



Aim High - Get Your GED

Melissa Timberlake is:

- College graduate
- Airline pilot
- GED graduate
- All of the above

1-877-37-MY-GED

Advertising Works. Thank God.

by RANDALL STAMPER

In July of 2005, I attended a meeting with representatives from the Office of Adult Education and Literacy (OAEL), several media companies, and then Virginia Secretary of Commerce and Trade, Michael Schewell. The topic was how best to continue to spread the word about the Race to GED with relatively limited funding. OAEL had spent approximately \$100,000 on outreach and marketing at that point and was on the verge of spending about \$275,000 more.

The media representatives had been invited to offer their insights into the most effective way for the state to invest its funds. Secretary Schewell had recently contributed a quarter of a million dollars from his office to the Race, some to be used for outreach, because he understood that adult education was a workforce as well as a social issue, and he wanted to ensure that the money would have positive results on recruitment and test completion.

Early in the meeting, I was asked to recount the results of approximately

a year of marketing efforts. I described our presence at various events around the state, the television and radio spots and billboards that had been placed, and partnerships with other businesses and agencies at both the state and local levels. I concluded by pointing out that since those efforts had begun, calls to the GED Helpline had increased steadily, from 3087 in 2003-04, to 5500 in 2004-05.

Secretary Schewell nodded his head, shrugged, and stated simply, "Advertising works." Steve Southern, general manager of Richmond's Lamar Outdoor Advertising office, sighed, "Thank God." I think it is safe to say that less than a year later, after funding a statewide outreach campaign that included outdoor, radio, and television, we all breathed a similar sigh of relief when 11,411 calls were made to the GED Helpline between July 2005 and February 2006.

Over the past three years, substantial outreach on the state and local levels has significantly raised public awareness

Marketing

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of the Race to GED. Increased calls to the GED Helpline, growing enrollments, and higher test completion rates are the most obvious evidence of our success. Less obvious, though, is recognition of the Race among citizens who don't need our services. When neighbors or acquaintances tell you that they've seen a commercial or billboard and ask about the Race, it indicates the high level of saturation that we have achieved. That success is something we should all be proud of. It also, of course, leads to the inevitable question, "What next?"

We've learned a lot over the past few years. Some things have worked. Some haven't. We didn't hire a marketing firm. We didn't rely on consultants. We didn't pay advertising buyers. We put our heads together, asked a lot of questions, and developed an extensive, sustained and integrated plan that has garnered national recognition from newspapers, public television, and other states' adult education offices. Make no mistake; people are

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PROGRESS

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A Few Words on *Progress*

Over the past four years we have learned a lot about advertising and promotion as we have implemented the Race to GED campaign. We tend to call it marketing, while in the public sector the term outreach is often used, probably because it sounds less like a business activity. I like calling this work outreach because it better describes what we do. We don't just want to sell them something. We want to reach out and change their lives.

In our kinds of organizations, we rarely if ever have huge amounts of money to conduct advertising campaigns designed to make our programs household names, so we have to leverage our advertising dollars with a lot of ingenuity and plain old personal selling. In this issue of *Progress*, you will learn about several adult education programs that have hired staff members whose primary job is to promote adult education. This heralds a major change in the way adult education has traditionally approached promotional activities, and it shows that these programs take seriously the need to do this work every day, not just when an already overworked manager or teacher has some time to speak to a community group or put up a few posters.

Other programs have found that they can get the help they need by entering into partnerships with professional organizations or by establishing a committee composed of marketing and public relations professionals. Two articles describe how such approaches have enabled community-based organizations to achieve far more than they imagined by accessing experienced volunteers who put their knowledge and skill to work on behalf of adult literacy.

The Race to GED has been good for adult education and literacy for many reasons, not the least of which is the increased number of adults enrolled in educational programs or earning a GED. Yet perhaps the most enduring effect on Virginia's programs is the recognition that we do need to devote time, energy, and resources to outreach activities. To be effective, these activities need to be carried out in a consistent, planned way that sets specific targets, monitors the results, and makes course corrections when needed. Indeed, to be effective over time, these efforts need to be thought of not as a special campaign but as the way adult education and literacy programs routinely operate.

Sincerely,



Calendar

June
22-23

TESOL Academy 2007
Boston, MA

July
18-20

VAILL 2007
Radford, VA

October
10-11

Regional COABE

Williamsburg,

VA VAACE

12

Williamsburg,

VA



Click here. These two words are perhaps the most over-used word pair you can find on the Web. At the same time, they are unhelpful in almost every case they are used. Most people, when writing for the Web, use them to exhort users to click on a link, whether that link leads to further information or begins an on-line process, like a registration or evaluation form.

Telling a user to “click here” while reading a Web site may seem like a good idea. It provides an action for the user to perform that even the most inexperienced can figure out intuitively. What it doesn’t provide is a context for what the user can expect to find after they click. And therein lies the problem.

The majority of Web users do not read deeply. They scan, looking for information relevant to their goals and only read deeply once they believe they have found what they are looking for. The most important information a user can scan quickly is links. Within a body of text, links stand out readily; they may be different colors, they may be bolded, they are almost always underlined.

When a user scans a page and sees a link titled “Click Here”, he must then read the surrounding text to establish why he should click there. On the other hand, when a user scans a page that has a link titled “Virginia Dept. of Education, Office of Adult Education and Literacy”, he can infer that the link most likely leads to the VA DOE page for the Office of Adult Education and Literacy.

This has repercussions for non-users, too. Part of the search-ranking system used by Google and other major search engines is based on the text used to link to various sites. You can see this for yourself by searching Google specifically for the phrase “Click here” (search for it with the quotes around it). The top results are all to freeware software (Adobe Acrobat Reader, Apple Quicktime, Internet Ex-



Creating Links in Microsoft Word

When you copy and paste a link into a Microsoft Word™ document, you generally need to type something after the link for it to become active. If the last thing you paste into a document is the link, then it’s possible it won’t be active. To get around this, you can simply type a space or a line break (the Enter key) after the link and Word should automatically convert it to an active link.

