

# The Power of Two



Issue 27

June 2015

## The Heart of Literacy

Melody, a Mothers' Club student, holds a rocket ship in her hand and lands it on each of the eight planets displayed on a felt board. She says the names out loud as the rocket ship descends onto the felt planets, feeling the shape of the words in her mouth, familiarizing herself with them.

On this sunny Saturday morning in March, twelve community volunteers gathered at Mothers' Club Family Learning Center to read the book *Space Song Rocket Ride*. Over the course of the 90-minute, highly interactive program, young children and their parents were able to come together to bring a story to life.

**The Early Readers' Book Club (ERBC)** is a central component of the Family Literacy Model, used by Mothers' Club and designed to strengthen the literacy skills of English-Learning parents and children through interactive story reading and related activities.

*"What I've learned is that it's not so much that they walk out of here being able to understand how the universe works, it's that they*



*The Plascencia family at ERBC*

*hear new words," Volunteer Program Coordinator Sarah Hilbert said. "And that, when they hear the words in a year or two again, they'll remember that early exposure and that's important for emerging literacy skills."*

*Literacy, continues on page 5*

## Remembering Mary Lois Nevins



*Mary Lois Nevins at the grand opening of our Family Literacy Center*

We are sad to announce that one of Mothers' Club's closest friends, **Mary Lois Nevins**, passed away on May 25th. An enthusiastic supporter of many organizations and an engaged community member, Mary Lois was known throughout Pasadena for her generosity, warm spirit, and passion for equal opportunity. She was a vivacious woman whose love of Mothers' Club Family Learning Center was contagious, encouraging others to join her in supporting our organization.

*Nevins, continues on page 3*

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*Receive more news and updates: Sign up for our E-Newsletter online at [www.mothersclub.org](http://www.mothersclub.org).*

**Save the Date**  
**Fall Food & Wine Festival**  
**Saturday, Oct. 17, 2015**

**Mothers' Club**  
**Family Learning Center**  
980 N. Fair Oaks Avenue  
Pasadena, CA 91103  
626.792.2687 Office  
626.793.1832 Fax

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[www.mothersclub.org](http://www.mothersclub.org)

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## A Letter from the Executive Director

The month of May at Mothers' Club Family Learning Center was dedicated to literacy. **Fostering a love of reading is a key component of our work at Mothers' Club.** Anecdotal, we know that reading and having access to books are important for young kids. But reading isn't just a nice thing for families to do together – it has a long-term impact on children's development and future success.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, **children's language skills by age 2**

**are predictive of their pre-literacy skills at age 5.** We also know that low-income students start school up to 14 months behind their more affluent peers. Children who attend high-quality early childhood education programs like Mothers' Club are less likely to need special education services, be held back, or drop out of high school. Focusing on the literacy skills of our youngest, most at-risk children is an investment in the future of our community as a whole.

During the **31 days of May**, Mothers' Club Board members,

volunteers, and staff joined together to launch our **Spring Into Literacy** campaign. Each committed individual reached out to their friends, family, and colleagues to tell them about the importance of literacy and ask for their help to provide school-readiness programs to 120 children and adult education programming to parents. As a result, we raised **\$35,000** for Mothers' Club Family Learning Center from more than **350 donors**. Every donation will be matched dollar-for-dollar by a challenge grant from **The Riordan Foundation**, doubling the impact. We'd like to thank all of our fundraisers for their hard work and welcome all of our new friends to the Mothers' Club family!

Unfortunately, May was also a sad month for us as we lost one of Mothers' Club's greatest friends, **Mary Lois Nevins**. We hope you will read about her contributions to our organization and join us in remembering her legacy.

Here's to another month of reading, learning, and growing at Mothers' Club Family Learning Center!



Hector LaFarga, Jr.  
Executive Director



### Fall Food & Wine Festival



Mothers' Club  
Family Learning Center

**SAVE THE DATE**  
**Saturday,**  
**October 17, 2015**

**Join us for a fun and festive night at**  
Mothers' Club Family Learning Center  
980 N. Fair Oaks Avenue  
Pasadena, CA 91103



*Nevins, continued from page 1*



*Sue Kujawa and Mary Lois Nevins, life-long friends*

Mary Lois played an integral role in enabling Mothers' Club Family Learning Center to become the robust, sustainable, and high-quality organization it is today. In 1988, Mary Lois became **president of the Board of Directors**. It was a challenging time for Mothers' Club, which depended heavily on volunteers and a small teaching staff led by part-time Administrator, Sue Kujawa. Mary Lois understood immediately that the value of Mothers' Club lay in its support and education of both mother and child. She was truly ahead of her time!

