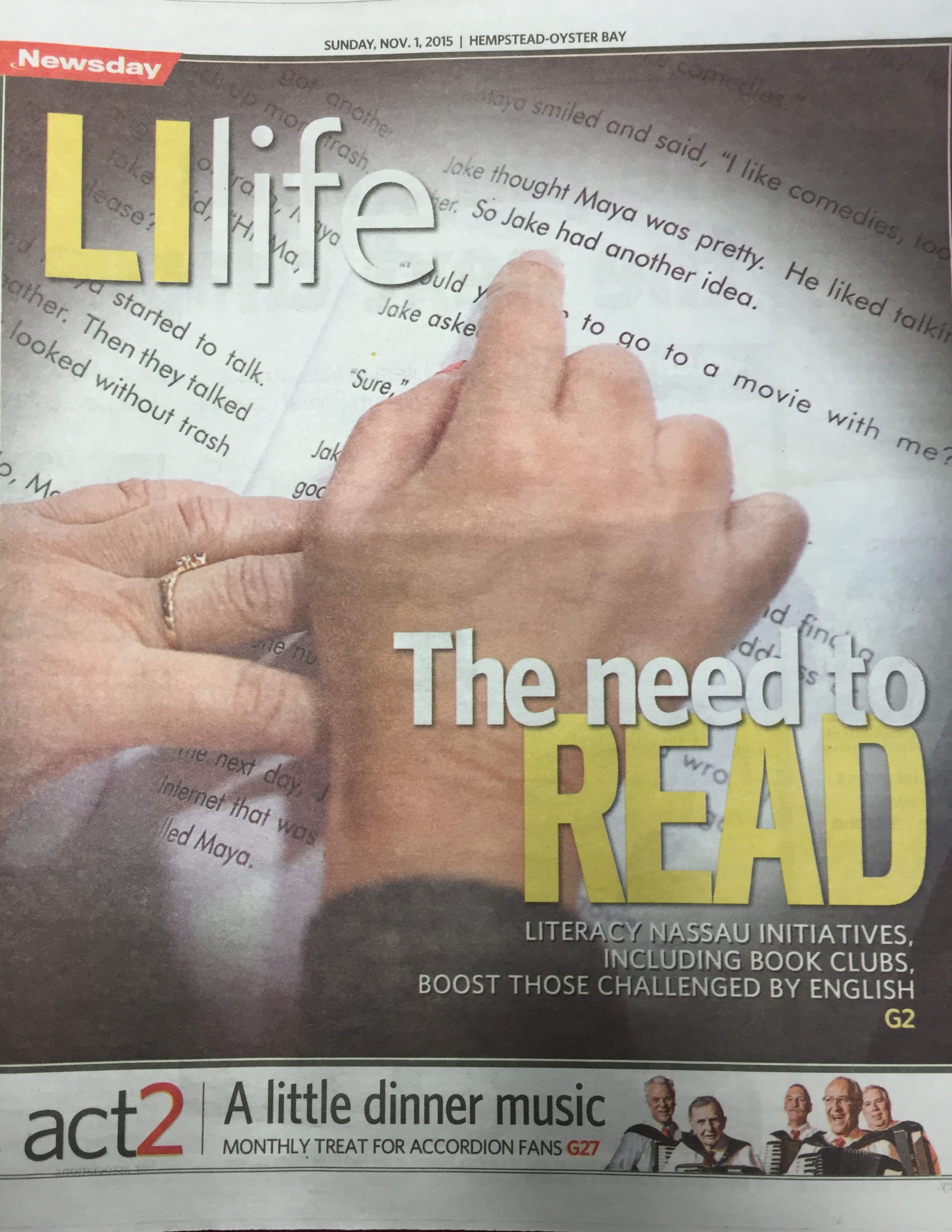


Lilife



The need to READ

LITERACY NASSAU INITIATIVES, INCLUDING BOOK CLUBS, BOOST THOSE CHALLENGED BY ENGLISH

G2

act2

A little dinner music

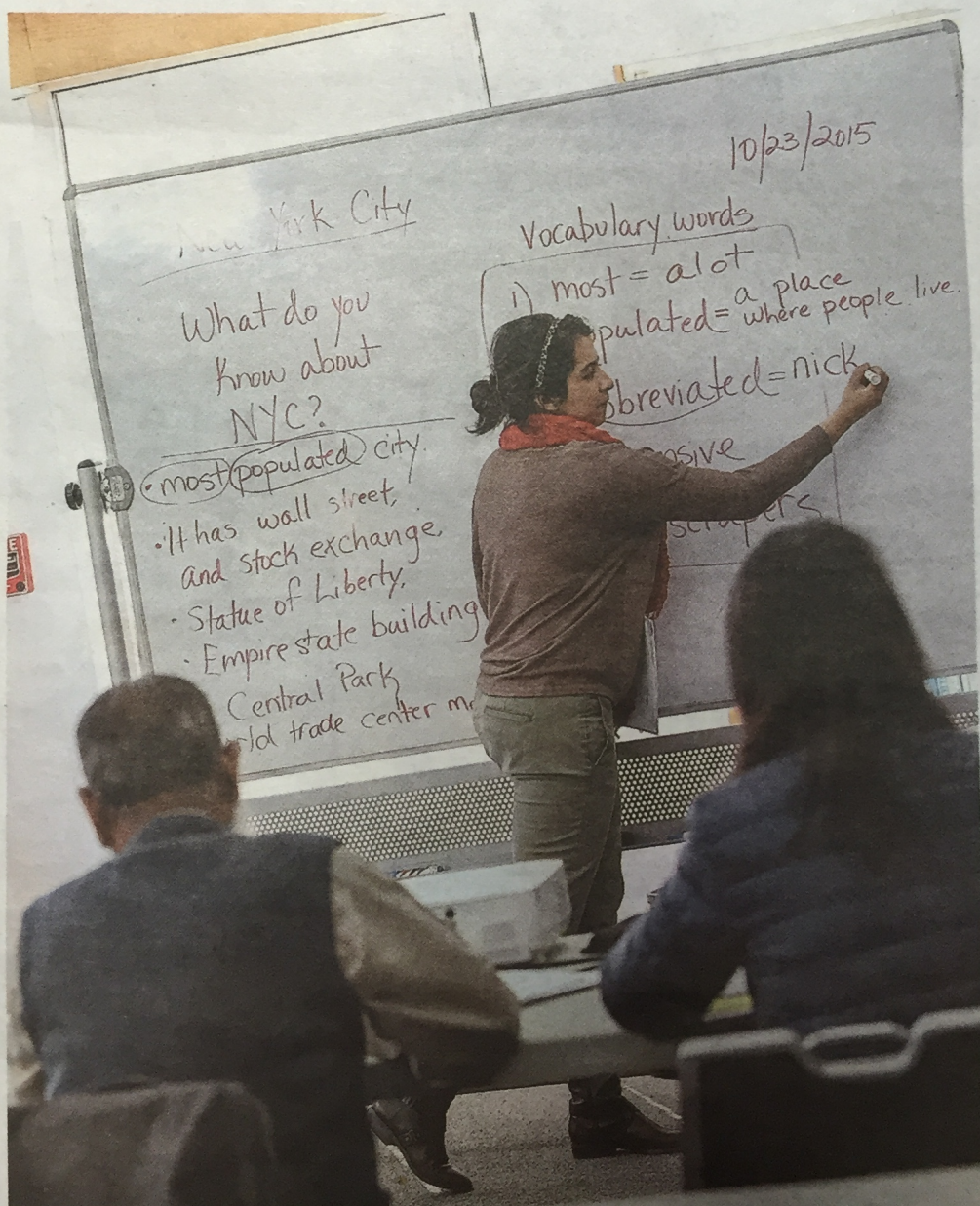
MONTHLY TREAT FOR ACCORDION FANS G27



Helping with the next chapter

VOLUNTEER NATION
update

Literacy Nassau assists adults who want to learn English, assimilate to a new culture



Umama Pasha teaches a lesson as part of Literacy Nassau at the Hicksville Public Library.
■ More photos at newsday.com/lilife



CATCHING UP Literacy Nassau was featured in LI Life in November last year.

