

New Students, New Programs at the EC

As we begin the 2009-2010 academic year, our second year in our new home in Jack London Square, we are welcoming the largest student body in the 30+ year history of the English Center. There are 150 of us, from 28 different countries, divided into morning, afternoon and evening class schedules. The increase in enrollment is largely due to a jump in the number of refugees and asylees that are enrolled, from 24 in Fall, 2008 to 84 in Fall, 2009. On page 7 of this newsletter, you can read more about the experience of our newest refugee group, the Lhotshampas from Bhutan.

Strong partnerships with the International Rescue Committee and Catholic Charities of the East Bay are responsible for this change in our student body. With the support of our funding partner Walter & Elise Haas, Sr., these students are equipped for academic success with textbooks and flash drives!

This fall we are also inaugurating a new program, the Healthcare Careers Portal for internationally trained healthcare professionals. In partnership with Alameda County Supervisor Alice Lai-Bitker and the San Francisco Welcome Back Center, the HCPI will provide case management services, including help with educational and exam requirements for licensure, for immigrants who want



Recent refugee Adiam from Eritrea gets to know classmate Nandia from Mongolia.

to help meet the growing need for trained healthcare providers. Our goal for year one—helping at least 200 unemployed or underemployed East Bay foreign-trained healthcare workers to re-enter their professions in the U.S.

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EC classes are interactive, with highly motivated students working in small groups



When I came to the EC my self esteem was on the floor. Many people looked down on me because I am a single mother, but at the Center, people saw me with admiration because I was working, studying and taking care of my son alone. Now I feel like I can go to college and be anything I want to be...

Local Foundations Support the English Center's Career Advancement Program

What do new Americans need in order to begin to contribute their talents to their new home country? Whether coming with years of education and work experience or not, a recent arrival needs strong English language skills, essential computer applications skills and knowledge of the job search process and U.S. workplace culture.

The Career Advancement Program (CAP) provides this training in an intensive model of instruction—sometimes called an ‘immersion’ experience—so that the highly motivated student can prepare as quickly as possible to enter or re-enter a profession.

Recognizing the unique value of CAP, local foundations have offered support. The **Y & H Soda Foundation**, **The Thomas J. Long Foundation** and the **van Löben Sels/RembeRock Foundation** help fund instruction and counseling services; the **Walter & Elise Haas Fund** help working students by supporting a financial aid program for low and moderate income applicants.



Studying 22+ hours each week in class and doing several hours of homework each night, the typical CAP student can advance from beginner to intermediate level skills in 16 weeks. The intermediate level student can become an advanced level student in another 16 weeks, ready to enter the workforce and/or to begin classes at the local community college.

Part-time study is popular with current employees needing to master specific skills such as presentation and negotiation in the business environment.

WALTER & ELISE HAAS FUND

van Löben Sels/RembeRock
FOUNDATION

The Thomas J. Long Foundation

Eighty percent of the English Center's CAP 2008 graduates found jobs or continued their education at a higher education institution. The average hourly wage for 2008 graduates was \$13.95 per hour, slightly higher than the \$13.58 average in 2007.

Introducing the English Center One-Stop Career Center

Sharon Schuyler, Career Placement Counselor & Business Liaison
Angelica Garcia, Career Placement Assistant

The EC One-Stop helps students realize their career goals in a number of ways. Many students are not aware of the cultural intricacies of job hunting. The One-Stop provides services that teach students how to find a job step-by-step. In the career classes, for example, students learn how to fill out employment applications, write cover letters, resumes and references, and prepare for job interviews. The EC One-Stop also helps students achieve personal goals by providing Internships where stu-

dents can learn and practice their English skills and/or gain work experience. In conjunction with their career classes, the EC-One Stop provides career counseling. These services include giving students a career assessment that identifies students' career and personal interests. Students can review their results and discover which careers they may find interesting and rewarding. Through instruction, counseling and follow-up from instructors and the EC One-Stop staff, students have the oppor-

tunity to prepare for the English speaking workplace while learning the career and technology skills they require in their job search.