Mary Lois had been a teacher at Hillside, a residential program for troubled foster youth. One time she was interviewing a young Hillside resident and asked her if she could remember a good time in her life. The little girl replied that the only thing she could recall

was when she was very little and she went with her mother to a place on Orange Grove called Mothers' Club. That was all Mary Lois needed to hear to convince her of the value of two-generation learning.

Sue Kujawa recalls, *"I owe so much to Mary Lois. She believed whole-heartedly in the mission of Mothers' Club, and she believed in me. So I worked hard to live up to her view of me, and I am grateful for the rewarding path she helped set me upon."* Sue served as the Executive Director of Mothers' Club for the next 20 years. The two passionate and determined women sustained a life-long friendship.

Mary Lois continued to lead the charge to grow community support for Mothers' Club by recruiting Board members, donors, and volunteers. Her most powerful tool for the future welfare of Mothers' Club became an invitation to lunch at the **Orange Grove Friends Meeting House**, our original location. Mary Lois would ask people to join her for lunch and tell powerful stories of the impact Mothers' Club was having on families. She would bring mothers in to share their own stories. Once people saw what was happening at Mothers' Club in person, they were sold. This is a strategy we still use today. Once visitors walk through our doors, the impact of the program and the warmth of the environment speak for themselves.

In 2005, Mary Lois kicked off our **capital campaign** by providing

a lead gift that encouraged others to join in the cause. As a result, we were able to raise **\$6.5 million** to build our beautiful, state-of-the-art center on North Fair Oaks. Her legacy will live on with our permanent home forever named in honor of her and her late husband, Richard Nevins.



*Hector LaFarga, Jr. and Mary Lois in front of our Family Learning Center*

Mary Lois and Richard Nevins were married for 55 years. She is survived by her sons, Richard, William, and Henry; daughters-in-law, Sharon, Adele, and Nanette; grandchildren, Sarah, Katharine, Richard, Kasey, Austin, and Wynn; siblings, Hatheway Hasler, Helen Farley, and Dwight Minton; sisters-in-law, Katharine Schwarzenbach, Louisa Miller, and Dorothy Scully; 39 nieces and nephews; 61 great-nieces and nephews; and 6 great-great nieces and nephews. **A memorial service will be held at All Saints Church in Pasadena on June 24th at noon.** Mothers' Club friends and supporters are invited to attend and pay respects to one of our most dedicated advocates.

In lieu of flowers, the family has indicated that gifts can be directed to **Mothers' Club Family Learning Center**. Donations can be made online at [www.mothersclub.org](http://www.mothersclub.org) or sent to **980 N. Fair Oaks Ave., Pasadena, CA 91103**.



*Mary Lois celebrated the grand opening of our building with a little dance*

## A Volunteer's Experience



*Mona Field tutoring Mothers' Club mom, Alma Hernandez*

When I got to the stage in my semi-retired life where I wanted to give back in a way that utilized some of my skills, I found Mothers' Club Family Learning Center through an online volunteer match organization. I remembered that my daughter had done some volunteer hours there during high school, and I looked at the website and decided I could achieve some of my goals there.

But just feeling positive about Mothers' Club's mission and programs was not enough -- what really made me decide to volunteer was the immediate, helpful, and professional reply I got to my initial inquiry. Sarah, the Volunteer Program Coordinator, made me feel so welcome, encouraged me to visit, and just generally is so exceptionally good at her work that I knew I would want to try my

best for Mothers' Club.

Having been an ESL teacher many decades ago, and knowing that times and teaching techniques probably evolve, I went in prepared to learn and to be the best assistant/tutor I could be, and to always defer to the teacher's wishes regarding my contribution. I enjoy being able to use the teaching skills I acquired in my twenties, and I find that much of the pedagogy for adult ESL remains pretty much the same.

I have now been a classroom tutor/assistant to three different teachers: remarkable Ellen, who taught almost until her last breath, then John, who left to pursue his career in the ministry, and now Christian. Each one has a unique style with the students, and I try to follow instructions as best I can. In Christian's class, I work hard to avoid using my Spanish (so does he!) and to work with whichever students he wants me to.

I usually work with 3-5 students, reviewing their assignments, helping them write, read, and pronounce English. I feel good to know that my help matters, and they seem to look forward to seeing me. The only "challenge" is that so few of them have any opportunity to practice their English outside of class, and their progress is often slow.

But they are so eager to learn, and so persistent, despite, in some cases, very serious personal challenges, that I can't help but admire them. I also find myself (perhaps selfishly) counting my own blessings every time I am at Mothers' Club -- having the sheer luck to be born in this country, having parents who insisted on my getting a college education, having had wonderful career opportunities, and on and on.

So by helping these women (and a few men) and seeing their struggles with English, with poverty, with lack of important life skills, I gain so much for myself. Mothers' Club has become a very important part of my life, and I hope to continue tutoring there for many years to come.

