

TUTORING ON THE PATH TO CITIZENSHIP

A literacy legacy



Alex von Kleydorff / Hearst Connecticut Media

Maria Trujillo, from Peru, and Martha Niño, from Nicaragua, in front of the South Norwalk branch of the public library on Tuesday. They have just passed their citizenship tests thanks to the Norwalk Public Library's Greater Norwalk Literacy Volunteers program, which helped them learn English.

Literacy Volunteers program helps with English, citizen test

By Kaitlyn Krasselt

NORWALK — There are 100 questions on the U.S. citizenship test.

Only 10 are asked during the test, and experts recommend knowing the answers to 30 questions in order to pass.

Maria Trujillo made sure she knew the answers to all 100.

"She insisted that she know all 100 answers," said Bruno Tomasi, a tutor with the Norwalk Public Library's Greater Norwalk Literacy

"That's just the way (Maria Trujillo) is. She made a huge effort. She came in every Monday, she came to every class. She just absorbed everything."

Bruno Tomasi, tutor with the Norwalk Public Library's Greater Norwalk Literacy Volunteers program

Volunteers program who helped Trujillo prepare for the test.

"By the last two sessions, she knew the answer to every single question, God bless her," Tomasi said. "That's just the way she is. She made a huge effort. She came in every Monday, she came to every class. She just absorbed everything."

On April 25, Trujillo, who moved to the U.S. at age 50 nearly 20 years ago, officially passed the test, and on May 18 she will take the oath to

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become a U.S. citizen, surrounded by her children and grandchildren in Bridgeport.

"I am so happy because a lot of years ago my dream was to come to the U.S. and live in the U.S.," Trujillo said. "My mom always said, 'You can do anything you want.' She always gave me love and support like that. So to do it, I am just so happy."

Trujillo, originally from Peru, is one of three women who recently earned their citizenship after learning English and studying for the test through the NPL Literacy Volunteers program. Martha Niño, of Nicaragua, and Marisol Garzon, of Mexico, also passed the test and have taken the oath to become citizens, surrounded by friends and family.

Niño, who passed her test April 7 and officially received her citizenship, has lived in Norwalk for 12 years and said she first heard about the program through friends and decided to try it out.

"I love the program," Niño said. "It's so difficult to learn English. My three children correct me all the time, and to study for the test was very difficult. When I took the oath, it was very emotional. I feel like I can sleep like a baby now that it's over. ... I'm so thankful for the program. For me it was excellent, and I think if you have the possibility to become a citizen you should do it. If I can do it, you can do it. It's the time to become an American citizen."

The Literacy Volunteers Program serves more than 400 adults in the greater Norwalk area every month through its free courses taught by volunteers.

The program started in 1976 at the South Norwalk Library and moved to the Main Library in the early 1980s. It was operated as a separate entity funded by Family Services of Woodfield until 2013 when the



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Maria Trujillo, from Peru, and Martha Niño, from Nicaragua, look at family photos on Niño's phone at the Norwalk branch of the public library on Tuesday. They have just passed their citizenship tests thanks to the the Norwalk Public Library's Literacy Volunteers program, which helped them learn English.

Norwalk Public Library Board of Trustees took over and the library began managing the program. Today, the program has more than 60 volunteers who teach English as a second language to people from all over the world who now call the Norwalk area home.

Tutors and students work together for a minimum of two hours a week in small groups. The program offers free classes in English as a Foreign Language, Basic Literacy and Citizenship Training, regardless of immigration status. The library also provides supplemental learning opportunities, such as conversation groups, writing groups and computer assisted instruction using the Rosetta Stone language program.

Sherelle Harris, assistant



Niño

library director for the NPL system who oversees the Literacy Volunteers program, said it is not semester-based and students meet with tutors at times that are convenient for everyone, which results in higher retention.

"People really like that

flexibility," Harris said.

Harris said the library is always looking for qualified volunteers, especially those who want to help with citizenship training and basic literacy. Additionally, she said the library is currently looking at ways to improve the program by placing



Trujillo

more of an emphasis on those two courses, as well as developing an exit program to help participants track their progress toward the goals they set at the beginning of the program, and updating the criteria for volunteers.

"We met with our tutors

and it was really great," Harris said. "We want to formalize the program as far as student needs and what they're telling us they need."

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