

# Watsonville/Aptos Adult Education News and Views



Adult education will become an agency of progress if its short-term goal of self-improvement can be made compatible with a long-term, experimental but resolute policy of changing the social order.

**Eduard Lindeman, *The Meaning of Adult Education* (1926)**

Vol. 5 No. 21

Sesquicentennial Issue

March 13, 2006



*Watsonville Evening High School  
Citizenship Class - 1938*



## *150th Anniversary Celebration of California Public Adult Education*

This year public adult education in California celebrates one hundred and fifty years of service to its communities. In 1856, in the basement of old St. Mary's church in San Francisco, the board of education sponsored evening classes for Chinese, Irish, and Italian immigrants who needed to learn English or become citizens. Later that year, other classes were added for adults to learn job skills in the burgeoning construction of post-Gold Rush San Francisco. One hundred and fifty years later you can walk into most California high schools in the evenings and see many adults acquiring literacy, preparing for work and other life roles, or enriching their life with art, technology, exercise and connecting with others in what is an increasingly alienating world for many.

It's been a long and honorable history of learning for a lifetime, second and third chances, and social justice. The movement for adults to return to post-secondary education began in the first decades of the last century, and became what we know today at community colleges. In the twenties and thirties, the mass progressive movements of the time created "evening high schools" that gave opportunities to adults of the working classes to finish a secondary education, and continue to career training or college while still working. In our county, Santa Cruz Evening High School opened in 1918, and Watsonville Evening High School opened in 1929.

*(cont. p 2)*

## 150 Years of Adult Education

During World War II one million Californians studied in adult education classes related to civil defense and the millions of returning soldiers after WWII needed to prove that, although they had not finished high school, they had learned enough in the real world to continue in college on the G.I. bill. Hence the GED test was created, and it continues to be an option for adults, born here and from other countries, to have national certification of their level of knowledge without a high school diploma. Competency, not seat time, has continued to be the process by which adult education certifies learning.

The sixties and seventies saw an explosion of adult education around the state, often modeled after European models like Denmark, where always the majority of adults are learning something new in a formal instructional setting. The role of adult education in welcoming and orienting the new waves of adult immigrants grew, and the federal government added to adult education's support to focus on adult literacy and "disadvantaged" populations. Prop. 13 in 1977 radically changed how public adult education was supported, and in some places in California, extinguished it.

Today, adult education is an underappreciated partner of California public schools. Over one and half million adults every year study in public adult education classes, over half of them of them learning English as a language new to them, or building literacy and basic skills needed for their own emancipation and success. Just last December the National Assessment of Adult Literacy was released and showed that since the last national survey, 1993, the number of adults who do not function at basic literacy levels remains

alarmingly high. The projections for immigration in California mean that by 2014 the majority of public school students will be children of adults born in other countries. What support will these parents have if they choose to learn English? The gap between the privileged and the working poor in our country seems to widen with each new initiative of the "ownership society." This gap is also here in our progressive minded central coast, and not just in the obvious difference between north and south county. Make no mistake, these "gaps", which some used to call class, correlate strongly with race, ethnicity, age, and immigration status.

Public adult education offers our classrooms and energies to make sure a place is set at the American table for those who need skills and learning for work, or who cannot read or speak English, for those who need to talk to other parents about families and children, and for those who have matured in their life's journey and need health and meaningful connection with others. It's a lot to ask. We've a lot to give in adult ed. classes... to each other. One hundred and fifty years and just beginning.



*Adult ESL Students  
in San Francisco, 1856*



# Adult Education

A long tradition of the practice of freedom....

Every social action group should at the same time be an adult education group, and I go even as far as to believe that all successful adult education groups sooner or later become social action groups.

**Eduard Lindeman, *The Sociology of Adult Education* (1945).**

[I deeply believe] that all human beings can be aided to become increasingly self-reliant and autonomous, that the most important single principle is that the learner be fully *engaged*, and that the main goal of adult-learning is to develop men and women who are, at the same time, compassionately sensitive and tough-minded.

**Roby Kidd, *How Adults Learn* (1959).**

Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of generations into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes 'the practice of freedom', the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.

**Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970, 1995).**

People] can find [their] vocation and happiness only by constantly expanding the boundaries of what [they have] already achieved. New horizons of cognition and new spheres of activity are made the source as well as the consequences of lifelong education.

**Bogdan Suchodolski, *Philosophical Aspects* (1976).**

A democratic philosophy is characterized by a concern for the development of persons, a deep conviction as to the worth of every individual, and faith that people will make the right decisions for themselves if given the necessary information and support. It gives precedence to the growth of *people* over the accomplishment of *things* when these two values are in conflict. It emphasizes the release of human potential over the control of human behavior. In a truly democratic organization there is a spirit of mutual trust, an openness of communications, a general attitude of helpfulness and cooperation, and a willingness to accept responsibility, in contrast to paternalism, regimentation, restriction of information, suspicion, and enforced dependency on authority.

When applied to the organization of adult education, a democratic philosophy means that the learning activities will be based on the real needs and interests of the participants; that the policies will be determined by a group that is representative of all participants; and that there will be a maximum of participation by all members of the organization in sharing responsibility for making and carrying out decisions.

**Malcolm S. Knowles, *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: From Pedagogy to Andragogy (Revised and Updated)* (1980).**

It is useful for the adult educator to be able to work with all forms of oppression simultaneously, facilitating the exploration of differences.

**Shirley Walters, *Gender and Adult Education* (1996).**

## Adult Education Today

My name is **Patricia Montiel**. I am from Mexico City. I have been living in Watsonville for 5 years because my husband lives here. He has been living here since he was 15 years old. I wanted to know Watsonville and I wanted to live together. I like living in Watsonville because in this country you have a better life. It is a peaceful place to live. Also we all have many free opportunities.



My family doesn't live here. My mother and four sisters live in Mexico for now. My father and brother live in Denver, Colorado. My one sister lives here because she is married with my brother-in-law.

I have been attending Watsonville/Aptos Adult Education since 2001. I had to leave school because I was pregnant. It is difficult to find people that take care of babies. Now I am back in school.

My boys are 2 and 10 years old and the school has a babysitter for children 2 years and up. *I am happy because I can come to school with my baby!!!* My first ESL class was Beginning Low 1. Now I am in Intermediate High. I attend the ESL/CBET class Monday to Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00p.m. at the Green Valley Campus. I also take home videos. In August I began to attend the G.E.D. classes at Porter because now they have childcare. I am happy!!

In my country I was a nurse and I worked 5 years in a pediatric hospital. In the future I want to work in a hospital. I want to be a nurse again in this country!

In my opinion, **“I want to succeed as I had in my country.”**

I suggest, **“Don't throw away your education! You can be better and you can do anything you want do!!”**



## Distance Learning - Online, Videos, DVD's at Home, and On the Job

**Distance Learning – Video Home Study** enables moms and dads to learn English and still stay home with their children. As soon as their children are in pre-school the parents begin ESL classes.

**Adult School Students Succeed...** a statewide project for this anniversary year to recognize 150 students in adult education who have accomplished goals and made significant contributions to their families and communities. Our school has been honored to have six of our alumni among the 150 students statewide. Here are the stories of the two most recently recognized, Angie Ledesma, and Jose Humberto Camacho.



## Angie Ledesma

Angie Ledesma describes herself as “a proud Watsonville/Aptos Adult Education graduate of the class of 1978.” She has traveled a long, sometimes arduous, but always rewarding road as a student, wife, mother, employee, volunteer, active community member and strong supporter of education.

Angie was born in Hollister, California, to what could best be described as a sharecropper father and a mother who, though herself uneducated, inspired a love of education in her seven children. Angie’s first school experience was at a small country elementary school in Tres Piños, a small town close to Hollister. t

She loved school and always chafed at the delay forced on her and other farm family children at the beginning of each term. Like many agricultural communities, the opening of school usually took a back seat to the harvest.

Her one consolation was being in school in time for the annual Christmas play. Being a “ham”, Angie would often get good roles.

Even at a very young age, Angie was an avid reader. She remembers reading a book each day as a child, and frequenting the public library when the family moved to Watsonville. While working during her elementary and junior high years picking tomatoes and prunes she discovered piles of old newspapers in the sheds. She took them home and read them as eagerly as she did her library books. Vicariously, her knowledge and experience expanded as she read of events close by and in other parts of the world.