If, for some reason, your links are still not being automatically made active, you can also create the links manually. To do this:

1. Highlight the entire section of text you want to make a link.
2. Click the Insert menu and scroll down to Hyperlink.
3. This will bring up a window with a couple fields and options. Most of these you can safely ignore.
4. Input the webpage you want to link to in the Link to: field. (The name of this field may change depending on what version of Word you have.) It’s very likely that if you have a link highlighted, the link may already be in place in this field.
5. Click OK.
6. You should now have an active link.

plorer) that many sites link to by saying “click here”. If you look in the text of the pages themselves, you won’t see a single instance of “click here”.

So how can you make your links stand out to users and search engines alike? Make them contextual. Write for the Web in such a way that the text you use for links accurately but succinctly describes what the user can expect to find. Let’s look at an example and see how it might be improved.

The Wrong Way to Link

NSCALL has released a new issue of *Focus on Basics*. The latest issue focuses on Correctional Education. [Click here](#) to read the latest issue online.

A Better Way

NSCALL has released a new issue of *Focus on Basics*. The latest issue focuses on Correctional Education. [Read the latest issue online.](#)

The Best Way

NSCALL has released a new issue of *Focus on Basics*. This issue focuses on Correctional Education. [Read the latest issue of Focus on Basics.](#)

In Other Cases

When writing documents that may or may not be used on the Web, it’s best to actually show the link. For example, if you are creating a flyer in Word™ or writing an email, instead of making a text link, it’s best to use the actual Web address as the link. This way, if the document is printed, the link information is still available to people who may read the printed copy. ❖

Got a question or suggestion for a future topic? Email hmajor@vcu.edu.

Rebranding the Literacy Council of Northern Virginia

by MATT KOLLMAYER

Literacy councils face a unique challenge when communicating with their target audience of functionally illiterate adult students. The emergence of large numbers of ESOL learners within that audience has made this effort even more demanding. The crux of the challenge is simple but potentially confounding: How do we as organizations convey the existence and benefits of our programs to people who, if they read at all, do so at or below a fifth grade level?



EACH ONE TEACH ONE

Here at the Literacy Council of Northern Virginia we asked ourselves this question many times while planning a rebranding effort in 2005. Our publications, hard copy and electronic, diverged in their look and feel. We needed to create a strong consistent visual image, an immediately recognizable presence in the public sphere.

We started with our logo. For more than 40 years, the Literacy Council of Northern Virginia proudly used the “Each One Teach One” icon (above, left) of Dr. Frank C. Laubach, the pioneer of the modern-day adult literacy movement.

We wanted to keep the idea of one person helping another but to convey it more concretely. We also wanted this idea to be clear to all our stakeholders, from partners and volunteers to adult students with below basic literacy and English language skills. To this end, we ultimately chose figures more obviously

representational of people and positioned them so it is clearer that one is helping the other. The design went through many iterations before we made our final decision, which we then showed to our students, staff, and Board. Response was positive; the intended message was getting through.

We also chose a color scheme where before there had been none. Because primary colors might suggest children’s literacy, we searched a more adult palette,



arriving finally at dark purple and slate blue (above, center, uncolored). In order to firmly associate the new logo with the Literacy Council in the public’s mind, we included it on all our publications: letterhead, envelopes, business cards, press releases, newsletters, class schedules, and fundraising and other marketing collateral. The aim was to establish what marketers might call top-of-mind awareness, to keep our branded image strong and present in as many ways as possible.

When we turned our attention to our website, we were again confronted by the challenge of communicating effectively with an audience with limited literacy and English language skills. Our solution: translate the students’ section of the site into the five languages other than English most commonly spoken by our students. Now, our website visitors can view program descriptions and registration information in Arabic, Farsi, Korean, Spanish, and Vietnamese in ad-

dition to English. To view these translations and much more content, visit our website at www.lcnv.org.

Our most recent marketing campaign came in support of our spring fundraiser, Reading: A Family Affair. Because the event was intended for the entire family, catering especially to young children, we wanted our promotional materials to have a friendlier, younger feel to them. We also wanted the materials to be distinct from class schedules and



the like, while still clearly retaining their association with the Literacy Council. The end result was a logo (above, right) with brightened colors. The event’s title hung above it in a font with a soft, almost hand-printed feel to it.

Not all literacy councils have the time or resources to devote to extensive marketing and outreach campaigns. However, it is worth making an effort to think about the way we’re perceived by the public and try to increase awareness of the outstanding work our volunteers, partners, and donors do. ■

Matt Kollmeyer is Communications and Grants Manager at Literacy Council of Northern Virginia. His prior job experiences include teaching writing at George Mason University, teaching ESOL classes overseas, developing web-based applications for a software company, and working in television post-production.



by ANNETTE LOSCHERT

Public Relations comes to Literacy Volunteers of Roanoke Valley

Creativity flourishes when members of the Public Relations Committee of Literacy Volunteers of Roanoke Valley (LVRV) get together, according to Annette Loschert, Executive Director. It all started in 2004 when the Blue Ridge Chapter of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) adopted LVRV as its public service project.

“That year, we were able to get professional communicators engaged in promoting a cause that was near and dear to them,” says Loschert, “and committee members swung into action.” They developed designs for a poster, a bookmark, a slide show, and a new brochure, creating a whole new image for LVRV. And that was just the beginning.

Since 2004, PRSA members have been partners providing expertise in attracting local media to the cause of literacy in the Roanoke Valley, writing news releases, and generally raising literacy awareness throughout the Roanoke Valley. “It is giving our organization name recognition in the region,” according to Loschert.

The PR committee’s communication plan this year focuses on “The Year of the Tutor” and a physical move to a new loca-

tion in the community. Throughout the year, LVRV has been working on ways to recognize the dedicated work of existing tutors while implementing ways in which to tackle their greatest need, adding new tutors to the LVRV family. And in July, LVRV will move to a new home in the downtown Roanoke library.

“This move allows us to further enhance one of our most important partnerships in the community,” Loschert says, “and it will allow us new programming opportunities benefiting the entire community, not to mention the generation of some great PR.”

Six members of the local PRSA chapter are working with LVRV to promote these events by designing a new brochure, creating ads, pitching stories to the media, and redesigning the website.

