



# *Giving Immigrants a Voice*

SUMMER 2017

## Twenty-Five Years, 25 Memories

### *Reflections from Diane Portnoy*

The Immigrant Learning Center was born 25 years ago. They say it takes a village to raise a child. It certainly has taken a whole community of supporters to make The ILC a success. I am proud and grateful, and I thank you for whatever part you have played.

To mark the occasion, I've collected 25 moments that made The ILC what it is today. Below are some of the most poignant memories. You can see the full list on our website at [www.ilctr.org/25-memories](http://www.ilctr.org/25-memories).

I am looking forward to making more memories at our 25th Anniversary Gala on October 28, 2017. I hope to see you there.



Yogi Berra and Diane Portnoy after receiving the 2001 Ellis Island Medal of Honor

- In 1992, I wanted to start a free English school and knew I could not fund it all on my own. With no fundraising experience, I reached out to friends and family for additional support. Kay and Gerry Martin and Anders Schroeder were the first to say yes.
- On November 9, 1992, my dream came true when the doors of The Immigrant Learning Center opened with three teachers, 60 students and 80 more on the waiting list.
- The school and I have received many honors and recognition over the years. One of the highlights of my life came in May 2001 when I was awarded the Ellis Island Medal of Honor. It was my second time on Ellis Island, the first being when I arrived from Poland as a child. I'll never forget seeing my and my parents' names etched on the wall there.
- One of the lowest points in my life also came in 2001 on September 11. In the days and weeks following the attacks, the classrooms emptied. Students were afraid to come to school because strangers were accosting them on the street. I knew I had to do something to address public opinion of immigrants, and the seeds of the Public Education Institute started to grow.
- In 2004, IBM donated 27 new computers to transform our patched-together collection of computers into a real computer lab where to this day every student has access.
- Noticing that students who struggled the most in our classes were those with little or no literacy in their native language, the Literacy Program was launched in 2006. From humble beginnings as a "one-room school house," it has evolved into a sophisticated multi-level program that serves as a model in the region.



All ILC students have the chance to improve English and computing skills in the computer lab.

*... continued on next page*

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## Twenty-Five Years, 25 Memories (continued)

- Although Malden has one of the largest foreign-born populations in the area, new citizens had to go elsewhere to be sworn in. That changed in 2011 when The ILC sponsored our first, annual swearing-in ceremony. There's something very special about watching people of every color from many religions, ages and economic statuses hold the American flag in one hand and raise the other to take the oath of citizenship. It reminds me of being eight years old and watching my parents become U.S. citizens.



ILC student with her son becoming a citizen at The ILC's first swearing-in ceremony in 2011

- I wanted a university partner to get the national attention needed for our research, and, in 2011, I identified George Mason University (GMU) as the best choice. I recall the first meeting at GMU where they told me it couldn't work. I also recall the meeting where we signed the contract that created the Institute for Immigration Research at GMU.

## See you there...

The ILC 25th Anniversary Gala will be held on Saturday, October 28. Full of fine food, dancing and plenty of surprises, you will want to be there to claim your stake in our history as well as our future.



ILC Board Member Saritin Rizzuto speaks to the first Entrepreneur Class at The ILC.

- Our teachers and counselors help students with their next steps, such as finding a job or enrolling in college or training programs, but were at a loss when students wanted to start a business. The solution came in 2016 when we launched the Entrepreneur Class. Since so much of our work in Public Education is touting the virtues of immigrant entrepreneurs, this felt like the perfect "next step" for us.
- The ILC has never advertised. All our students come to us from word of mouth. It's not uncommon for former students to bring in friends and family to register. It's always a joy for me to see returning students and learn what they have made of their lives. The most recent was in January 2017 when Narciso came in to register his cousin and tell us he had opened his own auto body shop.



The ILC is a not-for-profit corporation supported by tax-deductible charitable contributions and, in part, by funding from The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education; Mystic Valley Elder Services, Inc., the Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs and the Federal Administration for Community Living; and the cities of Malden and Medford, Massachusetts.

## Your support provides the tools for change

These may be challenging times for immigrants and refugees, but your support enables The ILC Public Education Institute to respond rapidly and effectively. More than 2,000 people in 46 states gained the tools they need to confront stereotypes, urge change and reframe the conversation on immigration through our free webinars. Participants interact with experts from nationally recognized organizations in these virtual mini-conferences where questions are answered in real time, and recordings are posted on The ILC website for anyone to reference. No one else gives access to this level of expertise in one easy, free resource.

In October, 2016, the Institute hosted **Building United Communities: Immigrants, Cops and Crime** to combat immigration myths and explore community policing. It was led by Chelsea, MA, Police Chief Brian Kyes and included speakers from the Council of American Islamic Relations, Vera Institute of Justice and Catholic Charities of Omaha, NE.



Chelsea, MA, Police Chief Brian Kyes led the discussion during the October 2016 webinar **Building United Communities: Immigrants, Cops and Crime**.

The fifth and final webinar for 2016 was **Numbers that Matter: Using Immigration Data to Advance Change** in December. It featured a live tutorial of Immigration Data on Demand, a free service from the Institute for Immigration Research (IIR), a joint venture between The ILC and George Mason University.