After elementary school in Tres Piños, Angie attended Moss Landing School, EA Hall Junior High School in Watsonville, and then one year at Watsonville High School. At the age of sixteen, partly in order to escape her parents’ strict upbringing, Angie left school to marry. She and her husband, an itinerant farm worker, moved to the Central Coast agriculture region of Santa Maria and began raising a family. Angie occupied herself with raising their six children for a number of years, all the while yearning to learn more. She prayed that the “box over my head” would be removed so that she could realize her dream.

The family moved back north to Watsonville in the early 1950’s. Angie was always tired from the hard work of raising her children and working in the fields and packing sheds, but her dream persisted. “At night when I got home it was such a dream for me to be able to sit down and read the newspaper and have some leisure time,” she says, “But I couldn’t give up on my studies.”

Angie reached her first goal when she graduated as an “A” student from the Watsonville/Aptos Adult School class of 1978. She was selected to give the welcoming address at graduation, and recalls the inspiration of Lester Oaks, then principal of the Adult School. Lester helped her to realize that although she could have passed the GED exams easily and quickly, the sacrifice and discipline of pursuing her high school diploma could broaden her. She also held up as a role model another “A” student, Grace Arceneaux, who later became the wife of a long-time educator and Watsonville/Aptos Adult School teacher, Ron Arceneaux.

Until graduating from the Adult School, Angie had worked as an inventory clerk. Using this experience, as soon as she graduated she applied for and got what she considered a dream job, working in the Welfare office serving others. She was the first Latina woman hired as an eligibility worker in Watsonville, a role she held for 6 years. Then she was promoted to the position of supervisor where she worked for the next 12 years. She paved the way and served as a role model for many other Latinas after her, some of whom were hired under affirmative action guidelines which did not even exist when she became a pioneer in the agency. Looking back on her childhood, and then forward to the realization of her dream of working to serving people, Angie says, “If it had not been for night school, I would not have

## Angie Ledesma (continued from the previous page)

When her husband was diagnosed with full blown AIDS, contracted from a blood transfusion, Angie took a very early retirement to care for him. This occupied her life, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, for 4 years. Doctor's had advised her to place her husband in an institution, but she was determined not to. When her husband died, Angie found herself not only physically and emotionally exhausted, but also financially depleted and destitute. The savings they had put aside over the years had been used for his care and expensive medications.

Allowing herself only a short time to recover, Angie soon went looking for a job. She tried various things, capitalizing on her skills and experience, while also volunteering as a peer counselor in Santa Cruz County. It wasn't long before Angie was offered a paid position as peer counselor, and immediately began developing the job to include many more clients than had been served previously. Angie is still in this job and is a highly esteemed presence in the Watsonville Senior Center community. There is a great need for Latinas to work with the aged, and Angie interacts as a peer mostly with women from Mexico, some of whom have been able to identify with her so much that they have confided things to her that they never have told anyone in their entire lives. "God finally put me where he wanted me," Angie says.

Angie is one of sixty-eight Santa Cruz County area women featured in a book of interviews of seniors, *What a Life! Heroines Sung and Unsung*, by Ruth Hunter. Ms. Hunter writes of the women, "The world is better for your contributions." Angie's many community activities spanning several decades has made the world better. While her children were in school Angie was an active member of the PTA, where, although she felt isolated as the only Mexican parent, she continued to contribute. She also served early on as a member of the Board of Planned Parenthood, advocating for women's rights.

As a member of the Board of Directors of the Henry Mello Center for the Performing Arts, Angie formed a pool of ushers for the Center's many events. She participated in intensive training with Women's Crisis Center and contributed many hours on the nighttime crisis line, counseling and advising women in crisis. Angie has served as an ambassador for *SecureHorizons*, a supplemental health insurance company, greeting clients, giving them information and helping them to feel at ease. Among her most treasured honors is the recognition she received as the first Latina of the newly formed Chicana Women's Organization. Currently, Angie serves on the Boards of Directors of the Watsonville Women's Club Foundation and the Watsonville Senior Center.

