“LIFE began six years ago, with four volunteers: myself, my husband, a member of the Batavia Mothers Club, and an NIU undergraduate student,” says Sue Sokolinski. “Last year, twenty-two people volunteered, including teachers from Batavia and Naperville, family members, and former parent participants.”

She’s talking about literacy in Families Empowers (LIFE), a ten-week family literacy program she established in the Batavia School District. Its mission is to strengthen collaboration between families and schools, promoting reading development and achievement of struggling first-grade readers. It is premised on a Structured Listening Activity (SLA) model, based on research that shows a strong correlation between listening comprehension and reading comprehension. There are no costs to program participants.

Beginning in January each year, Sokolinski and other volunteers gather with participating families for two hours on Saturday mornings at a local elementary school. District teachers, reading specialists from nearby Naperville School District 204, and members of the Batavia Mothers Club volunteer their services. Every session starts out with breakfast (donated by local businesses), followed by breakout sessions for the first graders, their siblings, and for the parents. At the end of the morning, parents and first graders come together for a literacy activity linked to the skill being taught that day.

Incorporating activities for all family members is important, says Sokolinski, as reading and literacy difficulties are often seen among siblings. Including them helps capitalize on opportunities to strengthen literacy and problem-solving skills for the entire family.

Each week, the first graders receive a nonfiction book which dovetails with the district’s math and science curriculum. “We teach the students how to listen for specific information in the books,” Sokolinski explains. “They also learn how to retell that information by using text features such as the glossary, index, table of contents and illustrations.”

Meanwhile, volunteers are working with parents, teaching them how to help their children use these features when they are reading together at home. Parents are asked to read the books out loud to their children several times during the week. At the end of the week, children retell the book to their parents, with information about the retelling (what big idea the child identified, how many details were accurately retold, what connections the child made with the information in the book, etc.) reported on a checklist designed by Sokolinski. The checklist provides insights into the students’ listening comprehension skills as well as parents’ interpretation of their child’s ability to recall and retell information.

At the end of each Saturday morning session, parents and children reunite to engage in play-based activities that support listening. Pre- and post-program tests are administered to all participants, and surveys allow parents and students to provide valuable feedback about their experiences. Preliminary findings indicate that participants are making significant gains.

LIFE grew out of a case study Sokolinski conducted for her master’s degree thesis in early childhood special education and her work with Dr. Lynette Chandler, professor and associate chair in the Department of Teaching and Learning; Dr. Dan House, Director of the Office of Institutional Research and instructor in the Department of Leadership, Educational Psychology and Foundations; and Dr. Laurie Elsh-Piper, professor of Literacy Education and director of the College of Education’s Literacy Clinic.

“I focused my thesis project on family literacy,” says Sokolinski. “As a first grade teacher, I saw a need to inform parents of struggling readers about reading development and how they can promote early reading development in their homes.” She designed LIFE to meet that need. To date, over 50 families have participated. Former LIFE participants have also returned as volunteers to “pay it forward,” she says.

Paying it forward is something that Sokolinski takes to heart. She founded another literacy program in Aurora, the Victory Adult and Family Literacy Program (VAFLP), as a result of a doctoral course with Dr. Paul Isley.

“A group project turned into a program for refugee families,” she explains. “How can you see a need and ignore it when you’ve been given the educational opportunities that I’ve been blessed with?”

While less structured than LIFE, VAFLP is making tremendous strides in changing the lives of its participants by helping them navigate a new culture, connecting them with English classes, assisting with the completion of medical forms and securing of driver’s licenses, and providing assistance with basic needs and relocation arrangements. One participant has even received a scholarship to pursue a college degree.

Sokolinski downplays her own role in the literacy programs, focusing instead on the wonderful staff of committed volunteers that are central to the programs’ success. “Victory is simply one of facilitator. It is the growing staff of committed volunteers that are central to the programs’ endurance.”

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When asked what advice she’d give about starting a similar program, she says, “Anyone can make a difference. Just make a decision. Get started with the resources you have available. Have a vision and view challenges as opportunities, not obstacles.”

