



Thanks for 30 years of support  
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New: Expanded GED classes  
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# SIENA LITERACY CENTER NEWSLETTER

## Calendar

### NOVEMBER 3

[GED orientation, 1 pm or 5 pm](#)

### NOVEMBER 11-13

MACAE (Michigan Adult, Community, and Alternative Education Association) Conference

### NOVEMBER 24-25

Building closed—staff training

### NOVEMBER 26-27

Building closed—Thanksgiving holiday

### DECEMBER 2

Giving Tuesday

### DECEMBER 8

[GED orientation, 1 pm or 5 pm](#)

### DECEMBER 22-

### JANUARY 2

Building closed—holiday break

### JANUARY 19

Building closed—Martin Luther King Day

### FEBRUARY 2

[GED orientation, 1 pm or 5 pm](#)

### ONGOING

New student sign up:

[www.sienaliteracy.org/signup](http://www.sienaliteracy.org/signup)

New tutor orientation:

[www.sienaliteracy.org/tutor](http://www.sienaliteracy.org/tutor)

Sister Mary Hemmen, O.P., loved education! And she believed that education should be available to everyone because education enables equitable participation in life’s journey. With that vision, Sister Mary worked long and hard to establish a literacy center on the west side of Detroit. That Center, sponsored by the Adrian Dominican Sisters, is Siena Literacy Center and is celebrating its 30<sup>th</sup> birthday! If Mary was still alive, she would be so happy and so proud.



Adrian Dominican Sisters

Siena Literacy Center has a proud history. Originally housed in a closed public school and tucked in a neighborhood in Redford, learners and tutors found their way and fostered and learned the skills of literacy. However, the challenge of being so far away from a bus route caused Mary and the Board to search for a new home. And much to everyone’s relief, the Center found a beautiful home at Christ the King Parish.

In the Dominican Spirit, Siena Literacy Center has grown and thrived, has survived some difficult times and many more wonderful times, and has given new life and hope to hundreds of people. We Adrian Dominican Sisters are so proud! As the number of Sisters declines, we are transitioning away from our sponsorship as Siena Literacy Center becomes independent of us. Under the leadership of many fine directors, and more specifically Caitlyn Pisarski, the current director, Siena Literacy Center has thrived in the Dominican tradition of study and creating a welcoming community. Be assured of the prayers of the Adrian Dominican Sisters as Siena Literacy Center enters its next decade of service in so many new and creative ways. May God the Creator bless you all.

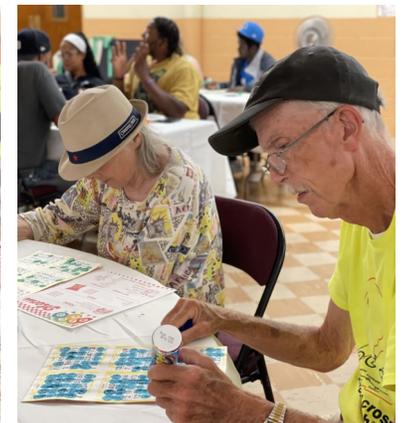
Sister Frances Nadolny, O.P.  
General Councillor  
Adrian Dominican Sisters

# Thank you to all our 30th anniversary supporters!



We celebrated the 30th anniversary of Siena Literacy Center this year with a series of fall events, including a [bingo night](#) in August, our [annual benefit evening](#) in September, and a [spaghetti dinner](#) in October.

We are so grateful for all our supporters who came out to make new memories with us, as well as all those who made contributions in honor of our anniversary. Your support will help us to continue serving adult learners for the next 30 years!



At the spaghetti dinner in October, Councilman James Tate honored Siena Literacy Center for its “30 years of learning, legacy and love” with an official resolution from the De-

troit City Council. The resolution commends founders, staff, volunteers, and students for their “dedication to literacy, inclusion, and community empowerment.”

