



ISSUE NO. 1



FALL



2026



Congratulations,
graduates!
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Student Spotlight:
Moustapha
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SIENA LITERACY CENTER NEWSLETTER

Calendar

OCTOBER 15 10am-1pm

Fall clean up (see [page 6](#))

OCTOBER 19 11am-1pm OR

OCTOBER 22 5:30-7:30pm

Tutor workshop: Reading
Development 6: Comprehension
and Fluency (RSVP 313-532-8404)

NOVEMBER 9 11am-1pm OR

5:30-7:30pm

Tutor workshop: Reading
Development 7: Reading and the
Role of AI (RSVP 313-532-8404)

NOVEMBER 23-24

Building closed—staff training

NOVEMBER 25-26

Building closed—Thanksgiving

DECEMBER 1

Giving Tuesday

DECEMBER 21-31

Building closed—holiday break

JANUARY 18

Building closed—Martin Luther
King Day

New student orientation:

www.sienaliteracy.org/signup

New tutor orientation:

www.sienaliteracy.org/tutor

Dear Siena supporters,

Greetings and happy autumn! Since our last newsletter in the spring, so much has happened worth noting and celebrating. We honored our volunteer tutors at our annual [Volunteer Awards Ceremony](#) in April and celebrated our hard-working learners during our [National Adult Education Honor Society Induction and Graduation Ceremony](#) in June. Most recently, we rounded out summer with another beautiful evening at Bayview Yacht Club for [La Dolce Vita: An Adult Education Fundraiser](#). Thank you to everyone who attended, donated, and celebrated with us near and far. See pages [2](#), [3](#), and [4](#) for a recap of these uplifting events.



This fall also marks the beginning of our 2026-2027 GED program at St. Suzanne Cody Rouge Community Resource Center. Launched as a pilot in 2024, this program now operates four days a week with seven different class sessions to meet the diverse levels of our learners. Over these past several weeks, I've witnessed on more than one occasion a new learner moved to (happy!) tears as they embark on this often very personal journey. It's an honor to be a part of their experience.

While our St. Suzanne satellite site focuses on small group instruction, Siena continues to remain committed to our core service of providing one-to-one tutoring to adult basic education and English language learners. What's more, our center on Trinity Street serves as a refuge and a "third space," as our program director Eva Shillair recently reminded me. The term "third space" was coined by sociologist Ray Oldenburg in 1989 to describe a community hub that is separate from home or work where people can congregate, relax, and connect with others. What types of third spaces do you frequent in your life, and how do they impact your wellbeing?

Wishing you a peaceful start to your fall as we prepare for seasonal celebrations and holidays. Thank you for being a part of Siena's story – we are grateful you are here.

Siena honors student graduates, award winners



Siena hosted an awards ceremony in June to honor the year's graduates, award winners, and honor society inductees--and the atmosphere was **CELEBRATORY**.

The event highlighted many student accomplishments: nine students were inducted into the National Adult Education Honor Society, eight received awards from Siena Literacy Center, and three celebrated program completion. We also celebrated four GED graduates and four graduates of our CNA program, in partnership with [Nursing Detroit](#).

We were grateful to our keynote speaker [State Rep. Stephanie Young](#) who spoke about the accomplishments of all our students. The CNA program graduates were introduced by Felicia Vannostrand, CEO and founder of Nursing Detroit, and instructor Val Kantner introduced the GED grads. We also heard from student speakers Djime Sidibe and Romie Anderson.

CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL.



Annual benefit evening raises more than \$7,500

Thanks to generous friends and supporters, Siena raised more than \$7,500 for adult education services at this year's annual benefit evening, "La Dolce Vita: An Adult Education Fundraiser."

The event was held September 19 at the beautiful Bayview Yacht Club on the Detroit River and featured cocktails, Italian-themed appetizers, live music, and a silent auction. Student speaker DeShaun Thomas also shared the inspiring story of his educational journey.

We are so grateful to the sponsors and supporters who make this mission possible.



"When I look back at where I started and compare it to where I am today, I can see how far I've come. I am still learning, and I still have goals I want to accomplish. But now I know that I can do it."