“Teaming up with our local PRSA chapter has been a great move for LVRV,” says Loschert. “This outstanding partnership is one that could benefit other community-based literacy organizations throughout the country.” ■

Annette Loschert directs the Literacy Volunteers of Roanoke Valley.



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See the back page for more information about the summer VAILL.

Building Public Awareness in Henrico

by ELAINE CALLAHAN

At the Henrico County Adult Education Center, we are fortunate to have a full time position dedicated to developing and implementing marketing strategies for our program. Mr. Paul Smith, our Outreach Coordinator, has been in this position since its inception and has implemented many different marketing approaches. We have learned to research and get to know the clientele we will be marketing to, to try as many options as possible, to recognize that an approach that may seem small can turn into one of our most valuable tools, and to understand that marketing needs to be ongoing.

Paul continually seeks new and innovative ways to present our programs to the community. What works this year may not be as successful next year, as demographics and client needs change. Having Paul on staff has enabled us to have someone who is able to look at local trends and develop strategies that will be effective for our area. He spends a great deal of time investigating and researching demographics, educational information and economic information pertinent to our county as well as surrounding counties and cities.

Some of the marketing approaches we have implemented in our program are: Race to GED banners posted outside both centers; free GED testing (made available through Race to GED grant funds); information packets distributed to schools, community organizations and businesses; flyers distributed throughout the community; our Adult Education catalog; billboards; radio spots; GRTC ads; building a marquee outside our main center; wearing shirts with our logo embroidered on them; running commercials on NBC Channel 12 along with having our information posted on their website; and joining local business associations.

Of these approaches, the most profitable for us this school year have been: running commercials on NBC Channel 12, using the marquee outside our main center, wearing shirts with our logo, and distributing flyers on a regular basis.

The commercials were produced by the local TV affiliate and ran for two weeks. During that two-week period we received 382 phone calls inquiring about our program and the free GED Test that we were offering. As part of our partnership, we participated in their Call 12 program, which is available to nonprofit organizations. From 5:00 – 6:30, four Adult Ed. staff members were on their news programs answering phones and

...an approach that may seem small can turn into one of our most valuable tools.

talking to community patrons about our program. Throughout that time period, short spots were run about our program with information on how to call in and ask questions. Staffers handled a total of 100 phone calls. After a two week commercial run, our ad was then posted on the NBC Channel 12 website for another month. Again, the response from people calling was outstanding.

The idea of purchasing shirts with our logo embroidered on them was first discussed as something for us to give our teachers as a thank you for all their hard work. After Paul developed the logo and we purchased and distributed the shirts, we discovered that they became a unique marketing tool. When we wore them

out in the community, stood in line at the grocery or retail store, or attended meetings, people were extremely comfortable approaching us and asking for information about our program and how they could become involved.

The marquee outside our main building has given us the option to attract people's attention as they pass by our center. We have people stop in to gather more information or call because of what they read on the marquee. It provides a way for us to present information in a brief attention-getting manner urging people to come into our center. We also found that many times the people who saw the information would come into the center to get specifics for a friend or relative to whom they wanted to pass it along.

Flyers are an ongoing method of advertising to our community. Paul will develop different flyers that we distribute throughout the school year. We receive responses not just from individuals requesting information, but also from businesses and other community organizations. Through this method, we are able to develop successful partnerships throughout the community.

Overall, nothing is too small to consider when developing marketing approaches. It is crucial also to investigate and gather information about the clientele you are trying reach when developing your strategies. Having a full-time staff member to focus on marketing has helped to build community awareness of our program and in turn increase the number of clients we successfully serve each year. ■

Elaine Callahan is the Program Manager for the Henrico County Public School Adult Education programs.

Filling the Gaps to Strengthen a Program

by MARCIA PHILLIPS

The field of adult education is familiar with the concept of gap analysis as it relates to the performance of the learners. We look for the areas where students typically have difficulties and we develop new materials, new techniques, or new efforts to eliminate those gaps so our learners can succeed where they have previously floundered.

The field of marketing uses the same concept, looking for areas where the promise of the product has come up short. In marketing, gaps are considered as customer gaps and provider gaps. Analyzing the gaps is a useful exercise in building a strong promotion, and it is equally effective in developing and improving adult ed. program offerings.

The customer gap shows the distance between what the customer expects and what he receives. Providers must know what the clients are looking for, in order to meet their expectations. This works whether you stock blue blouses in your store in a season where all your customers want red, or you establish GED offerings and your potential client base is predominantly speakers of languages other than English who are looking for ESOL offerings.

This is also the first provider gap. Not knowing what your client base expects means that whatever you accomplish is largely due to chance. It could be that you are unaware of what your customers need or want. Are you doing things because that's the way you always have? Things change, and so do our client populations. It might be that they are tired of doing the same programs they attended in the past. Or it could be that the clients who want to come to you have other needs.

As a service provider, you have two good methods for discerning what your population wants – or needs – from you. First, go to your lost customers. Ask those who leave the program why they left. What were they looking for? What

will it take to get them to come back? A lot of useful information can be gleaned from those questions. Another way is to gather that information before you begin: find out what the customers expect or need, and translate your findings into program offerings.

Filling the gaps between your program and the needs or desires of your customer base will build a stronger, more responsive program.

The second provider gap is not having the right service designs and standards. You are providing what your client population is looking for, but not at a time or place that the clients can get to it. If you run all daytime classes in a central location – a comfortable, cost-efficient approach – you eliminate all those who work during the day, as well as those for whom the long trip becomes an insurmountable barrier. If transportation and childcare issues keep your projected clients from your programs, you will only get them into classes when you address those barriers. If the problem is that your programs cost too much, then

you must find a way to underwrite your offerings.

The third provider gap is not delivering to service standards. Your program offerings may not be good enough, or frequent enough, or friendly enough, or helpful enough. Do your instructors understand what they need to do? Do they have the training and the resources to deliver? Often, a good provider becomes complacent, but the buying public never does. The long, sad saga of American automobile manufacturing shows that. The same American workers are now building Toyotas, BMWs, Hondas, Volvos, and Mercedes Benzes, taking a big share of the market from traditional American automobiles that continue to have performance or quality difficulties.