Dear literacy champion,

I've spent much of this year reflecting on Siena Literacy Center's past 30 years of service to adult learners. I read meeting minutes dating back to when Sister Mary Hemmen led those meetings, in collaboration with dedicated advisors and board members who helped guide Siena's operations. I also spoke with many colleagues and Adrian Dominican sisters who knew Sister Mary and gleaned an understanding of her leadership style through letters and handwritten notes in our archives.



Four things I've learned about Siena are as true today as they were back then: One, funding for adult education has a long history of challenges, but we make it work and find ways to thrive. Two, it's incredible what a small team of dedicated and caring staff members can do! Three, volunteers are the lifeblood of our organization, and we wouldn't be here today without them. And four, it has *always* been about the learners.

Thank you for being a part of Siena's story. We're grateful for your support and look forward to creating our next chapter together.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Caitlyn Pisarski".

Caitlyn Pisarski, Executive Director

## Sacred Grounds supports future rain garden

Siena Literacy Center will break ground on a planned rain garden next spring thanks to Healing Over Habitat, an initiative of National Wildlife Federation program [Sacred Grounds](#), as well as additional funding from [Alliance Catholic Foundation](#).

The Healing Over Habitat initiative will provide funding, design and installation support, ongoing maintenance assistance, and more to build this garden. Watch for announcements about Siena's annual open house this spring, which will include an official ribbon-cutting for the new rain garden.

The Healing Over Habitat initiative aims to promote healing through nature by designing native plant gardens that address community needs, in collaboration with partners [Friends of the Rouge](#) and the [Sierra Club](#).



The rain garden, which was first announced last spring, will be installed in the yard outside Siena Literacy Center.



# Expanded GED program to include additional intro classes, daytime and evening options

Siena GED students went back to school in September with expanded class options to make studying accessible to more learners.

Siena's GED program now includes additional class times, with options to attend in either the daytime or the evening. Available classes now also include pre-GED math or language arts, to help students who need a boost with foundational skills to prepare for the exam.

Classes are offered Monday-Thursday at Siena's satellite classroom space at the [St. Suzanne Cody Rouge Community Resource Center](#). Already nearly 40 students have enrolled for the 2025-26 school year, and enrollment is still open.

"Since the expansion of the GED program, I have seen much more commitment and energy from learners," said instructor Val Kantner. "Now that they can attend twice a week, there is a new feeling of increased motivation. Also, it's been wonderful to see the individuals bonding in the groups since they often see the same people in both classes. I'm so happy to see them reach out to one another for support and encouragement. This is a vital ingredient for success."



*Instructor Val Kantner works with students on GED material at the St. Suzanne Cody Rouge Community Resource Center classroom.*

## Student Spotlight:

### JACKLYN REESE

I'm writing this on behalf of the Siena Literacy Center GED program. Not only do I like this program, I love it. My teachers are great. They have the passion and ability to connect with adult students, like myself, and make us comfortable and excited about learning.

I am so grateful for all of the resources and services I have received to help me achieve my goal to pass the GED.

I have been blessed with a computer, calculator, GED book, notebook and pen, wonderful teachers, and an awesome tutor. I am able to step into my commencement to receive my High School Equivalency Diploma because of the GED program.

Thank you for this opportunity. I am learning so much.



[Sign up for an upcoming GED orientation!](#)

Scan the QR code or call us at 313-532-8404.

# Renovations create new basement classroom space, improvements around building

In September, renovations were completed on painting projects around the Siena Literacy Center building thanks to a generous Adrian Dominican Sisters Special Initiatives grant. The projects included repainting and repairing water damage to the kitchen and closets, as well as renovating a basement classroom space that will now house expanded classes for English language learners.

The newly renovated classroom is about double the size of the previous space, and students were pleased to have additional elbow room.

“It’s good, and it’s adaptable to learn,” said student Mourtalla Syll, a member of the intermediate English class.