We would like to thank the sponsors of the 2009 Gala Celebration. They are:

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**2009 Gala Celebration**

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![Auction bidders join in the "FUN-draising"](image1)

![David Inge and Charmaine Izzo-Inge](image2)

**2010 Gala will be held on Saturday, August 28, 6-11 p.m.**

**Join the Fun!**

**Save the Date and Join the Fun!**
Ever Dream of Going to the Olympics?

That dream came true for College of Education alumnus Mike Braid, who spent 16 weeks as the athletic trainer (AT) for the U.S. Men’s Volleyball Team before and during the 2000 Sydney Olympics.

Braid talked about his range of experiences as an AT when he delivered the 2009 Roger Kallisiak Distinguished Athletic Training Alumni Lecture last April. The series is named for KNPE Alumnus Roger Kallisiak, who has a distinguished career of service to the field.

A native of Michigan, Braid is a former head athletic trainer at NIU (1991-94), where he also earned his master’s degree in physical education with an emphasis in sport management.

“As I swam, played games, sang songs, planted flowers, hiked in the woods, and canoed down the river with my campers, who were blind and visually impaired children and teens, I grew to love them and learned about the challenges they faced. More than half of the counselors and staff at the camp were blind or visually impaired, so I learned about their educational and life experiences, and my mind expanded as I worked with them and saw how capable they were. I witnessed how the campers walked more confidently, learned to take care of their possessions and themselves away from their parents and discovered that they were special not because of their blindness, but because of their unique personalities and abilities.”

Braid says that networking with other professionals is one of the best things about his work. “I’ve worked with really wonderful people – the patients, athletes, peer physicians, coaches, all of them have been great. They have opened up doors for me to do things that I might never have been able to do. Traveling, being part of prestigious events and competitions, helping injured athletes of all abilities get back on their feet and on with their lives – it’s been humbling to be part of something bigger than my own experience.”

About the future of the field, Braid says, “There is still a lot of education to be done about the importance of our role in health care settings, as well as the emerging value of our profession in such areas as law enforcement, the military, and even the performing arts.” He says that only about half of all ATs work in clinical settings, so educational programs must evaluate how well they are preparing future ATs for roles outside of those arenas.

Seeing the Possibilities: Ann Harman

This year marks the 200th birthday of Louis Braille, the man who invented the Braille code for reading, which changed the lives of those with visual impairments. Just as Braille’s dogged determination led him to develop the Braille code, Ann Harman’s determination to work in the field of visual disabilities led her to NIU.

“By my senior year in high school, I knew that I wanted to be a teacher for visually impaired students,” says the Marshallville, Missouri native. “However, nobody I knew seemed to know how one could become qualified to do that or even if it was a viable career option. I didn’t even know anyone who was blind. Consequently, I spent many hours on the Internet trying to find more information about how I could possibly study to teach students with visual impairments.”

During this time, Harman was completing her undergraduate degree in English with a Spanish minor at Truman State University; she graduated Phi Beta Kappa and was co-veddictor of her class.

In her research on visual disabilities programs, Harman came across several articles online that were written by Dr. Gaylen Kapperman, a professor in and the director of the Visual Disabilities program in the College of Education. Favorably impressed with his contributions to the field and to his students, Harman sent Kapperman an email, asking his advice.

“To my great delight, he replied that I could get my master’s degree to become a teacher for visually impaired students. From then on, and even more so after I visited NIU, I felt that this was the place where my dream of teaching blind and low vision students could become a reality.”

Harman laid the foundation for that dream the summer after her freshman year in college, when she worked as a counselor at Opportunity Unlimited for the Blind’s Camp Tuhsmeheta in Michigan. “As I swam, played games, sang songs, planted flowers, hiked in the woods, and canoed down the river with my campers, who were blind and visually impaired children and teens, I grew to love them and learned about the challenges they faced. More than half of the counselors and staff at the camp were blind or visually impaired, so I learned about their educational and life experiences, and my mind expanded as I worked with them and saw how capable they were. I witnessed how the campers walked more confidently, learned to take care of their possessions and themselves away from their parents and discovered that they were special not because of their blindness, but because of their unique personalities and abilities.”

Harman’s own potential as an outstanding student was not lost on Kapperman or NIU. She was one of only ten recipients at NIU to be awarded a prestigious University Fellowship and is believed to be the first College of Education student to receive this honor.