English Center Opens ACT Assessment Center



In March 2009, The English Center joined the nationwide ACT Center® network which delivers computer-based testing and training services to individuals, employers, and professional organizations. These are high-stakes certifications for college and work readiness. ACT Center locations serve as a

comprehensive resource for developing and serving community's workforce and economy.

Gerardo Romo, EC alum '08, is the Assessment Center Assistant and to date, has proctored computer-based assessments for the Commission on Dietetic Registration (CDR), Boston Univer-

sity (BU), the National Inspection, Testing and Certification Corporation (NITC), the Nuclear Medicine Technology Certification Board (NMTCB) and the Foreign Service Officer Test (FSOT). In addition to the American College Testing (ACT) assessments, the EC Assessment Center delivered tests for ETS (Educational Testing Service),

ACTT (Association of Classroom Teacher Testers) and NABCEP (North American Board of Certified Energy Practitioners).

In 2008-09, the Assessment Center administered a total of

829 tests This number will continue to grow in 09-10.

Y&H Soda Foundation generously supported the opening of this assessment center with a donation for new computers, desks and chairs and installation expenses.

An Internship Experience Can Build Your Resume!

Internships provide resume-building experience and opportunities to gain confidence in a supportive work environment.

Sin Yi Yeung- I worked at Port of Oakland twice a week from 2:00 to 4:30 pm. I was an office assistant there. The people there were so friendly. Whenever I had questions, were very happy to help me. Albert was my manager and he was a Chinese man. Of course, we spoke English because I came to learn English and get some experiences. I did different work like using the copy machine, entering some documents into the computer, doing mathematics. I haven't used Microsoft Excel for a long time and they taught me how to do it. Although I have already finished the internship there, I will never forget how friendly they were and what I

learned.

Bhim Timsina- I have been working as an office assistant in The English Center since January, 2009. I got an opportunity to have experience of many things which I haven't done in my life before. I have had an opportunity to talk to many people visiting The English Center. I have done the work which add new experience in my life. For example, faxing, scanning, copying , greeting guests, receiving phone calls and doing inventory. I found all staff members and teachers to be cooperative and helpful.

Chun Hui Huang- My teachers, Kaya Beeley and Robert Beckley, helped me to find an internship in the Port of Oakland, located in the Oakland air-

port. I have been working there for almost 2 months. It is a good chance for me to get some experiences.

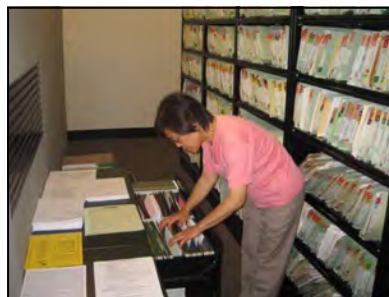
I still remember the first day, I was given challenging tasks, such as making phone calls and writing business letters. I am still an ESL student, so I can't speak English fluently.

"Finally, I could make phone calls by myself!"

When Ms. Forte, my supervisor, asked me to call the customers to get some information, I was very nervous because I didn't get the exact information. She asked me to be patient and explained to me and asked me to try again. Finally, I could make phone calls by myself.! I think I was able to do that because I am taking classes about Communication in the Workplace, in which I'm being taught how to make phone calls in the work-

place. It was a good beginning, and that really made my happy. So, I will keep working as an intern there until I have strong enough office skills to find a good job.

Noriko Watanabe- I have been volunteering at KPFA radio



Shu Hui Zhao practices her office skills at the Port's Office of Audit Services

station for 1 month. Volunteering gives me an opportunity to a difference to people's lives in my community. I have an opportunity to practice speaking English with native English speakers and get experience to help and enrich the local community.

The English Center's Mock Presidential Election wins State-wide Promising Practices Recognition!

