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**Community  
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FOR SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN

Grant funds new  
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# SIENA LITERACY CENTER NEWSLETTER

## CALENDAR

### OCTOBER 2

Virtual Tutor Workshop: Using Aztec Software, 11 am-12 pm

### NOVEMBER 6

Tutor Workshop: Reading Techniques I, 2-3:30 pm

### NOVEMBER 13

Tutor Workshop: Reading Techniques II, 2-3:30 pm

### NOVEMBER 20-21

Staff training—building closed

### NOVEMBER 22-23

Thanksgiving—building closed

### NOVEMBER 28

Giving Tuesday

### DECEMBER 25-JANUARY 4

Holiday break—building closed

### JANUARY 15

Martin Luther King Day—building closed

### JANUARY 29

Tutor Workshop: Processing Styles, 2-3:30 pm

There is no doubt that education, in general, is one of the most important factors that will lead communities to success, happiness, and a better life.

There are a lot of people, in many different communities, who either missed their early education or had to leave school early because of some circumstances.

There are also those like myself who immigrated from another country with different languages and now must learn to speak English. Siena Literacy Center in the Detroit Metro Area is here to help. What these two groups need is exactly what Siena Literacy Center has been providing since it was established.

After some years of experience at Siena, I believe that no one can imagine the happiness that everyone here—learners, volunteers, and staff—feels when learners start depending on themselves to read mail, fill out applications, or read and send a message in English. These accomplishments would never be achieved without putting all our efforts together. Hats off to all of you who support this program and make these achievements possible.

Here at Siena Literacy Center in the computer lab we support our learners by welcoming everyone who wants to use the software programs we provide. We also provide basic computer knowledge and a space for tutors and learners to work together. We are grateful for all the ways that others contribute, as well: volunteers who tutor learners, donors who support our program financially, or learners who put in the effort to meet their goals.

Let us stand together to help those who are seeking job opportunities, looking for a better job, and wanting to be able to communicate with their neighbors in English.



**Abdual Lahawl**

*Computer  
Lab Manager*

# Student Spotlight: MELVIN COOPER



Congratulations to Melvin Cooper, who has completed his program at Siena and will graduate to a GED program at St. Vincent and Sarah Fisher Center!

“The more people kept trying to make me give up, the more I kept trying to push on,” Melvin said.

Melvin enrolled at Siena in May through Skills for Life, a Detroit at Work program. Skills for Life students are paid to work for the city of Detroit three days a week and attend academic programming two days a week. Siena currently has seven other students enrolled through the Skills for Life program.

Melvin’s goal at Siena was to improve his test scores so he could enter a heavy machinery training program, but while at Siena, he decided to pursue his GED, a dream he always had in the back of his head.

As he continues to study, he’ll still work three days a week for the city of Detroit, trimming trees with others in the Skills for Life program. His work crew has become a very supportive part of the program for him, as he sees other co-workers graduate the program or move on to higher-paying jobs. “We’re like brothers and sisters and cousins,” he said.

Not everything about the program has been easy. While a classmate gives Melvin a ride to Siena, he wakes up at 4 am to take the bus to be at his job site on time at 7.

Melvin was surprised to complete the program at Siena as quickly as he did, and excited to tell his mom and dad. “It’ll be a big thing to show them, as well as my nieces and nephews and my sisters,” he said.

Melvin said he will miss his time working at Siena and hopes that others take advantage of the program. “I would suggest doing it and don’t give up,” he said. “You’re going to have a lot of negativity in your ears telling you not to do it. But keep one thing in mind, staying here is going to get you there.”

***The City of Detroit provides Detroit residents with a job today, a career tomorrow, and Skills for Life. To learn more, visit [detroitatwork.com/skillsforlife](http://detroitatwork.com/skillsforlife).***



## Staff Departures: Joyce Carter & Zoë Dixon

We are sorry to say goodbye to two of our staff members at Siena.

Zoë Dixon, our learning team resource coordinator, worked closely with our tutors to make sure they had the materials and training they needed to help students reach their goals. She left Siena in July because of family obligations.

Joyce Carter, our receptionist, greeted us all at the front desk and on the phone. Joyce came to Siena through the AARP Senior Community Service Employment Program and has now completed her service.

We’ve been so lucky to work with both of these women and wish them the best of luck in all they do.



Joyce Carter



Zoë Dixon

# Annual Gala Raises \$7,500 for Adult Literacy



*Siena board members enjoy the 2023 gala. Left to right: John Kluka, Caitlyn Pisarski, Al Robertson, Sue Witham, Mark Weisenthal.*

We celebrated our annual gala on September 7 at the Bayview Yacht Club with more than 60 friends and supporters. The event raised more than \$7,500 to support adult education

Guests enjoyed a lovely evening on the water, including food and drink, a silent auction, and raffle. We also heard from Siena learner Zachk and his tutor, Erin; executive director Caitlyn Pisarski; and former executive director Donna McRae-Nesbitt.