*- Mona Field  
Mothers' Club Volunteer*

### Thank You to Our Partners

***Thank you to our foundation partners for their recent grant awards:***

JIB Fund Community Building Initiative  
*to enhance our Afternoon Program by providing  
comprehensive, holistic services*

Pasadena Tournament of Roses® Foundation  
*to support our Volunteer Program*

Atlas Family Foundation  
*to provide Early Childhood Education to infants and toddlers*

***Mothers' Club programs are funded in part by the following agencies:***

Pacific Clinics, Early Head Start

Los Angeles Universal Preschool

U.S. Department of Agriculture's Child and Adult Care Food Program

City of Pasadena, Community Development Block Grant

Pasadena City College Community Education Center





ERBC participants showing off their new books

Family Literacy is an inter-generational, community literacy model that brings adults and children together to learn, beginning before traditional school settings and continuing as a life long process. Mothers' Club has been carefully crafting and transforming this model since its inception in 1961.

*"Melody is a reader. She's always asking for books. Her family is impoverished. They live in a small apartment and her mom has to provide for four kids,"* Director of Education Julie Espinoza said. *"Yet, Melody's mom still has time to help Melody with homework and this is a result of the Family Literacy Model. Melody is an asset*

*to the family; she's a model to her youngest siblings."*

ERBC volunteers act as role models, showing the parents how to read aloud to their children in English. *"There are a lot of programs out there to have mommy read but we wanted the modeling of the volunteer, so that the parent would see how it was presented in a fun way,"* Espinoza said. *"Through this process, our parents become more comfortable with the read-aloud experience because ultimately when [their children] go to kindergarten and first grade, they have to sit every night and hear their child reading in English."*

Following the story time of *Space Song Rocket Ride*, the families went on to make their own rocket ships out of plastic cups. The kids eagerly talked about the planets and space, the words they had learned bubbling out in every direction. Everyone had the chance to imagine what he or she would bring to space with him or her in their rocket ships. Although some said, "burgers" or "my dog," the most common answer was "mom"

or "dad," "brother" or "sister," reaffirming the strong sense of family that is cultivated at Mothers' Club.

Watching the children confidently march out the door is an image of the Family Literacy Model in action. Melody holds hands with her mother, singing the song, as she waves her rocket ship through the air, *"I'm going to Space!"* she shouts, as the door shuts behind her.

*Written by Jane Drinkard, a sophomore at Occidental College. She spent a semester visiting Mothers' Club as part of the English Writing Department's "Writing with the Community" course.*



Volunteer Peggy Smith leading an ERBC small group

## Earn Money for Mothers' Club!

### Shop at Ralphs?

By registering your Ralphs Rewards card with their Community Contributions Program, a percentage of every dollar you spend at Ralphs will go to Mothers' Club. Please follow these simple steps to register:

1. Pick up a Ralphs Rewards card at your local market.
2. Register online at [www.ralphs.com](http://www.ralphs.com) and click on the upper right-hand link "Sign-In/Register."
3. Once you have an account, click on the "Community Contribution Program" in the left column.
4. Confirm your Ralphs Rewards card number is correct.
5. Locate Mothers' Club by entering our code: 90748
6. Select Mothers' Club and know that you are helping families every time you buy groceries!

### Make Purchases on Amazon?

AmazonSmile is a simple and automatic way for you to support your favorite organization. When you shop at [smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com), you'll find the exact same low prices, vast selection and convenient shopping experience as Amazon.com, with the added bonus that Amazon will donate a portion of the purchase price to Mothers' Club. Please follow these simple steps to register:

1. Go to [smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com)
2. On your first visit, select Mothers' Club Family Learning Center to receive donations from eligible purchases.
3. Shop as you usually do!
4. Visit [www.smile.amazon.com](http://www.smile.amazon.com) every time you want to purchase something through Amazon. Mothers' Club will automatically be selected.

## Telling Our Family Stories

Last semester, mothers from our Afternoon Program participated in a 9-week **Family Storybook class** as part of our **parent education curriculum**. The class provided mothers the time and encouragement needed to tackle a project that may otherwise have proved overwhelming because of limited time and resources. Participants were provided cameras, printers, and scrapbook materials. Memories long stored away were a critical part of the family story project as well.

The books are a powerful way for the parents to share their familial past with their children. Each mother included an autobiography page in her book, leading her to reflect on her own childhood and how far she has come since. The autobiography pages allowed the mothers to see the impact their parents had on them, and to further understand the important role they play in their own children's lives.