In the civic arena, Angie was appointed by the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors to the South County Commission, which was charged with the responsibility to assure that citizens in the lower income south part of the county received their fair share of funding. She also has served on the Personnel Commission for the City of Watsonville and as a member of the Commission negotiating with Charter Communications to keep cable television rates affordable. Angie even ran, unsuccessfully, for a Watsonville City Council seat. She had planned to make another run until her husband became ill and she chose to devote her time to his care.

Angie attributes her many accomplishments to several things. First, she recognizes that the hardships of her early life actually were blessings. "When you've been deprived as a kid you want to have fulfillment as an adult," Angie explains, thankful for the hard experiences that motivated her to succeed in life. Angie also cites her religious faith as a basis for her positive outlook and ability to rise above life's blows. And finally, starting with her years in adult education, Angie says, "Adult Ed was a stepping stone into a bigger world. Although it's true that I knew a lot because I read a lot, the discipline of actually being in school gave me self confidence. After the bumpy road that I had traveled, Adult Education opened the door to me to a better life and a life of service, which I always wanted. And my kids benefited, too. Now, as adults, they can verbalize that I was an inspiration to them. And I'm proud to say that all six of my adult children are college educated."

Read other stories of our honored students on the state web site:

[www.adultlearners.org](http://www.adultlearners.org)

Alumni Hall of Fame



Devorah  
Hernandez



Chuck  
Carter



Ramona  
Linan



John  
Basor



## Jose Humberto Camacho

Jose Humberto Camacho was born and raised in a poor suburb north of Mexico City. His parents never attended school, but they always instilled hope, responsibility and respect in their children. Trying to make a better life for his family, Jose Humberto's father moved to Watsonville, CA in search of work. As the eldest of seven children, Jose Humberto, now in his early teens, was forced to find whatever jobs he could in order to help support his family in Mexico. "It was at this point when education became an obsession for me, to escape poverty and as a way of self-empowerment. I knew that I needed to be a good role model for my brothers and sisters," says Jose Humberto, "

While I worked shining shoes, selling treats on the street and singing on the buses for tips, I studied hard and tried my best at school. It was difficult for me because as a teenager, I studied in the morning, worked in the afternoon, and finished my homework at night. Eventually, my efforts were rewarded, and after years of study and work I graduated from the National Polytechnic Institute in Business Administration, earning the title of Licentiate in Commercial Relations with Specialization in International Commerce. I got a job in the department of Imports and Exports in a manufacturing company, where I worked for several years. I had reached my professional goals and economically supported my mother and siblings." In 1987, at the age of 26, Jose Humberto made the decision to come to the United States. He briefly returned to Mexico several months later to ask for his girlfriend's hand in marriage. With his new wife Jose Humberto moved back to the United States permanently to start their new life. Unexpected was that it really would be starting over. Limited English skills and a lack of work experience in the U.S. made finding work in his profession impossible. Being ever resourceful, Jose Humberto forged ahead and worked at many different low paying jobs in agriculture and at a cushion factory, while also playing with a band in restaurants. Determined to advance himself, he started studying English and then GED Preparation at Watsonville Aptos Adult Education in 1989. Work and family forced Jose Humberto to be flexible with his study. His first daughter was born this year, and classes had to be scheduled around shifting work hours. Fortunately, adult education provided him with the needed flexibility and support. "Here is where I found supportive and caring educators who motivated me to not give up in my aspirations," he says of his five years at Watsonville Aptos Adult Education. "It was in the adult school that I realized I wanted to become a teacher. I knew I would be able to learn enough English to go back to college and start a new career in the United States. There were many wonderful and supportive teachers and one in particular helped me apply and register at Cabrillo Community College. I call her one of my angels. She was also the one who encouraged me to complete my GED." With growing experience and knowledge provided by the adult school, Jose Humberto was steadily able to advance to better jobs in a cannery, moving from packing to janitor and then to mechanic and inspector. "At first my wife didn't understand why I was spending so much time in school, since I was doing better, but my dream was to become a teacher. Soon however, as she understood, my wife, who is a supportive person, nourished my soul to envision a better kind of life in the land of opportunities. My children also became my inspiration to reach my professional goals." With this love and support, Jose Humberto entered Cabrillo College in Watsonville, California, in 1994, when his second daughter was 2 years old. Still working at the cannery full time, he graduated with an AA degree from Cabrillo College in 1999, and immediately enrolled in the National Hispanic University in San Jose, California. The Bachelor's Degree he earned in Mexico led to an invitation to work as a Migrant Support Teacher for the Pajaro Valley Unified School District. "I felt like the luckiest person in the world when I was accepted to the University and then even luckier when I started working for the Pajaro Valley Unified School District Migrant Program as a Migrant Support Teacher at Mintie White Elementary School in Watsonville, California," relates Jose Humberto. "Being a full time worker, a full time parent, and a full time student was not easy, but in spite of all the hard work, I enjoyed every moment of my second opportunity as a student. It took me another five years to complete the university and my teaching credential. It is true that my wife supported me every step of the way, but I must say at times she was skeptical. Sometimes she asked me why I was spending so much time studying, since I had a good job in the cannery with good benefits. I told her my dream was to become a teacher and, of course, she understood and supported me. Five years later, in 1999, when I was graduating from the university, the cannery closed and all of my co-workers lost their jobs.