BY STACEY ALTHERR
Special to Newsday

Umama Pasha leans across the desk and, with a smile, shakes the hand of each student. “Hi! My name is Umama. What’s your name?” When they reply, she asks, “How are you today?” Pasha, 26, a program administrator and educator for Literacy Nassau, a Freeport-based nonprofit that provides reading, writing and English lessons to adult students at public libraries across the county, is teaching the American version of small talk to her students.

All are immigrants preparing for their citizenship interviews. Pasha wants them to feel comfortable replying to conversational questions that usually begin the nerve-racking appointment that is the first step toward becoming an American citizen.

“It’s not about the grammar, but to build confidence,” Pasha explains. “It’s to help our learners gain indepen-

LINDA ROSIER

COVERSTORY



JONAH MARCUM



LINDA ROSE

Above, Joanne Depaula moderates the Next Chapter Book Club, for adults with autism and other learning disorders. At left, Literacy Nassau students learn English.

Learn more

To find out how to donate, become a tutor or sign up for Literacy Nassau programs:

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EMAIL: mail@literacynassau.org

VISIT: literacynassau.org

Literacy Nassau
187 Smith St.
Freeport, NY 11520

dence.” Pasha’s students will spend nine weeks meeting for three hours each week in a community room at the Hicksville Public Library in this pilot program — one of several recently initiated by Literacy Nassau, including book clubs for autistic

and developmentally disabled adults, and other sessions meant to ease assimilation into a new culture. The group also helps native speakers with literacy needs.

Literacy Nassau is one of 27 Office for New Americans Opportunity Centers set up

across New York State. There are two others on Long Island. All are set up within established organizations that already offer community programs.

Literacy Nassau was featured in the November 2014 installment of the monthly Volunteer Nation series. The

story highlighted the group’s Office for New Americans program. Newsday recently checked in to learn what the nonprofit has been up to in the past year.

Learning, making friends

There’s no slouching or

staring out the window in this classroom. The five students — from Pakistan, the Dominican Republic and China — listen intently as Pasha teaches the current reading assignment on New York City. They learn about its attractions and importance as a financial center of the world. They learn what Wall Street is, for example, and what “expensive” means.

Aziz Chaudrey, 75, is from Pakistan. He left his homeland five years ago to live with his daughter on Long Island. He is committed to learning the language and passing the citizenship exam. He said he sees this country as a haven and wants to be a part of it.

“It is not safe,” Chaudrey says of his native land, carefully choosing his words. “Here, life is safe.”

For Jane Wang — she prefers her Anglicized first name — the program is about making friends and being part of a community. Wang, 53, takes another English literacy class

See COVER STORY on G4

Boosting English and lives

COVER STORY from G2

in the program, but said this one helps her learn more about American culture so she can feel more comfortable in social surroundings.

"I need to learn more," said Wang, who is married and has been in the country for three years. "I need to become more independent."

One of the newest programs within Literacy Nassau is the Next Chapter Book Club. Its focus is adults with autism and other social and learning difficulties that make fitting into a community more challenging. The book club gathered for the first time on Oct. 6 at the Hillside Public Library in New Hyde Park. Other book clubs meet in Syosset and Bellmore.

Based on a national program created at The Ohio State University, members meet in public places, such as Panera Bread and public libraries, and discuss books with a Literacy Nassau facilitator. The idea of the club is for its members to feel comfortable grabbing a cup of coffee in a public place and meeting their peers.

Readers in the club can discuss books such as "Marley and Me."

"Children and teen literature is not interesting to them," said Kim Nau, Literacy Nassau's office manager and the program director of Next Chapter Book Club. The club aims to offer high-interest books for lower-level readers.

"They don't want to read about high school problems," Nau said.