The class was led by Mothers' Club mom **Abby Valdovinos**, who carefully outlined the course ahead of time so that each week would focus on a different aspect of creating a family storybook. Each



*Back Row (Left to right): Gemmy Ramirez, Yanet Rayes, Patricia Flores, Elvia Montenegro, Marlene Castillo, Angelica Guevara, Norma Favela; Front Row: Joanna Moreno, Angelica Garcia, Abby Valdovinos, Adriana Munoz, Jeanette Rodriguez*

book is a testament to the mother's love for her child. By including pages filled with the lyrics of their child's favorite song, a picture of their favorite book, a collage of their best qualities, and countless childhood photographs, the parents succeeded in communicating to their children just how special and loved they are.

The course culminated in all the participants presenting their finished products to one another, in what turned out to be a very joyful and emotional last class. Mothers laughed as they shared their children's quirks and cried remembering the day they were born.

The class was an opportunity for the participants to bond over the creation of the books, to chat while sharing memories of their children and their own childhoods, and to take the time they would otherwise not have to create a meaningful keepsake for their children. After presenting her book to the group, Mothers' Club single mom of three Norma Favela said: "See! I don't have time," as she changed her shoes under the table to jet off to her job. "We need more classes like these!"

- Lara Nassar  
Development Assistant



*Angelica Garcia and her Family Storybook*

### Join Us for a Tour

The best way to learn about what happens at Mothers' Club is to visit our Center and take a guided tour with staff.

#### Upcoming Tours:

Thursday, June 18 - 11:30am  
Tuesday, July 7 - 9am  
Thursday, July 16 - 11:30am  
Tuesday, Aug 4 - 9am  
Thursday, Aug 13 - 11:30am  
Tuesday, Sept 1 - 9am  
Thursday, Sept 17 - 11:30am

To RSVP or for more information call  
(626) 792-2687 ext. 122 or  
email [mara@mothersclub.org](mailto:mara@mothersclub.org)



# Thank You to the Mothers' Club Guardians

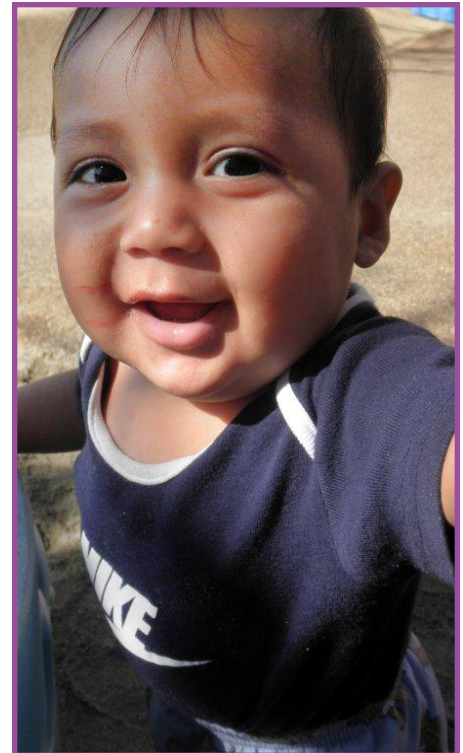
The *Guardians* provide sustaining support for our programs and operations by donating \$1,000 or more to our annual fund.



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## Leave a Legacy to Future Generations, Remember Mothers' Club in Your Will

All gifts to Mothers' Club provide you with the personal satisfaction of providing critical services to our community's most vulnerable children and families. Planned gifts can give you even more in return.

By including Mothers' Club in your will or living trust, you can ensure that Mothers' Club will remain a valuable resource for generations of families to come. We can refer you to professionals who will help you design a charitable gift plan that benefits Mothers' Club and enables you and your family to fulfill your personal financial goals.

If you would like to learn more, please contact our Development Office at (626)792-2687, ext. 122.

Thank you for partnering with us to meet the needs of future children and parents.

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## Our Mission & Guiding Principles

Mothers' Club Family Learning Center prepares families living in isolation and poverty to succeed in school and in life through two-generation learning programs. Our programs are built on two guiding principles: in order for significant, long-term change to occur within a family, you must reach both parent and child and educate them together; and, the most critical time to reach a family is when children are proven to be most vulnerable and impressionable, between birth and 5 years-old.

## The Power of Two-Generation Learning

We fulfill our mission by providing FREE programs to disadvantaged families with children ages 0-5. Our two-generation learning model helps mothers and children gain the knowledge, skills and confidence they will need to break out of poverty. National research and our own evaluation results confirm that increasing the education levels of both a parent and their child is an irrefutable way to promote long-term, positive change within a family and a community.

**Donate Online & Learn More at [www.mothersclub.org](http://www.mothersclub.org)**

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The Power of Two - June 2015

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**Fall Food & Wine Festival**  
**Saturday, Oct. 17, 2015**