## Student Support Center



### DRUGS AND GANGS: HOW TO PROTECT YOUR CHILDREN

On January 25 Student Support Services sponsored Miguel Orejel, Watsonville High School teacher, in morning and evening presentations at the Porter Building on *Gangs and Drugs: How to Protect Your Children*. The topic had been requested by students at the Student Council meetings, and approximately 230 enthused and engaged students and their teachers participated. There were many questions, so many that Miguel was not able to complete his excellent PowerPoint presentation in the morning session. Morning students have requested another visit to complete the topic. This same presentation will be scheduled for Green Valley students



### BANKING, SAVINGS AND CREDIT

Teresa Morales of Santa Cruz Community Credit Union engaged 475-500 students in dynamic presentations at the Porter Building and Green Valley sites in February. Explaining how to use financial institutions, increase savings, make a budget, and use credit, Ms. Morales kept the students active and participative, using many visuals and practical examples to help her audience gain greater understanding of finance and money management. We look forward to the possibility of further workshops or short classes led by Ms. Morales when she will be able to explore these topics with our students in greater depth.

### Jose Humberto Camacho (continued from previous page)

We both knew then that we had made the right decision, even though it had been a strain on our family.” Upon graduation from University, and after 15 years studying in the United States, Jose Humberto fulfilled his dream and became a Migrant Education teacher. He continues to work at Mintie White Elementary School, and in the fall of 2005 he also began to work evenings at Watsonville Aptos Adult Education as a Student Advisor, where he already is a beloved member of the school community. He is actively involved empowering students through the Student Council and, with the students, in preparation for the 150th anniversary of Adult Education in California. He visits students in all 50 evening ESL classes, serving as Advisor, telling his own story and then meeting individually with students, advising and motivating them. He feels that his life has come full circle.

“I have a job where I can empower my students to make positive contributions in their lives. I work with both the children and their parents. Six months ago my former teacher at the adult school called me and asked if I would like to come and work with her. I was thrilled and overjoyed with the opportunity to go back to where I had begun. I now work closely with this former teacher as the evening ESL Student Advisor. It is a joy to go into the classes and tell the adults learning English that I used to be sitting in those same chairs and because of my start at the adult school, I am now a teacher.” With the birth of his youngest son and daughter in 2001 and 2002, Jose Humberto continues his commitment to family, education, empowerment and community. He has coached his 2 older daughters’ soccer teams; taught guitar classes at *Casa de la Cultura*, a social service agency serving poor people in the community of Pajaro, California, and at the Santa Cruz County Sheriffs Rehabilitation facility. For 12 years he played in a band called “*La Estudiantina*” in schools, convalescent hospitals and restaurants. Currently, he is very involved in *Cara and Corazon*, a weekly workshop that strengthens family relationships, educates about gang and drug prevention, and validates Latino values and cultural identity. In all that he does, Jose Humberto says, “I transmit my experience as a student, as a parent, and as a teacher to motivate others to become successful people and to create dreams in this land of opportunities, and I always say to them that “*Si se puede.*”