The fourth provider gap is not matching performance to promise. Generally a function of misleading advertising, it's all about what you promise: Get your GED in 60 days. And if enough do not achieve that goal, or they discover that it will take two years rather than two months, then you have a gap. And your students do what they have done in the past when their expectations are dashed. They leave.

Filling the gaps between your program and the needs or desires of your customer base will build a stronger, more responsive program. As the articles in this issue of *Progress* attest, marketing works. ■

Marcia Phillips is the Editor of Progress and a Specialist at the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center.

Marketing Adult Education Programs

by SUSAN SEYMORE

Marketing is one of the most challenging tasks faced by adult education program managers. Limited by inadequate marketing dollars, programs struggle to implement somewhat amateur ideas that they hope will motivate the reluctant students to enroll in adult education classes. Questions that emerge are: How can adult educators market their services better and reach students who are not currently served? How can we contact and recruit the adults who require our services? What can we say to arouse their interest when they are reluctant to listen to a message that may be perceived as threatening? How can we gain the general public's support? What type of resources and techniques can we use to achieve these goals? How can we maximize the marketing dollars in our marketing budget?

The Mount Rogers Regional Adult Education Program (MRRRAEP) has implemented the following two successful strategies:

1. Collaboration

The regional program managers in Regions 1, 2 and 3 (Rebecca Scott, Linda Allen and Susan Seymore) meet frequently to discuss solutions to the above questions. Realizing that it is difficult at best for a single program to administer an effective marketing plan, the three regional programs collaborate in grant applications, in specific marketing campaigns, and in working with marketing media. The axiom, "There is power in numbers," is so true. Representing 15 school divisions, we three regional managers have been astounded at corporate partners' willingness to provide incentives or free advertising. Some examples:

- Bristol Motor Speedway provides

two race tickets (the Busch Sharpie Mini 300 and the O'Rielly 200 Truck Race) to each GED recipient.

- Food City provides in-house public service announcements.
- Food City prints 2.4 million grocery bags with the Race to GED logo and contact information for adult education classes each year.
- Charter Media has donated over \$2 million in free advertising.*
- Lamar Advertising and Stafford Advertising have provided free billboard space.*

*In response to marketing contracts

To increase our marketing, scholarship and testing budgets, we apply jointly to grant providers and have been successful in obtaining over \$500,000.

A single "800" number is used in all joint television and billboard advertising. One person is assigned the responsibility of forwarding all incoming inquiries to the appropriate program manager.

We all share a slice of a nice fat pie that would have been unattainable without collaboration.

2. Marketing Coordinator

Last year, we applied for Race to GED funds to hire a marketing coordinator for the region. We were looking for someone who could "design an outreach program that would target specific age groups and/or demographic groups for the purpose of increasing the numbers of individuals tested, increasing the numbers enrolling in our classes, increasing awareness of the adult education program and ultimately increasing the numbers entering the workforce and/or post-secondary education."

Enter Jeff Campbell...!

Jeff is an adult education teacher in Smyth County. Formerly a marketing teacher in Smyth County Public Schools, he understands the basic components of a sound marketing plan. Targeting single moms, displaced workers and high school dropouts, Jeff visits agencies (DSS, Health Departments, One Stop Centers, town halls, health clinics and libraries) in all seven localities. He leaves brochures, posters and contact information and makes helpful personal contacts. Contacts at local ministerial associations have led to local food pantries, where, on one occasion, he spoke to over 400 people, which resulted in many follow-up inquiries about adult education.

A customized packet is given to each major employer in the region. The packet includes contact information, brochures that identify how employers benefit from our services, ESL information, and freebies such as letter openers and/or pens. A follow-up email provides an opportunity to thank the employer and reinforce our message.

Posters and flyers are placed at restaurants, grocery stores, post offices, and



businesses – any place people frequent. Ads are placed on local cable community events channels, radio spots and local newspapers.

MRRRAEP's goal is to educate. This includes marketing. We educate prospective students by convincing them they need our product. We educate agencies,

corporate partners, and the general public regarding the negative socio-economic impact of low educational attainment to the community and the critical need to support adult education.

By collaborating and using the services of an expert marketing strategist, our student numbers are increasing and

our message is being heard throughout Southwest Virginia. ■

Susan Seymore is the program manager for Mt. Rogers Regional Adult Education Program, serving seven localities in Southwest Virginia.



by STEVEN LESTER

Try to google the subject of GED outreach and you will be hard pressed to find any useful information. A good GED outreach template is generally non-existent. GED programs usually develop their own outreach strategy and the outreach methods depend upon the program's particular region. Advertisement approaches can differ from county to county, from community to community, and even from house to house.

In order to effectively communicate the need for and availability of our services, we had to learn and apply certain principles, sometimes through trial and error. This article will highlight some ideas that have helped the Southwest Regional Adult Education Program (SWRAEP) establish a solid program presence in Southwest Virginia. We believe that our outreach methodology maximizes our potential to impact adults without a high school credential in our community. We also feel that our methodology provides positive "pass-along"

Making the Time to CARE A GED Outreach Philosophy and Plan

information that serves to bolster our program's reputation, thereby enhancing program effectiveness.

Our outreach plan is developed to combat commitment obstacles, the primary hindrance of continuing education. Some of these are easily understood and can be addressed in a straightforward fashion. They include the availability of child care, access to transportation, and family responsibilities. Other commitment obstacles are less definable and, therefore, harder to address. These involve a cultural stigma toward education, poor self-efficacy, nominal employment prospects, and not realizing one's need for continuing education.

To infiltrate the GED candidate population, we have established a working outreach philosophy called C.A.R.E. This philosophy is designed to communicate our program mission to the general public, specifically the high school dropout community, so that commitment obstacles can be weakened and broken down.

Contact and Communication

The first aspect of the C.A.R.E. plan is to make contact and establish communication with inactive students. To do this, we have implemented various methods. We contact students who have not been in class for a period of two months. In an effort to reconnect them to a class, we offer assistance, which might be a word of encouragement, a different class

option, or distance learning tools. Another approach is to identify and contact anyone within our region who has tested but has non-passing or incomplete GED test scores. A letter of encouragement along with their transcript is sent to them in an effort to exhort the student to completion. These approaches have produced positive results.