*Above right: The intermediate ESL class meets in their new classroom space. Below right: The basement space before the renovations.*



## Before & After

*Below: The resource room closet. Above right: The coffee area. Below right: The kitchen.*



# Welcome new social work interns!

Siena Literacy Center is excited to host two social work interns from [Wayne State University](http://Wayne State University) for the 2025-26 school year!



## La'Tisa Madden



La'Tisa is a native Detroit who earned her BA in Psychology in May 2025. She is currently a foundation-year MSW student at Wayne State. She is

dedicated to making a positive impact in the lives of others and is interested in exploring different populations for her future academic and career focus.

## Autumn Hall



Autumn is currently a BSW senior and has an Associate's degree in Mental Health and Social Work. With more than five years of

hands-on experience in mental health mentoring and group facilitation, she has supported both adults and children facing a wide range of mental and physical challenges. Her work is grounded in empathy, cultural competence, and a strong commitment to empowering individuals through advocacy, support, and practical resources.

## A Legacy of Literacy

Are you interested in learning more about planned giving opportunities with Siena Literacy Center to leave a legacy of literacy for the next generation? Or maybe you'd like to hear about the immediate benefits of a Donor-Advised Fund and how it can complement your current investment portfolio? Reach out to Executive Director Caitlyn Pisarski to set up an in-person or virtual meeting to learn more: 313-532-8404 or [cpisarski@sienaliteracy.org](mailto:cpisarski@sienaliteracy.org).

## Project Educate & Elevate: Siena partners with MCAN and Detroit Public Schools

Siena Literacy Center has partnered with the [Michigan College Access Network](http://Michigan College Access Network) and [Detroit Public Schools Community District \(DPSCD\)](http://Detroit Public Schools Community District (DPSCD)) on

an exciting new initiative called Project Educate and Elevate. This partnership will help adult learners enter

employment or post-secondary education through targeted training and a coordinated referral system. Students in the program enrolled with Siena and referred by DPSCD will work on improving foundational reading and math skills through one-to-one tutoring services, earn digital literacy certificates through Northstar Digital Literacy, and receive college and career navigational support.



Interested in getting involved with this or other Siena programs? Our biggest need is always volunteer tutors!

Visit [www.sienaliteracy.org/tutor](http://www.sienaliteracy.org/tutor) to sign up for an orientation or contact Katie Anderson at [kanderson@sienaliteracy.org](mailto:kanderson@sienaliteracy.org) to learn more.

# With Gratitude to Our Generous Donors

## Major Funders

[Adrian Dominican Sisters](#) • [Alliance Catholic Foundation](#) • [Catholic Foundation of Michigan](#)  
[City of Detroit Neighborhood Opportunity Fund](#) • [Detroit Employment Solutions Corporation \(DESC\)](#)  
[Dollar General Literacy Foundation](#) • [DTE Energy Foundation](#) • [Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity](#)  
[Michigan State Bar Foundation](#) • [PNC Foundation](#) • [St. Suzanne Cody Rouge Community Resource Center](#)  
[The Village Club Foundation](#) • [Young Woman's Home Association](#)

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	Chelsea Jones			

## In Memoriam

Larry DiBasio  
Sr. Mary Anna Riley

## In Appreciation of Siena's Board of Directors

Sue Witham, *Chair*  
 Alfred Robertson, *Vice-Chair/Treasurer*  
 Ron Eady, *Secretary*  
 Bill McKnight

Greg Cascione  
 Steve Wasko  
 Mark Weisenthal  
 Sr. Ellen Burkhardt, O.P.

*With heartfelt thanks to John Kluka, who steps down from the board this year after six years of service.*



FOUNDING MEMBER



A member organization of

**ProLiteracy**



**Adrian Dominican Sisters**  
Sponsored Institution





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*We celebrated our 30th anniversary with a Bingo Night on August 21, including a comedian bingo caller, music, and kids' activities. Pictured: Almeta and Ronald Harris.*

**SIENA LITERACY CENTER**

Follow us: @sienaliteracy