The English Center received 'Best Practices with Student Success and Retention' recognition and an award from



Helen Hutchison, President of the League of Women Voters, explains the election process.

the second year in a row, the English Center was awarded a Promising Practices Award by the California Department of Adult Education and CASAS. This awarded recognizes California ABE or ESL adult education providers that have implemented strategies and practices that are innovative, creative and go "beyond the basics." The Mock Election held on Nov. 4th 2008 was recognized as such an event, helping students learn not only about the American election process but become involved in the historic 2008 Obama-McCain ElectioCampaigns and debate.

For eight weeks, Morning and Evening Community English students studied election vocabulary and learned about citizen and immigrant rights, the voting process,



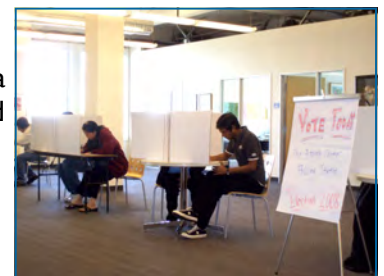
and the different candidates and political parties running for office. Students attended a presentation on Immigrant Rights by the President of the Oakland Chapter of the League of Women Voter's, Helen Hutchinson, as well as the KQED "Get Out The Vote" Event with Civil Rights activist, Dolores Huerta. On Nov. 4th, Election Day, all English Center students and staff participated in a "Mock" Election, where they simulated the voting process that citizens across the country

were taking part in at the exact same moment. The English Center was set up as an authentic polling station, with real copies of California state ballots and private voting booths. Students and staff were asked to sign in, took as much time as they needed to fill out their ballots in the private voting area, and were given an "I voted!" sticker after their ballots were handed in. Level 2 and 3 students were stopped and asked to participate in an Exit Poll as well, each answering five questions about their voting choices.

Once the Evening students finished voting, the results were tallied and posted. By a landslide of 87%, the English Center voted in favor of Barack Obama, and voted democratically for most local representatives as well. About half of the voters marked their preferences on the numerous propositions as well, with all but Proposition 8 passing. Prop 8, the most controversial, failed by only 2 votes, reflecting the complexity of the topic and confusion of language that affected the rest of the United States as well.



While not all of our students are citizens, and were not able to vote in the real election, the activity gave them a deep understanding of the voting process, and prepared them for elections that they may take part in the near future. It created a spirit of community and camaraderie among everyone involved, as well as a spirited debate on vital topics and the different candidates and parties. Most importantly, taking part in this Best Practice allowed our students and staff to go beyond the classroom and participate in a historic world event.



English Center Students Move Beyond Classroom Practice

Community English Class Goes on Field Trips

October 3, 2009 - Angel Island Trip

English Center students and guests enjoyed a weekend ferry ride/field trip to Pier 39 and Angel Island accompanied by instructors Janice Tolman and Rob Beckley. The weather was cooperative and students enjoyed the photo opportunities from the upper deck of the ferry. After a brief layover in San Francisco to watch the sea lions at Pier 39, we boarded



Students visit the Angel Island Visitors' Center to learn about the "Ellis Island" of the West.

another ferry to Angel Island in the Bay near Alcatraz Island.

Everyone enjoyed a pot-luck picnic on the lawn near the Visitor's Center, and then set out for a mildly strenuous hike to the historical Im-

migration Station.

Students used the occasion to do

research for upcoming PowerPoint presentations focusing on the history, geography, flora and fauna of the island.



Everyone is ready for an Outdoor Movie at Jack London Square!

Continued from Page 7

Growing up in eastern Nepal, he said he absorbed as much English, advanced mathematics and science knowledge as was available in the refugee schools, and months ago he spoke glowingly of finding some kind of future job that reflected those skills.

They made stuff happen for themselves," said Climent, the resettlement director. "Nobody really has much of a work history. A lot of people were English teachers. They learned English and they taught other students English. They have the right basic skill sets to start out in a decent way here." At the Timsina home in East Oakland, the climate has been a mix of optimism, frugality and nervous uncertainty. The apartment is full of products bought at a local Indian store that bring the family some familiar comfort — oils, spices and jars of pickled mango. On the living room wall, a bright waterfall poster carries a hopeful message: "Happiness is everyday sunshine of life."