The contact and communication segment of the C.A.R.E plan also includes the recruitment of new students. The Southwest Regional Adult Education website, www.russell.k12.va.us/adulted, has attracted many new students and is a great source for program information. A toll-free telephone number (1-866-581-9935) is also provided. Through these avenues of communication and contact, prospective students receive positive reinforcement, the knowledge of educational opportunities, and a voice of hope that will serve to encourage them through the GED process.

Advertisement

Our advertisement goal is to inform and educate the public regarding program services. The advertisement segment includes billboards, TV commercials, radio advertisements, flyers, brochures, Food City grocery bags, banners, and the SWRAEP newsletter entitled Achieve. Student testimonials and program information published in eight weekly newspapers and featured in TV news programs have made a great impact

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Focus on Near Passers

by SHARON HETLAND

Near passers,” “stop outs,” and adults curious to see if they are ready for the GED exam have been the centerpiece of Northern Shenandoah Valley Adult Education’s outreach efforts this year. The Race to GED grant enabled NSVAE to add an outreach counselor to the staff, two Fast Track Labs, and a targeted math class. Believing in our mission “to empower adults through learning,” NSVAE endeavored to increase community awareness of the important services we offer as well as provide additional support to adults in all stages of their personal race to achieve the GED.

During 2006-07, NSVAE scheduled monthly practice test sessions in three different locations in the region. The outreach counselor called those signed up to take the Official Practice Test (OPT) to confirm their participation and to answer any questions that they might have. After the practice test, follow-up letters and phone calls were made to all testers, sharing test results and advising them on their next step in the Race to GED. “No shows” were called to reschedule the OPT and to give them class information. Those passing the practice test and earning a voucher received GED testing schedules and specific advice on how to proceed. Individuals receiving the voucher were tracked to be certain that they took the GED and passed. The outreach counselor contacted those not passing the GED and developed a strategy to assure success in the future.

The outreach counselor also provided consultation to adults who did not pass the OPT, directing them to the next step in their race to the GED. “Near passers” who needed targeted instruction in specific subjects were directed to the Fast Track Learning Lab. Students who needed help passing the math section were steered to the GED math class. These students were encouraged to work on their weak areas and to set new target

dates for taking the GED exam. Once in the program, students received follow-up phone calls if their attendance lagged, in a concerted attempt to prevent “stop outs”.

...the audience must hear the message many times and in various ways for it to prompt action.

In reviewing the data from 2004 to present, we discovered that many adults were very close to passing but had not enrolled in a class or retaken the exam. All these adults were sent letters with class schedules and promotional calendars. While many students could no longer be reached, a significant number were glad to hear from us and recommitted to the process.

Our increased contacts with our “near passers” and “stop outs” have shown us that the audience must hear the message many times and in various ways for it to prompt action. Deliberate efforts to confirm those registered for an OPT still yielded about a 40% “no-show” rate in the three testing locations in the region. However, NSVAE increased the number

of adults who took the OPT and who passed the GED. From October 2006 through April 14, 2007, 190 took the OPT and 88 (46%) received vouchers to take the GED exam free of charge. Of those 88 adults receiving a voucher, 66 have taken the GED exam and 56 have passed. Ten adults were “near passers.” These numbers represent a small increase over year-to-date data for 2005-06. While any increase is certainly encouraging, it is not the significant increase we hoped our efforts would produce. Yet, 22 adults who took the OPT and did not receive a voucher still took the GED exam. Of that number, 8 adults passed and 14 were “near passers.” Through OPT opportunities and outreach, we gained 70 students in our lab and added 62 more students to class rosters at one location alone.

The Race to GED message is being heard, but our results remind us that the race is one of endurance. As adult educators, we must be in it for the long haul, developing hope and change as we go. Increasing the number of people in our community who have a GED is our overarching mission. Our efforts to bring attention to the GED have helped many adults earn their GED, even if they did not attend our classes. For those students who are “near passers,” we are here to help them over the last hurdle. For those students who start and stop over and over again, we are here to keep them on track. For those students who reach their goal of earning the GED, we are at the finish line to congratulate them and to encourage them to set goals for the next leg of their journey. Northern Shenandoah Valley Adult Education indeed empowers adults through learning. ■

Sharon Hetland is an instructor in the NSVAE program and this past year has served as the Outreach Coordinator.

Marketing the West Piedmont Race to GED Program

by LARRY HIXSON

The GED program as we know it has been around for over sixty years; however, the challenge of marketing the existing local, regional and state programs to those who need it remains strong. In the West Piedmont Adult Education Regional Program (Franklin, Henry, Patrick and Pittsylvania counties and the city of Martinsville), we have begun a concerted effort to raise the awareness level of the need for all citizens not having completed their high school education to “come on down” and get their GED.

Herein lies the real question: How can we entice those individuals who did not finish high school for whatever reason to be brave enough to make a phone call and actually enroll in a GED class or register for the exam? This geographical region of Virginia is unique in that our citizens have traditionally relied on the furniture making, textiles, and tobacco industries to make a living. However, the demise of these industries has left high unemployment among low-skilled workers and affected the region’s ability to attract, retain, and retrain our local workforce. According to Virginia employment statistics, the average worker in the region earns approximately \$16,000, below the poverty level for a family of four. But, in order to attract new businesses to this region, a large majority of the population must return to school to complete their education and begin retraining for higher skilled technical jobs.

One of the first steps in attracting the approximately 46,000 citizens who do not have a high school diploma is to create a local environment whereby citizens are made aware that obtaining a GED is a positive move towards better jobs, higher pay, and a more successful future. Studies show that parents who value education and training instill this work ethic in their children, who in turn

become our future workforce and civic leaders.

The Race to GED logo and marketing campaign has had a very positive effect and increasingly significant impact on creating this awareness. The West Piedmont Race to GED outreach and recruitment expansion project uses a detailed, systematic approach to market the GED program to community agencies, businesses, and industries, as well as private citizens. As with any successful project, teamwork is paramount. Monthly meetings with the lead teachers and program managers from each of the localities identify recruitment strategies that work, as well as identifying special events to further promote getting the word out.