“Ann is one of those very highly motivated students who has thoroughly investigated the various opportunities for graduate study in the area of blindness and visual impairments,” Kapperman says. “And, after searching out and exploring all of the possible programs, she chose to come to NIU! We are very pleased to have her in our program and have very high expectations for her upon graduation.”

Harman says that NIU has a really good visual disabilities program, with very good professors. In fact, she liked the philosophy of special education at NIU so much that it was the only school to which she applied. “I really wanted to come here,” she says. “I am so glad to be here.”

For more information about the Visual Disabilities program and scholarship opportunities it offers, contact Dr. Gaylen Kapperman at 815-753-8453 or email him at gkapperman@niu.edu.
“Remember that every day is a fresh start for students.”

That’s one of the pieces of advice that Linda Smerge, the 2009 Illinois Teacher of the Year, shared with the 120 students and faculty who attended her presentation, “Ten Things I Wish I’d Known About Teaching,” on September 11th. Smerge knows about fresh starts – she left a lucrative law practice 15 years ago to return to teaching and hasn’t looked back since. After her stint as Illinois’ educational ambassador, making presentations and talking with teachers and students about education, Smerge will return to her classroom at Wilson School in Cicero.

Her speech included plenty of personal anecdotes, sage advice, and reflections on the teaching profession, including a quote from Richard Elmore. “Teaching is not rocket science. It is, in fact, far more complex and demanding work than rocket science.”

“Trust me, I’ve been where you’ve been,” Smerge told the audience. “If you’re coming into teaching because you think it’s easy, maybe you shouldn’t be here.” She pointed out that studies have shown that the quality of a classroom teacher has a greater impact on student learning than any other factor.

It’s a humbling amount of power, she said, combined with the tremendous responsibility that teachers have to love and respect their jobs as well as their students. But that power and responsibility also bring “never-ending growth,” she promised.◆

Smerge’s Top 10 Pearls of Wisdom

10. Collegiality
   • Always treat the school secretary, nurse and custodian with respect.
   • Know your strengths as well as those of your colleagues.
   • Find common ground and work together.

9. Flexibility
   • Be willing and able to make changes and do it with a smile.
   • Learn the hierarchy of the school administration and personnel.
   • Turn in paperwork on or before time.

8. Empathy
   • Understand and embrace your school population and culture.
   • Show interest in student activities.
   • “Even on your worst day, you’re a student’s best hope” – Larry Bell

7. Respect
   • Show the respect you expect: Establish a system of positive behavior on the first day, and then “praise them, praise them, praise them.” Singling out well-behaved children as models is more constructive than shaming children who are misbehaving.
   • Find ways to communicate and connect to parents. Teachers should tell parents everything about their children – “the good, the bad and the ugly,” Smerge said – and ask parents to write (and provide) letters of “a million words or less” about their children.
   • Find ways to connect to students. Have special greetings or ways to command attention, such as “1,2,3, all eyes on me” or even a silly phrase such as, “spaghetti and meatballs.”

6. Patience
   • Students who are hardest to love need your love the most.
   • Keep your “power” in perspective: “Your students are going to listen to anything you say,” she said.

5. Team sport
   • Do not isolate yourself in your classroom. “If you do,” she said, “I guarantee you will burn out and leave the teaching profession.”
   • Consider teaching as a team sport.
   • Set worthy goals for yourself, as a grade level team and as a school and reflect often on your progress.

4. Creativity
   • Don’t be married to one specific teaching strategy or textbook.
   • Explore resources regularly.
   • Seek professional growth opportunities.

3. Sense of humor
   • Don’t be afraid to laugh at yourself.
   • Don’t be afraid to make mistakes.
   • Learn jokes appropriate for your field or subject.

2. Amnesia
   • Learn to let go – don’t be a garbage truck trashing baggage around with you.
   • Every day is a fresh start for students.

1. Self-care
   • Know your needs and make sure they are met.
   • As much as possible, leave school at school.
   • Adapt a hobby and give yourself permission to enjoy it.

From Sea to Shining Sea (Almost)

18,000 miles and counting – that’s how far avid cyclist Dr. Paul Carpenter, Chair of the Department of Kinesiology and Physical Education, has ridden this year. He’s competed in seven races, taking first place in five of them and second place in the other two.