But the happiness can be elusive. As the months have passed, Timsina said he has now come to believe that much of what he learned in Nepal "relates only to Nepal. Now, I realize it is quite difficult. Going to college, it is so costly. I cannot pay for that." In mid-May, he will have completed his first eight months in the country, meaning his federally-funded refugee cash assistance of \$359 a month will expire. Fortunately, after impressing his teachers at The English Center, he was hired to work part-time after classes as an evening receptionist. "I don't think Bhim has missed an hour since he started," said Michael Goldberg, an associate director of the center. "He's here with a smile every morning, studying, then he's back (at 5 p.m.) working with a smile."

Timsina's father, Bedha, 60, and mother, Lachhi, 50, have a few extra months of checks and food stamps because they arrived later, but they are less likely to find a job after their help expires. "They are finding it quite difficult," said their son. "They don't know the language. They don't have any friends to talk to."

Exploring their East Oakland neighborhood by foot without understanding the signs or what people say to them can be nerve-racking, the family said, although they sometimes venture out to visit a Bhutanese acquaintance who lives about a 15-minute walk away. The parents said through an interpreter they are nevertheless happy to be here, convinced that their grown children will have a better life ahead of them. As the pressure to find stable work grows, Bhim Timsina said he and his siblings have a hard time imagining what their life will be like in the coming months and years, but they hope what they have learned as refugees and through the help of nonprofits here and in Nepal will serve them well.

"For my existence, I will do any kind of work," Bhim Timsina said. "But I need to aim quite high."

Dreams Live After Exile

By Matt O'Brien

OAKLAND - April 26, 2009, *Oakland Tribune*

On the first day of English class, a dozen classmates from a dozen countries introduced themselves. They stood up and told each other what brought them to the United States. Bhim Timsina had the most to say, sharing a long, bleak story about a kingdom that expelled a sixth of its people. "There became two types of people in Bhutan," he said of his native country. His people — those of Nepali descent — were the type who had to leave. Carefully grasping for the right words and relaying them with cheerful formality, the 26-year-old tried to explain in English why he spent the past 17 years in a refuge camp. Timsina is one of about 60,000 Bhutanese refugees the U.S. State Department says are being resettled across the United States as part of a diplomatic agreement made during the Bush administration.

Tied to a distant political crisis that barely registered on America's radar, exiled Bhutanese are now one of the fastest-growing groups of new Americans. About 250 Bhutanese refugees have moved to the East Bay within the past year, with more to follow. Timsina arrived in September and lives in a small Oakland apartment with both his parents, three siblings, one sister-in-law and a baby niece. "Everything is new for me," he said. "I have never lived in a developed country. When I march one step, there are question marks." Timsina was 8 years old when his family was expelled from the farmland they had ox-plowed for generations, a fertile seven acres that yielded rice, millet, buckwheat, cauliflower and spinach.

Their Nepali ancestors first migrated to Bhutan's arable southern Chirang region as farmers in the late 19th century, and it was not until the 1980s that the Timsinas found themselves unwelcome there. They were called Lhotshampas — the "People of the South." They dressed differently from the Drukpa ethnic majority but had for years peacefully coexisted with them. They practiced Hinduism, not Buddhism. They spoke Nepali at home, not the national Dzongkha language. They lived in the warmer lowlands, not the northern Drukpa highlands that are considered the heart of the Himalayan country.



When the Bhutanese king enacted a policy called "One Nation, One People," it enshrined Drukpa culture and made its traditions mandatory in Bhutanese schools and public life. Lhotshampas protested, fueling government claims that their expanding population, and feared alignment with Maoist rebels, could threaten the monarchy and Drukpa way of life. And because official documents had no record of Timsina's parents in a 1958 census, the family and tens of thousands of others were dubbed illegal immigrants and banished in the early 1990s.