One very effective tool is the West Piedmont GED website which provides information about classes, contact information for those interested in beginning classes, and links to the state Race to GED website. It is invaluable to our efforts.

In addition to the regularly planned testing dates, West Piedmont provides GED testing on demand. This allows the region to be responsive to business and industry needs, and ensures that no one has to wait months to take the test. Further, after testing, each client receives information about post-secondary opportunities available through the region’s one-stop centers.

West Piedmont also uses billboards to good effect. A driver has between five and seven seconds to read and internalize the billboard message, so the billboards feature a local free access number (888-GED4all/888-433-4255) where citizens can get the information they need.

A perhaps unique marketing approach is the Race to GED Motorcycle Rally. West Piedmont is sponsoring the rally in partnership with Big Bird’s/Big Twin Harley accessory shop in Martins-

ville on June 10. It is an opportunity for recruitment, and rally winners will receive GED scholarships.

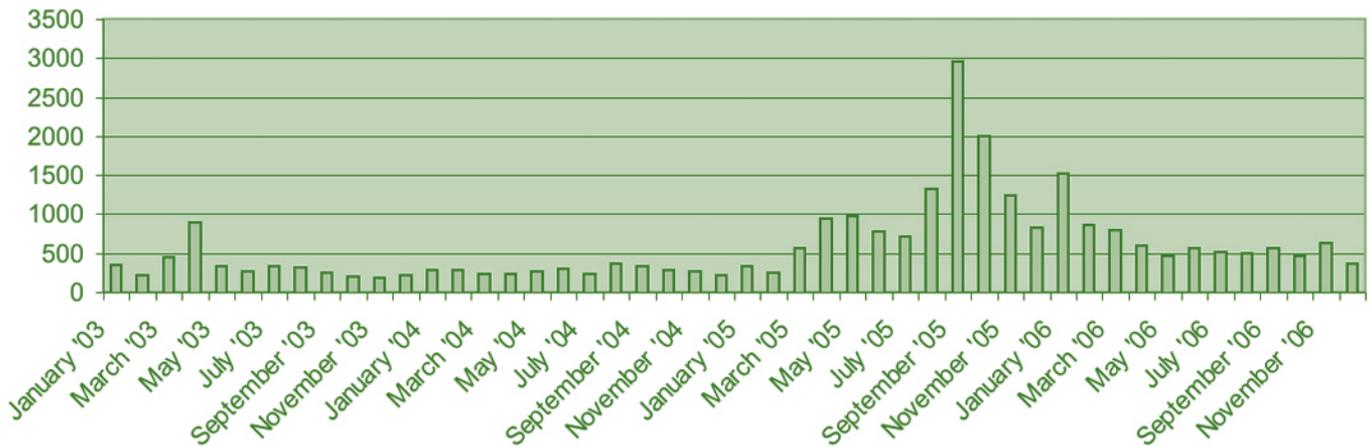
Other marketing strategies include using successful GED candidates to encourage others, working closely with the Employment Commission and other businesses and agencies to offer convenient GED classes, expanding the number of testing sites and class locations, publishing the test schedules in the local newspapers monthly, and creating an eye-catching, easy-to-read brochure, available in the one-stop centers in the region.

West Piedmont is using targeted marketing techniques to reach the various audiences throughout the region. Staff members make contact regularly with the Chamber of Commerce, community college, military recruiters, high schools, churches, counselors, and most importantly, business and industry. In addition to the user-friendly website and the annual bike rally, we also have the Business IQ partnership, regional job fairs, and continuing partnerships with other public and private human service agencies. And there are plans to hold an antique car rally to further promote the GED program in our region.

The impact of sustained marketing breaks the barriers to citizens who need to complete their high school education and keeps our product, obtaining the GED, in the forefront. West Piedmont is tremendously excited to do whatever it takes to carry the GED program to the next level in order to have a better educated citizenry to attract much needed new business and industry to our region. We are always looking for new ideas and are happy to share what we have learned with you. ■

Larry Hixson is the Recruitment Specialist for West Piedmont Adult Education Program. He is located in Rocky Mount, VA.

Call Volume for the GED Helpline On a Monthly Basis



Advertising Works. Thank God. (continued from front page)

watching Virginia's Race to GED. And we are now poised to enter a new phase of outreach. Before beginning that new phase, we should take a look at what we've done and the lessons that we've learned.

It's Much More than Media

In the fall of 2005, VCU marketing professor Deb Cowles used the Race to GED as a test case for one of her graduate-level marketing classes. The class conducted a statewide "gap analysis" of the Race to GED to identify where our efforts were successful and where they were failing. The number-one gap identified was customer service. When potential learners called us or walked through our doors, they often were unable to reach us, or they were confronted by someone who could not answer their questions. The graduate students' analysis showed this repeatedly.

In response, the staff at the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center developed several resources to ameliorate this problem. *Race to GED Frequently Asked Question* notebooks were distributed by the hundreds to local programs, where they were given to staff, placed by school phones, and supplied to partner agencies so that potential students would not turn away because of a lack of basic informa-

tion about our services. The Resource Center also developed and delivered three regional customer service training workshops to adult education staff members from more than 14 different programs across Virginia. At the Resource Center, increased call volume resulted in a contract with a company that provided live operators to handle calls to the Helpline during overnight and weekend hours. These steps were taken because Cowles' students exposed the fact that, while billboards, logos, and television and radio spots may spur calls, marketing continues on a person-to-person basis long after the call has been made. Creating a customer service orientation at every level, from the person who answers the phone to the teachers to program management, is imperative if we are to retain our learners. From a marketing perspective, the callers are our potential customers, and they are a hard sell. At every step, we must put them at ease and make it as easy as possible for them to take advantage of our product.

Targeted, Consistent, and Sustained

While fewer spots are being played on television and radio stations across the commonwealth, and only a handful of billboards are still posted, data shows a long-term residual effect from our

marketing. Calls to the GED Helpline are still coming in at a level higher than before we began. This carryover effect, marketers will tell you, is the result of conducting a targeted and sustained campaign that relies on a simple, consistent message.