Often the books are abridged. A recent reading of "Eat, Pray, Love" by Elizabeth Gilbert, which has 352 pages in its regular paperback edition, has 60 pages in the version used by the book club, according to Karen Micciche, executive director at Literacy Nassau, which currently serves 725 people with the help of 450 volunteers and a nine-person staff.

The book club focuses on community and inclusion, social interaction and literacy. Facilitators have the members read aloud — if they can — and help with any words or content not understood.



Karen Micciche serves as executive director of Literacy Nassau, which currently assists 725 people with the help of 450 volunteers.

We are the eHarmony of literacy!

— Karen Micciche, Literacy Nassau executive director, explaining how the right volunteer is matched to a reader

"At the first meeting, I was surprised how talkative they were," recalled Nau, a former English as a Second Language teacher. "It's about learning how to enjoy a book, socialize with friends and enjoy the camaraderie."

Literacy Nassau, which jump-started the program with a grant from the John and Janet Kornreich Charitable Foundation, hopes to expand the clubs to 25 sites across the county in the next year.

Literacy tutoring has relied

on a basic and proven method: one-on-one tutoring. Volunteers traditionally met for about three hours a week with their new learner over an indeterminate period of time.

Literacy Nassau has changed that. The idea is that some students, especially those a little further along in their English studies, can benefit from a group class. Now new learners attend a small group for beginners, where the basics, such as learning the names of articles

of clothing, are taught.

After the five-week program, the readers are assessed to find the right one-on-one volunteer tutor.

"We are the eHarmony of literacy," jokes Micciche, explaining how the right volunteer is matched to a reader.

That program used to go on indefinitely, but now it's for one year. After that, the learners return to more advanced small-group instruction for 12 weeks with a volunteer, who

is usually a retired teacher, and then for those who go on, an 11-week English class made up of a larger group. Those sessions are led by a paid instructor who is TESOL — Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages — certified.

The large-group class not only expands on vocabulary but also focuses on cultural norms, often taking students on field trips to places such as Sagamore Hill, the home of President Theodore



Umama Pasha works with Juan Ventura, 62, who is from the Dominican Republic. After a five-week small-group class, students are assessed and paired, one-on-one, with a volunteer tutor.

LINDA ROSIER



BRUCE GILBERT

Pasha trains volunteers to teach English to nonnative speakers at the Jericho Public Library while Carl Martin of Oceanside takes notes.



Carol Barnes, right, a retired New York City teacher, helps student Josefina Victoria Reynolds of the Dominican Republic during a Literacy Nassau session.

Roosevelt, and even to the Tanger Outlet in Riverhead so they can be taught about coupon books and sale racks — things that can get by a new English learner. The class also is funded by the New York State Office of New Americans.

Along the way, students from beginning to advanced are given standardized tests to mark their progress.

“Our mission has always been to teach the hardest to teach,” Micciche said.

‘They are so grateful’

Despite new initiatives and programs, there is something that doesn’t change: the hundreds of volunteers who fan out across Nassau County’s public libraries and other public spaces to work with the English language learners.

At the Long Island Cares office in Freeport, Carol Barnes, a retired New York City teacher and administrator, is explaining to a three-member group of very limited

English speakers why we use a singular noun for a shirt, but pants take a plural. She runs her hands down her own pant legs to make sure they understand that it is because there are two legs covered by fabric.

Her own background in teaching is evident when she zeros in on the students struggling with nuances of the language. She calls them by name and goes over a concept until she is sure they grasp it.

Next, Barnes explains the

difference between “this” and “that.” Most native English speakers use it without thinking of the difference, but to someone not born into the language, teaching words that change based on proximity of the item to the person speaking can be mind-boggling. Barnes keeps at it, patiently, using at least 10 examples to make sure they get it. Each student speaks slowly and carefully as they answer her, with Barnes helping them with enunciation.

What keeps her going is her students, who, she said, are so committed to becoming a part of their new world that they show up and tackle the weighty task at hand.

“I can’t say there was one student who didn’t want to be here and do the work,” Barnes said. “They are so grateful.”

The same can be said of Literacy Nassau’s staff and volunteers.

“You can help people in a really meaningful way,” Micciche said.