Such stories, said Don Climent, regional director of the refugee aid organization International Rescue Committee, are commonplace for the thousands of Bhutanese immigrants now arriving to the states. Stuck in refugee camps for almost 20 years, many are coming with enthusiastic hopes for a better life but with limited knowledge about what they should expect to do in a down economy. Purna Mongar, 32, did not find out he was assigned to live in Oakland until he was already en route from Katmandu. "When I reached New York, I came to learn I would be in Oakland. That's the first time I heard the name of the city," he said. When he arrived to the airport in the middle of the night in March 2008, he said "it was amazing to see the high buildings, the top of those high buildings in downtown Oakland."

"I liked the environment here," he said. "When I look over the hills of Oakland, it seemed like my country, Bhutan. I felt that I am in my own country." Mongar's family is believed to be the East Bay's first to be resettled under the new refugee agreement. In 2006, after years of failed repatriation talks, the U.S. offered to take in a majority of the more than 100,000 Bhutanese refugees, and other countries accepted the rest.

The former schoolteacher of fellow exiles took his first Oakland job at a Kentucky Fried Chicken, where he said "because of inexperience, I burned my hands a lot." The job lasted a month before he found work at a San Leandro gas station.

Timsina, also a former schoolteacher, enrolled himself several months ago in an English-language and job skills course at **The English Center**, an organization at Jack London Square that caters to refugees and new immigrants.

"I used to think I knew English," Timsina said. "But when I talk to people they have a different accent. When I arrived in the airport, I was so confused."



A Saudi Woman's Dreams Come Closer to Reality

She has followed a path from Riyadh to Oakland and is about to journey further on that path to Tempe Arizona, to Macomb, Illinois, or perhaps elsewhere. Khaloud Alzahrani, the English Center's scholarship student from Saudi Arabia, started her journey with the English Center in October 2008. Accompanied by her husband, Fawaz, and her six-year old daughter, Leyan, Khaloud helped settle her family in an apartment in Alameda. When Leyan started classes at Ruby Bridges School in Alameda, Khaloud began her English classes with us in Jack London Square. Soon, her husband, Fawaz, joined her at the English Center.

But Khaloud had more to focus on than her husband, Leyan and her studies. Over the winter holidays, she gave birth to another daughter, Rima, who will have dual citizenship in America and Saudi Arabia.

It was Leyan who motivated Khaloud's ambition to get a graduate degree in immunology. At the age of four months, young Leyan suffered a viral infection that resulted in a heart problem that continues today but is under control. Understanding that while women make up 70% of Saudi Arabia's university enrollment but only 5% of its workforce, Khaloud was determined to learn all that she could about the human immune system. Medicine and education are two of the few fields open to Saudi women that she could teach at the college level in Saudi Arabia, providing opportunities to other Saudi women.

While increasing her English proficiency to the level she needed for graduate study, she began to research graduate biology departments that included specializations in immunology and corresponded with professors who might invite her to study with them.

After graduating from college, Khaloud taught high school biology, encouraging her students not to give up despite the lack of science equipment and instruments in her schools' laboratory. She visited several hospitals, collecting blood samples to allow her students to examine and compare the samples. Encouraged by the enthusiasm and eager questioning this created in her class, she resolved to continue her studies in graduate school so that she could teach at the college level in Saudi Arabia, providing opportunities to other Saudi women.

While increasing her English proficiency to the level she needed for graduate study, she began to research graduate biology departments that included specializations in immunology and corresponded with professors who might invite her to study with them.

She now has acceptances at Arizona State University and Western Illinois University, and the possibility of acceptances at others. She and her family are ready to move on from the English Center and to experience American life on a university campus in another part of the United States.

But Khaloud has said that she will always be grateful for the help she received at the English Center, for the friendships she made with her classmates, and for the opportunity to make her adjustment to American life here in the San Francisco Bay Area.

We look forward to the news she promises to send us as she accomplishes the high goals she set for herself as a concerned mother and a high school teacher in Saudi Arabia.