Early on, our media partners provided a wealth of data and advice about when our target population was viewing television, what they were watching, when they were listening to what radio stations, and when and where they were driving to and from work past any given billboard in Virginia. This information allowed us to target our marketing to our potential learners. Advertisements were placed so they would have the highest likelihood of reaching those who lacked a high school credential, thus increasing the value of each to generate multiple calls. Quite often, traditionally low-yield placements: overnight spots or billboards on small, rural roads, were very effective for our programs. This allowed both state and local funds to be stretched out over a long period of time. We also learned that placement was not the only aspect that needed to be targeted.

Elliott Sadler and the NASCAR theme appealed to pockets of the state, but it was not consistently effective statewide. Consequently, the second wave of billboards and spots appealed to a dif-

ferent motivation: "Make More Money. Get Your GED." When those signs and spots debuted, the phones began ringing off their hooks. We learned that a message needs to be short and clear, and that it should appeal to that idea or obstacle most important to our audience. Obviously, earning more money, so that they can better provide for themselves and their families, motivates our target audience. Our learners regularly cite a host of reasons for wanting to get their GED and a variety of the positive results of earning it. What we must focus on with outreach, though, is what will get them to pick up the phone or walk through our doors, and it's clear that money talks. Cultivating a systemic customer service attitude and delivering a simple, effective message at appropriate places and times – that's what our success to this point boils down to. However, there is one more facet of the Race to GED outreach that should not be overlooked.

Partners

We can't do it alone. Developing partnerships with local media, other agencies, and community organizations has greatly helped spread the word. Word of mouth is still the best form of marketing. There is a dizzying array of services available in Virginia, and often, citizens don't know where to start. Making sure

that local DSS, VEC, DRS, and similar agency offices know about our programs is critical to ensuring that potential GED completers find us. Placing printed material, the *Race to GED Frequently Asked Question* books, and business cards at each local office should be considered a bare necessity to build word of mouth.

Building good relationships with media representatives is also crucial. A large part of the *Marketing and Implementation Guide* discussed how to do this. If we speak the media's language - if we are knowledgeable about deadlines, the editing process, and how stories are chosen - we are more likely to get the support and coverage of our local media professionals. Another lesson we've learned is that if you don't ask, you won't get it. Be direct about asking for PSA time, complimentary space with a minimum purchase, and other bonus placements. Most of these companies budget and plan for the support of community initiatives. If we want to be that initiative, we must ask. Charter Media's support has truly been crucial to the success we've enjoyed, and they're committed to helping us with the next stage of our statewide efforts. Had the local programs in Southwest Virginia not cultivated that relationship, we would never have enjoyed the exposure we've received.

What's Next

So, there's that question again. The next phase of Race to GED marketing began in October 2006, with the release of the GED Success Story Calendar. In the next few months, television spots and billboard layouts that build on the calendar layout will be produced. The spots will be mass produced and they, along with billboard layouts, a revised marketing guide, and more calendars, will be distributed to all local and regional programs in late July. OAEL will purchase billboard space, and local programs will be encouraged to place more billboards and to purchase television airtime for the spots, which will feature individuals who appear on the calendar and who will speak about the improved income and career opportunities that become available after earning the GED. With another wave of integrated state and locally generated outreach, no doubt the phones will be ringing off of the hooks again. ■

Randall Stamper is currently Specialist for Communications and Special Projects at the Office of Adult Education and Literacy in the Virginia Department of Education. He previously served as Director of Communication and editor of Progress at VALRC.



Pursue Your Dreams - Get Your GED

Andre Bright is:

- GED graduate
- College student
- Tutor
- All of the above

1-877-37-MY-GED

Making the Time to CARE (continued from page 9)

on GED awareness in the community. Local businesses contribute by providing program incentives, which include community college scholarships provided by the Alcoa Foundation, tickets to racing events at Bristol Motor Speedway, and Hardee's food coupons. By consistently placing educational opportunities before our target population, we hope to provide enough of a reminder that people will make a positive decision regarding their education.

Referral and Redistribution Network

The purpose of the referral and redistribution segment of the outreach program is to establish a relationship among other area service programs. Through this relationship, individuals identified as needing their GED can be referred to our

program. Our goal is to train, educate, and supply information to area agencies such as the department of social services, VEC branches, churches, Head Start, and Even Start programs. When a client base is appropriately shared among agencies, more program awareness, program participation, and positive relationships can be experienced by all collaborating partners.

Event Opportunities

Event opportunities present the adult education programs a venue to put a face on our program. Event venues include community club meetings, fair booths, parades/festivals, Food City Family Race Night, and placing kiosks in area stores and food pantries. Representatives of our program can talk to the public, present literature, and hand

out advertisement items. By presenting our program on the table talk level, we hope to generate informative discussions in the community that can facilitate our mission. Educated conversation works to break down commitment obstacles in a way that no other medium of advertisement can.

Outreach is a must if GED programs are going to impact the high school dropout population effectively and educate the community regarding existing GED opportunities. The C.A.R.E. philosophy and plan is only a tool. Caring about the advancement of education within our communities is the real power for success. ■

Steven Lester is the Outreach Coordinator for the Southwest Regional Adult Education program.

Summer is generally quieter in the field of adult education than the other seasons. But already, the summer of 2007 is notable for the number of changes it is bringing to the Resource Center.

The first change is the departure of Stephen Grainer from the Resource Center. Stephen has been our webmaster for several years, and has brought a distinctive new look to the VALRC website. If you haven't visited the site recently, go to www.valrc.org to see the quality of his work. In fact, you will be able to see other examples of his work on the VCU website in the future, because he leaves us to become webmaster for Virginia Commonwealth University. Another aspect of Stephen's job at VALRC has been his design and layout of *Progress*. This is his last issue; we know his eye and talent will be missed here.