But he’s not done yet.

On June 9, 2010, he’ll begin his most ambitious ride yet – the Race Across America (RAAM), which covers over 3,000 miles between Oceanside, California and Annapolis, Maryland. This non-stop, non-drafting bike race has been dubbed “The Toughest Bike Race in the World” (Outsider Magazine); it covers 14 states, 4 time zones, and 18,000 miles and counting – that’s how far avid cyclist Dr. Paul Carpenter, Chair of the Department of Kinesiology and Physical Education, has ridden this year. He’s competed in seven races, taking first place in five of them and second place in the other two.

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“My training and racing goals right now are all structured around getting ready for RAAM,” Carpenter says. “Between now and June, I’ll maintain my base miles by cycling to work, with longer rides on the weekends as northern Illinois winter weather allows. As spring arrives, I’ll increase my longer weekend rides and hope to get out west for some training in the desert heat and to do some hill work, both in short supply in the Midwest. In February, I plan to race the Sebring 24 Hour Race and in early March I may compete in the Texas Hill Country RAAM Qualifier. In late spring, I hope to do the Heart of the South [500 miles] as a good measure of my fitness level and a chance for my crew members to gain race experience. And, I will likely do several simulated 24 hour races, as well as compete in the Calvins Challenge 12 hour race and local century rides. If the timing is right, my last major training ride will be the challenging Balltown Double Century Classic in late May.”

Here’s how Carpenter describes the RAAM route:

“The race climbs up from the Pacific coast and across the coastal mountains where riders face their first challenging climb. The route crosses the California and Arizona deserts where temperatures can hit well over 110 degrees. Racers climb up through Prescott and Flagstaff, then northward through the spectacular Monument Valley and into the Rockies, where altitude becomes a factor. The route then drops down onto the plains of Kansas and into the heat and humidity of the Midwest. The rolling hills of Missouri come before crossing the Mississippi into the flatlands of Illinois and Indiana. Then the route continues on through Ohio and into the challenging climbs of West Virginia before dropping down to the finish in Annapolis.”

Why RAAM and why now? Carpenter answers simply. “As someone whose professional and personal life is focused on physical activity, I am always looking for ways to test my physical and mental limits. RAAM presents the ultimate physical and mental challenge. My primary goal is be an official finisher, something not to be taken lightly given the magnitude of this race and the difficulties to be overcome. I am hopeful that if my training goes as planned, I will be able to complete the race in less than 11 days.”

He’s also serving as a research subject for two KNPE colleagues, Dr. Amanda Salacinski and Dr. Matthew Stults-Kolehmainen. Salacinski will examine the intensity and duration of the ride on substrate usage by collecting blood lactate and glucose levels and monitoring Carpenter’s dietary intake. Stults-Kolehmainen will monitor Carpenter’s experience of mental and physical stress and concomitant fatigue before, during and after the ride. Carpenter also plans to have video taken that will be of sufficient quality to allow some biomechanical analyses (e.g., pedal efficiency and how it declines over time). As a sports psychologist, he also hopes to collect data from himself and his crew on the emotional and psychological aspects of competition. Carpenter anticipates that the data may lead to research presentations and articles, and hopes that it will spur additional research projects.

Who are some of the people you would be interested in this year’s RAAM? Carpenter says, “The race is a gathering of the best. This year I’ll race with other ultra-athletes such as â€œSuperman,â€ who’s professional and personal life is focused on physical activity, I am always looking for ways to test my physical and mental limits. RAAM presents the ultimate physical and mental challenge. My primary goal is be an official finisher, something not to be taken lightly given the magnitude of this race and the difficulties to be overcome. I am hopeful that if my training goes as planned, I will be able to complete the race in less than 11 days.”

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Those who are interested may follow Carpenter’s progress through his blog [www.ultraracer.net/raam] or through Twitter (this user name is pjcuk). Both up-to-the-minute, and updates will be more frequent after the new year, when his training and race preparations ramp up, as well as throughout the race. Digital photos will be posted to the web site during the race so people can follow his progression, and he welcomes motivational and supportive emails through his web site, www.ultraracer.net.