-DeShaun Thomas, student speaker



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Awards ceremony honors superhero volunteers



We celebrated our hardworking volunteers in April at our annual volunteer awards ceremony at the Rosedale Park Community House. The theme this year was "Not all superheroes wear capes!"

We were thrilled to be joined by Rep. Stephanie Young, who presented all the volunteers with certificates from the State of Michigan in recognition of their service.

2026 Award Winners

English Language Tutor of the Year:

Carter Caris

Reading Tutor of the Year:

Allyson Bettis

Rising Volunteer of the Year:

Claudette Clement

Volunteer of the Year:

Carole Hawke-Diop

Sr. Lenore Boivin Adaptive Teaching Award:

Flo Walling

Sr. Mary Hemmen Lifetime Service Award:

Jan DiBasio

Joe Korotko



New program to help students take their next steps

Siena Literacy Center is launching a new initiative called Project LIFT (Lean into Future Trainings) that will help learners take their next steps into living wage careers with quality benefits. The program is designed to help current and graduate students with career and postsecondary counseling services.



**MGM RESORTS
FOUNDATION**

As learners graduate Siena, a Project LIFT counselor will help them identify and apply for appropriate programs, whether that means skilled trade apprenticeships, state-certified credential programs, or 2- or 4-year college programs.

The program builds on past success of Siena's community resource navigation program and social work team, which closed nearly 200 cases last year to help students access the resources they need to stay in school. Dedicating staff to Project LIFT is a crucial next step to reduce poverty and increase wealth-building in our community.

Project LIFT is made possible in part by a generous grant from the [MGM Resorts Foundation](https://www.mgmresortsfoundation.org/).

Student Spotlight: MOUSTAPHA FALL



Moustapha Fall first came to Siena in 2024 as a high beginning ESL student. After two years of study, he's graduating the ESL program and beginning work toward his GED. He hopes to become an electrician and start his own business.

"I see a lot of difference in myself," said Moustapha, who remembers being nervous to express himself when he first came to Siena.

Now, Moustapha's improved English has helped him get a promotion at his restaurant job, as well as start a second job.

Despite his busy schedule, Moustapha finds time for his education. He works on reading and math with his tutor, Jeff Coote.

"I've been amazed with all the students, and Moustapha is a glittering example," Jeff said. "The dedication is refreshing to see."

Now Moustapha recommends to others that they study at Siena Literacy Center.

"People ask me, they say how is your English so good when you have only been here [in the United States] three years," he said.

GED camp boosts confidence, test-taking skills

Siena Literacy Center's GED classes doubled in size last year, with 57 participants and seven class options. In July, we also introduced GED Boost Camp, an intensive four-week summer course offering individualized test prep for advanced GED students.

Robert Norwood was one of those GED students. "The one-to-one tutoring was great to help you focus on what you were doing good or what you were lacking," he said. He said he was happy he participated in the course, and that the environment was very positive.



The classes met three days a week from July 27-August 20 at Siena's satellite GED classroom in the [St. Suzanne Cody Rougee Community Resource Center](#). The program was a great kick off to this year's GED classes, which began September 8.



A big thank you

to everyone who participated in the Rocket Community Challenge in August!

Together we raised \$2,315, which will help fund the supplies our students need most:

- 25 Kaplan GED prep textbooks
- 8 online Reading Horizons seats
- 8 online Burlington English seats
- And more!

Thanks for making our rain garden a reality!



We are so grateful to the tutors, students, and other friends who helped plan and install Siena's new 900-sq. ft. rain garden in April and May. The garden is already helping reduce stormwater runoff at Siena.

Interested in being a part of our beautification team? It's not too late! Join us for an outdoor fall clean up on October 15—see below for more information.

The rain garden was made possible by 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 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](#).



Join us

FOR AN OUTDOOR FALL CLEAN-UP

**Thursday, October 15,
10 am-1 pm**

*Feel free to drop in for as long
as your schedule allows!*

RSVPs appreciated:
info@sienaliteracy.org or 313-532-8404

TOOLS AND SUPPLIES PROVIDED · LIGHT REFRESHMENTS

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SIENA LITERACY CENTER

In June, we celebrated the graduates of our CNA program for advanced ESL students, above. We also honored GED grads and other award winners: read more on [page 2](#).

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