"I really hope to serve as a role model for other Saudi women to make a difference in their lives and communities, even if it is only a little one"

The English Center Student Body Reflects the World

What does "Diversity" mean at the English Center?

The English Center-student enrollment for academic year 2008-2009 was certainly one of the most diverse ever- **229** students from **40** different countries!

East Asia

Bhutan
Burma
Cambodia
China

Hong Kong
India
Japan
Korea
Nepal
Samoa
Thailand
Tibet
Vietnam

Central and West Asia

Afghanistan
Iran
Iraq

Kazakhstan
Mongolia
Uzbekistan

Africa & SW Asia

Algeria
Eritrea
Ethiopia
Ivory Coast
Saudi Arabia
Yemen



Men & women, young & not so young study at the EC!

Europe

Belarus
France

Russia
Ukraine



Lithuania
Romania

The Americas

Argentina
Colombia
El Salvador
Guatemala
Mexico
Nicaragua
Peru

USA
Venezuela

What is it like to be a student at the English Center?

As a student at The English Center, you'll learn English and you will learn a lot about yourself! You'll learn to speak and write fluently and comfortably in English **and** you'll gain confidence to study and work in an American university or corporation.

In your classes, you'll meet other students from all around the world. Many sessions, we have students from as many continents as



A student making a presentation in the computer lab

North and South and Central America, Europe, Africa, and Asia. Because the class size is small (average 15 students), you will form friendships with your classmates and learn about their customs and culture. And, you will receive very personalized attention from the very professional and experienced teach-



Students at one of EC's-famous class parties

ers here at The English Center.

Several times each session there are class and school parties. You will learn about American holidays and taste foods from around the world.

Often, your class will go on field trips to local museums and other interesting locations.

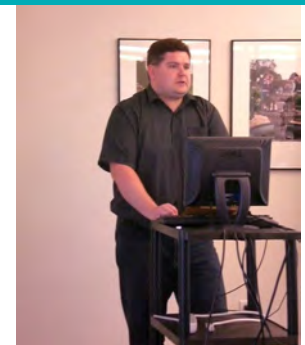
Learning English, learning the Bay Area

By Matt O'Brien
Contra Costa Times

Posted 4/29/09

OAKLAND — "How are you?" Marianna Matthews asks her class. "How are you?" Identical words, slightly different questions. The teacher asks her adult students if they understand the difference. "It's called intonation," she said, diagramming the flow from one syllable to another. "It's the music of English. Whether your voice goes up or down."

The mysteries of English are, in part, about words and how to pronounce and write them. But the students at The English Center in Jack London Square, hailing from the Ivory Coast, Mongolia, Uzbekistan, China, Bhutan, Myanmar, Latin America and elsewhere, want more than words and grammar. They are looking to understand the nuances.



Pavel Sedliar gives the Summer Valedictory at Graduation

Learning English, Learning the Bay Area, continued....

"I want to find the same job here that I had in Lithuania," said student Pavel Sedliar of Walnut Creek. "But I must have perfect English."

Even in the best times, the kind of students who find themselves at The English Center, many of them refugees, all of them immigrants, have trouble finding jobs in a new and unfamiliar world. But in the current economic climate, their efforts to find work that meets their skills — or at least pays the rent — are even more dependent on being able to comfortably speak the language of the mainstream job market. "There is just less available of what they can do and more competition for what's available," said Don Climent, a regional director of the International Rescue Committee who helps locally resettled refugees adjust to the Bay Area.

Sedliar, who is fluent in many Eastern European languages and used to work at a Lithuanian telecommunications company, first began improving his English at an adult school in Concord. He later found out about The English Center, which offers an intensive, five-day-a-week course that includes computer skills and help finding jobs. Arriving every morning with his assigned reading — Jack London's *The Pearl* — Sedliar said he is thrilled to be part of classes that include people from almost every continent and a multitude of cultures.

Alums Return To Mentor Current Students at the Career & College Panel Discussion



Come study with us. We're waiting for you!

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