We are grateful for donations to our auction and raffle by Madonna University; artists Dominic Pangborn, Ruth Foon, and John Demers; Village Palm; and Bayview Yacht Club. A big thank you to all who supported or attended this event!

With gratitude to our sponsors:



Bill &  
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*Tutoring pair Erin (left) and Zachk (right) both gave inspiring speeches about their work at Siena.*

# Siena Photo Spotlight



Thank you to [Alliance Catholic Foundation](#) and [Alliance Catholic Credit Union](#)! We were excited in August to receive a grant from Alliance supporting our adult literacy program.



Last November, we planted more than 100 tulip and daffodil bulbs. This spring, they were a delight for all to see as they came up our walk! Thanks once again to [English Gardens](#) for generously donating these bulbs.



In June, we were grateful to have the assistance of a hard-working volunteer group from [Motown Mission](#). The group of high schoolers and middle schoolers from Monument, Colo., spent a day at Siena as part of a weeklong service trip to Detroit and helped us beautify our grounds (despite rain!).



In April, we were thrilled to host an open house celebrating the feast day of St. Catherine of Siena and the publication of a book of Siena student stories, [“Our Shared Humanity.”](#) The book was compiled and edited by volunteer tutor and former staff member, Sister Lenore Boivin, OP, and made possible by a grant through the IHM Sisters. The open house was a joyful opportunity to connect with Siena friends, volunteers, students and staff members both new and old.

# Siena Photo Spotlight



We celebrated our students at our annual awards ceremony on June 29. Seven students were inducted into the National Adult Education Honor Society, and 10 more received awards recognizing their hard work this past year at Siena. We are grateful to our keynote speaker, board member Pastor Corey Kennard; volunteers Marie Selander and Bonnie Nielsen for flowers and food donations; our student speakers, Linda and Kungwe; and our neighbor Christ the King School for the use of their space. And as always, we are so appreciative of the tutors, family, and friends who support these students. Congratulations to all!



We've been redecorating! The Adrian Dominican Sisters' Special Initiatives Grant has allowed us to purchase furniture to make our space more comfortable and welcoming, and we are so grateful.

# New staff to help break down education barriers

## Community Foundation

### FOR SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN

Thanks to a new grant from the [Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan](#), Siena is now able to hire a full-time Community Resource Navigator. This new staff person will help students connect to the wraparound services and supports they need to meet their academic goals.

The navigator will screen students for mental health, financial wellness, workforce, and benefits needs and make quality referrals to trusted partners in and around Detroit. Providing these referrals and support can make the difference between a student completing the program and abandoning it.

“We are incredibly grateful to the Community Foundation for this generous grant that will launch our Community Resource Navigator program,” said Siena’s Executive Director Caitlyn Pisarski. “Adult learners bring their whole selves to the educational experience, and this new staff member will allow us to provide compassionate and responsive supportive services to alleviate suffering and open new opportunities for career growth, wealth-building and healing.”

### Meet our new social work intern:

#### Marissa Johnston

Our new Community Resource Navigator will be joined by our new social work intern, [Marissa Johnston](#), who started in August.



Marissa is in her first year of Wayne State University’s social work program. She has her BA in Psychology from Eastern Michigan University and aspires to be an elementary school social worker after she completes her MSW. She is currently working in schools as an ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) Paraprofessional. In her free time she likes to spend time with her husband and three children going on adventures to local attractions and ending the day reading them bedtime stories.



## Workforce instructors help students reach goals

Siena has recently brought on three part-time workforce instructors to work with students enrolled in Siena through the Skills for Life program, in partnership with Detroit at Work.

These workforce instructors are working two days a week with Skills for Life students both one-on-one and in small groups to help them meet their employment related goals.



Our staff tutor [Derek Foster](#) is now taking on the role of workforce instructor! Derek has been an educator for more than 25 years, working with ABE, ESL, and GED students. He is a graduate of Spring Arbor University .



[Mary Saunders](#) has experience in education from Detroit Public Schools and various Oakland County schools. She’s a volunteer at her church, Detroit Rescue Mission, and various nursing homes, and a graduate of Wayne State University.



[Bill Szczechowski](#) holds a BA and an MSW from the University of Michigan and served as an Employee Assistance Program Administrator for two Fortune 500 companies. Since retiring, Bill has taught adult education math and worked seasonally for UPS and the Detroit Tigers.

# With Gratitude to Our Generous Donors

## Major Funders

Adrian Dominican Sisters • Catholic Foundation of Michigan • City of Detroit Neighborhood Opportunity Fund  
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Roderick Hudgens

## In Honor of

Sr. Rosemary Brennan, O.P.  
Caryn Jensen and William O'Neill  
"The security, peace, and freedom that my  
country could not give me."

## In Appreciation of Siena's Board of Directors

Sue Witham, <i>Chair</i>	Bill McKnight	Steve Wasko
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*We honored 17 students at our awards ceremony in June.*

*More great news inside.*

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