteers. Twenty-nine volunteers worked with the childcare staff this year to nurture and educate the children in the program. They lead songs and story times, they initiate games and activities, and sometimes they simply rock a child until she can drift off for a much-needed nap.

Our thanks to all the wonderful volunteers



who helped give the children at MLC a great foundation for life and learning this year! If you are interested in becoming a weekly childcare volunteer during the 2016-17 program year, please contact Nora Jinishian, at nora.jinishian@mercylearningcenter.org or call 203-334-6699.

DID YOU KNOW?

Only **66%** of adults without a high school diploma use the internet.

74% of adults with annual incomes under \$30,000 use the internet, compared to **97%** of adults with annual incomes of at least \$75,000, a **23% difference**.

Last year, women at MLC spent more than **27,500 hours** developing their computer and internet skills.

LOGGING IN

Women Learn the Language of Technology at MLC

Everyone knows that at Mercy Learning Center, women are learning English. But women are learning another language as well—the language of technology. Mercy Learning Center has two computer labs with 30 computers each and two full-time instructors who provide both group instruction and one-on-one guidance.



Women learn how to type and use all the Microsoft Office® programs, as well as the internet and language learning programs. For many women, it is their first encounter with a computer. "There's a lot with computers," says instructor Marianne Roggeman. "It's simple in most people's minds, but for our students it's very different from what they're used to." As with everything at MLC, small

successes are celebrated: "A student may be coming from another country and has never touched a mouse before, and to see them highlight their name and make it a different color and change the type style, they get so excited," says instructor Linda Ashby. "It opens a whole new world," agrees Marianne. "I always say, 'Just dive into it and try it. You can't break anything!'"

“WE DID IT!”

Recognition Reception Honors MLC Graduates

They all started somewhere different—diverse countries, varying education levels, unique family situations. But the 30 women who graduated from MLC in 2015-16 now all share one thing in common, a high school diploma. The women celebrated this major milestone together at the annual Recognition Reception in May. Some of the graduates are already taking college classes, while others

are preparing to start in the fall and others are enrolled in vocational training programs. For all of the women, their time at MLC has expanded their sense of possibility. “I thought it was too late for me,” remembers one graduate. “Now, I am going to college. I want to teach my daughters that if we work together, we can do it. Even though our lives aren’t easy, we can do it.”



SPRING FUNDRAISERS SPELL SUCCESS

Friends and Supporters Step Out and Come Together for MLC

This spring, Mercy Learning Center hosted two evenings of fun and entertainment. This year’s annual Scrabble for Success ladies’ night, held in March at Fairfield Country Day School, was a flurry of good will, good times and good words. Our thanks to sponsors KMS Partners, Luxe Nail & Spa, Splash of Pink and Superior Seafood as well as the planning committee and all who attended.

In May, MLC supporters Barb and Ken Kleban and Nealy and Fred Madsen sponsored a benefit concert at the Fairfield Theatre Company featuring the talented



and animated local music group, Caravan of Thieves. Thanks to everyone who came out to make the evening a success!

EMPOWER THE FUTURE!

With planned giving, you are establishing a donation that will be given at a later time. By planning to support MLC in the future, you help ensure that we continue to educate and empower women and families.

Planned giving can also provide financial benefits to you and your family now and in the future.

WAYS TO GIVE INCLUDE:

- Bequests, estate gifts or trusts
- Stocks and securities
- Life insurance policies or real estate
- Annuities

If you are interested in planned giving, speak with your legal and/or financial advisor to discuss the many options.



JOIN US!

Become a Tutor at MLC

It’s fun, flexible, and rewarding. To sign up or learn more, contact Lynn Gabriel at lynn.gabriel@mercylearningcenter.org or 203-334-6699.