In addition to moral support, Carpenter is seeking financial support and sponsorship to assist with the tremendous expense of such an undertaking. From entry fee to support vehicles and GPS tracking devices, not to mention communications, food and supplements, insurance costs, and lodging for his crew, as well as items as small as sunscreen or lip balm, the expenses are mounting. To support his ride, visit Carpenter’s website, www.ultraracer.net or email him at sponsor@ultraracer.net.◆
**News and Awards**

Nicole Allgood, a graduate student in educational psychology (LEPP), was named a 2009 NIU Outstanding Graduate Teaching Assistant.

Meryl Domin (TURN) received a grant from the P-20 Center for Engagement for a collaborative project, "Integrating Arts Activities into School Literacy," at Clinton Rosette Middle School in DeKalb.

Justin Geijer, a 2009 graduate (KNPE), published an article about his USOAR grant study in the Internet Journal of Allied Health Science and Practice. Associate professor William Pitey (KNPE) co-authored the article. Geijer is currently pursuing his Ph.D. at the University of Minnesota.

Hayal Kaçkar, a doctoral student in educational psychology (LEPP), was named a 2009 Emerging Scholar in Service Learning by the International Center for Research on Community Engagement at the University of Minnesota. Kaçkar also was named one of NIU’s Outstanding Women Graduate Students for 2009.

Gaylen Kopperman (TURN) received several grant awards from the U.S. Department of Education. $100,000 over 4 years to train teachers and orientation and mobility instructors of students with visual impairments; $500,000 over five years to prepare rehabilitation teachers, including a distance learning component; and his program is part of a consortium that received $5,000,000 to train doctoral candidates in the areas of blindness, visual impairment, and hearing impairment.

Alumnus Thomas Nolan authored a new book, Eternity Can Wait, designed to help the “fifty-something” age group prepare for retirement and beyond.

Gina Paulus, a 2009 Elementary Education graduate (TURN), received the “Outstanding Capstone Paper” award from the honors division.

William Pitey (KNPE) and Jenny Parker (KNPE) co-authored Qualitative Research in Physical Activity and the Health Professions, which was published in 2009.

David Shernoff (LEPP) is a co-principal investigator on a three-year research project, “Creating Minimal Video Games for Engineering Education Research,” which began in August. The project is supported by a grant award of $150,000 from the National Science Foundation.

Laurice Zittel (KNPE) received the Hollis Fait Scholarly Contribution Award from the National Consortium for Physical Education and Recreation for Individuals with Disabilities. The award recognizes significant contributions to the knowledge or understanding of physical education/recreation for individuals with disabilities. Zittel also received the Crystal Apple Award from Michigan State University; the award honors educators whose careers have had immeasurable value and significance in the field of education.

NIU Names Dean Watson Leader of P-20 Center

With the aim of heightening awareness of existing projects and encouraging future initiatives, NIU officially launched the Center for P-20 Engagement in August. “P-20” refers to teaching and learning that runs the spectrum from pre-school through graduate level. As Executive Director, Dr. Lemuel W. Watson will focus on coordinating P-20 projects, promoting NIU’s role as a leader in P-20 partnerships, and managing and extending NIU’s initiatives with educational organizations, governmental units, non-profits, and corporations. Watson adds this responsibility to his current duties as Dean of the College of Education.

“The goal of the Center for P-20 Engagement is to be a place where we can connect people, facilitate dialogue and enhance everyone’s work,” says Watson. “My intent is to become a key spokesperson for the university as we engage with communities and businesses to share knowledge about teaching and learning, create experiences for students and faculty, and bring folks together around critical issues in education.”

**Upcoming Events**

College of Education Holiday Celebration

Wednesday, December 9, 11:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.

NIU December Commencements:

Graduate – Saturday, December 12 @ 4 p.m.
Undergraduate – Sunday, December 13 @ 2 p.m.

College of Education Spring Event (invitation only)

Friday, April 23, 2010, NIU-Naperville

College of Education Gala Celebration

Saturday, August 28, 2010, 6 - 11 p.m., Barsema Alumni and Visitors Center

Contact Gail Hayenga (815-753-8370 or ghayenga@niu.edu) for more information about the above events or opportunities to volunteer.

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