Our next change is a happy note: Jim Andre, well-known to adult educators around the state, will be leaving his

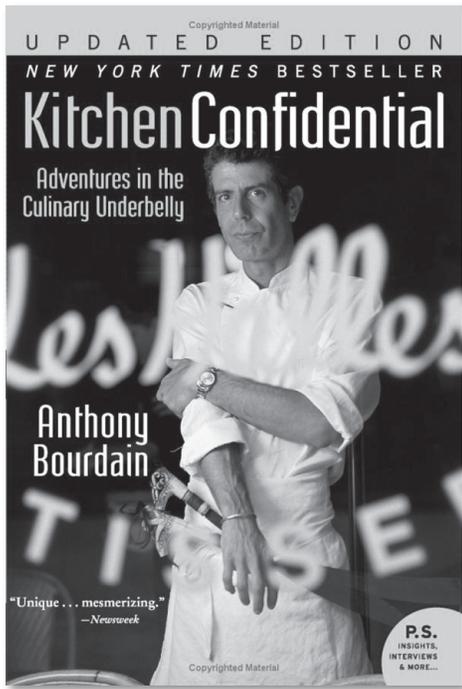
position with the Henrico County adult education program and coming to the resource center as Program Development Specialist. As such, he will be working with local programs around the state to fulfill professional development needs. Jim has been a trainer for the Resource Center for several years, and we look forward to working more closely with him.

In July, we make our next change: a move. Our new office will actually be off campus, at 3600 West Broad Street. Formerly known as the Seaboard Building, our new site is a large office building with a number of attractive amenities, not the least of which is adequate parking. A large number of other VCU offices are located there; this move continues a University goal of moving Centers or Institutes not primarily concerned with students off-campus. The suite we will occupy at 3600 is a large space on the sixth floor, big enough for the two grant-funded reading programs, also a part of the Literacy Institute, to be in the same

place with the Resource Center. The move is anticipated to take place mid-August. ■



Jim Andre



Written by ANTHONY BOURDAIN
Reviewed by JASON GUARD

Jason Guard is the Assistant GED Specialist at the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center. He also manages the statewide GED Helpline.

Book Review:

Kitchen Confidential

Pop culture often acts as an indicator of fluctuations in the job market. Just as the move from retail shopping to online stores has created new opportunities for entry level workers, the current popularity of celebrity chefs has made the art of serving up tasty grub into a trendy but viable vocation. Amidst all the hoopla stands Anthony Bourdain, a gritty New York City chef whose writing has directed new attention on the inner workings of restaurant kitchens and spawned a new breed of professional and amateur chefs. Although not necessarily a role model, Bourdain has turned his writing hobby into an impressive media phenomenon that has inspired many to turn their cooking hobbies into careers. Could this book open the door to gainful employment for adult education students? You be the judge.

Bourdain's memoir *Kitchen Confidential: Adventures in the Culinary Underbelly*, details the trials and errors of an up and coming chef. Although the book has been misunderstood as an exposé of the unsavory practices that result in our favorite foods, Bourdain's stories tend to focus on the drive, passion, and thick skin required at every level of restaurant management. Throughout, Bourdain details exactly what attributes make for a successful line cook, sous-chef, or waiter, and what tendencies indicate that an employee can't take the heat and should get out of the kitchen. These profiles of determined professionalism and well-intentioned amateurishness make the book a useful map of the burgeoning food service industry as well as an entertaining tour of restaurant kitchens.

Although many of Bourdain's misadventures can be viewed as lessons of what not to do during a culinary career, he provides self-effacing anecdotes and insightful commentary on the food service industry that demonstrates his reverence for the fine art of food service, quality ingredients, and skillful preparation.

For Bourdain, the kitchen is one of the last frontiers of real opportunity where ordinary Americans can find economic stability and upward mobility despite education level, primary language, or personal history. All that is needed is a solid commitment to and pride in one's trade.

The colorful personality behind *Kitchen Confidential* spends a great deal of time describing the seedy underbelly of your favorite eatery, the demeaning nature of kitchen hierarchies, and the often self-destructive habits of nearly everyone drawn to work in restaurants. Nonetheless, these anecdotes are counterbalanced by an emphasis on the fundamental skills that all cooks must learn: organization (mis en place is the preferred term), economical portion sizing, waste minimization, safety regulations, time management, and the necessity of elementary Spanish in almost any kitchen. Some readers may take offense at the vulgar and abusive behind-the-scenes behavior that serves as an undercurrent in this book, but it does seem clear that we are getting the unadulterated and often harsh reality of life in a professional kitchen.

You may be wondering how Bourdain fits in among the celebrity chefs. The answer is: he doesn't. He disdains the lights, camera, action phoniness of TV cooking shows, and he delights in seeing wannabe Emerils and Rachael Rays quitting before they finish their first shift as a line cook. Ironically, the traits that the culinary world depends upon most are hard work and dependability, rather than artistic vision or a discerning palate (or sound effects and cleavage). Armed with these two ethics, even the most unskilled cooks and dysfunctional personalities can (and usually do) find restaurant kitchens to be the perfect workplace.

For Anthony Bourdain's latest adventures, check out the globe-trotting *No Reservations* on the Travel Channel. ■

PROGRESS

Virginia Commonwealth University
Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center
817 West Franklin Street
PO Box 842037
Richmond, VA 23284-2037

VAILL 2007

Plan now to attend *BUILDING TOMORROW, TODAY, the Virginia Institute for Lifelong Learning (VAILL) 2007*. VAILL will be held July 18-20 on the campus of Radford University. The agenda will feature strands of topics for program managers, EL/Civics, GED standards, technology, ESOL program development in rural areas, and CBLOs. New teachers will be offered special workshops. Everyone will have the opportunity to meet informally with Elizabeth Hawa and the staff of the Office of Adult Education and Literacy. Housing and food will be available to participants from noon on Wednesday, July 18th through Friday, July 20th.

This is a wonderful opportunity to come learn and share with fellow adult education practitioners from across Virginia. The Office of Adult Education and Literacy provides the funding for the institute to strengthen adult education programs and instruction. As a participant, you will be able to attend sessions on topics of current interest. You won't find a better deal anywhere else. You'll come, attend sessions, share and gain knowledge and then return to your classroom renewed and refreshed with new ideas and methods to implement. Registration forms and workshop information will be available at the Resource Center site, www.valrc.org, and the Office of **Adult Education and Literacy** site. . ❖