“ I loved the webinar, it gave me a lot of great information that I can use personally and also helped me better understand the communication issues. I am a school counselor with middle school age students and the webinar solidified my ideas about how to move forward with our kids.”

*Allison Cain, Des Moines Public Schools*

*Participant in the “Taking Back the Narrative” webinar.*

This year kicked off with **Taking Back the Narrative: How to Talk About Immigrants and Immigration** on February 23. It showed immigrant- and refugee-serving organizations, faith leaders, and community organizers how to promote thoughtful discussion and foster change.

Demand for the Institute’s perspective is high. Director Denzil Mohammed spoke recently at Babson College, Emerson College, Goodwin Law, The House of the Seven Gables and the National College Transition Network conference in Warwick, RI.

The Public Education Institute was founded in response to anti-immigrant rhetoric following the 9/11 attacks. With your continued support, we will be here to provide the positive truth about immigrants in the face of any new challenge.

## Help The ILC while you help yourself

Each time you shop at Amazon, you can help give immigrants a voice.

Simply start at <https://smile.amazon.com>, select The Immigrant Learning Center, Inc. as your charity of choice and Amazon will donate 0.5 percent of the price of your eligible purchases.





## ILC Awards Dinner highlights impact of immigrant entrepreneurs



From left to right: ILC Board Member Saritin Rizzuto, Neighborhood Business Winner and Co-Founder of CEROCoop Josefin Luna, Mass. Secretary of Housing and Economic Development Jay Ash, and co-founder of CEROCoop Lor Holmes

The only event of its kind in New England, The Immigrant Learning Center's Immigrant Entrepreneur Awards Dinner is a powerful reminder of the contributions immigrants make to our society. On May 4, 2017, more than 200 business and community leaders came together to honor the accomplishments of 35 outstanding nominees from 21 countries who started businesses in 24 Massachusetts communities.

Guest speakers Massachusetts Secretary of Housing and Economic Development Jay Ash and Jeff Bussgang, general partner at Flybridge Capital and co-chair of the Global Entrepreneur in Residence

program, made powerful statements about the role immigrants play in economic development and innovation. The ILC's Founder and CEO Diane Portnoy underscored the importance of this message by saying, "Through this event tonight, our presentations at conferences across the country and our national, free webinars that have reached thousands, we are replacing ignorance and fear with truth and hope."

In accepting the award for Life Science, Dr. Johannes Fruehauf referred to conflicting public narratives about immigrants and asked, "So whose jobs are they stealing? The innovation and ingenuity of those [LabCentral] entrepreneurs created over 700 new direct jobs, and that typically translates into five to six times more indirect jobs. It is important to check and change the narrative, and that's what we are doing here tonight.... As immigrants, entrepreneurs, as successful business people, we have a special obligation to speak out against these short-sighted and often bigoted arguments when we see and hear them."

To see photos from the Awards and video interviews with the nominees, go to <http://bit.ly/icawards>. Please join us at next year's Awards Dinner on May 3. You can nominate an outstanding business owner starting in January.

### Meet the winners:



**Business Growth Winner:**  
Jose de la Rosa, co-founder of Guardian Healthcare in Jamaica Plain.  
Country of origin: Dominican Republic



**High-Tech Business Winner:**  
Sandro Catanzaro, co-founder of DataXu in Boston.  
Country of origin: Peru



**Neighborhood Business Winner:**  
Josefin Luna, co-founder of CEROCoop in Dorchester.  
Country of origin: Dominican Republic



**Life Science Business Winner:**  
Johannes Fruehauf, founder of BioLabs, LabCentral and BioInnovation Capital in Cambridge.  
Country of origin: Germany

## Her search for freedom is made easier with your help

Yenny worked for the Venezuelan government in customs administration and taxes for 19 years. Employees, like herself, who did not speak favorably of the government were given longer hours and harder work. She injured her back processing heavy packages without assistance. The final straw came when her children were threatened. The Communist Party is known for punishing dissenters, particularly protesting university students. When her two college-age children noticed they were being followed, the family made plans to leave.

“To be here, it means an opportunity to be free. Coming here, our lives were saved. Therefore, I want to give back whatever I can.”

Her daughter came to the United States in March 2015. Yenny and her son stayed behind so he could finish his dissertation. They got out just in time. One week after they left for the United States in November 2015, the Venezuelan government announced a prohibition against anyone who worked in customs leaving the country.

Yenny and her children applied for asylum upon arrival. Unlike refugees, asylum seekers are not offered

support from the U.S. government. She used her savings to survive. Yenny remembers tearfully the first thing she ever got for free was her new student binder when she started at The ILC in April 2016.



Yenny studies English at The ILC while waiting for her asylum case to be processed.

Through your support, we are not only giving her the English skills she needs to thrive, we are helping her feel she belongs. “The ILC has changed my life and way of thinking,” says Yenny. “My mom is also a teacher. I really appreciate all the hard work The ILC teachers do for newcomers who don’t speak the language. Not only learning English, also learning how to be a good citizen.”

In December 2016, she was granted a temporary work permit. It may be another year before her case is heard and she finds out if she can stay in this country. Yenny is so grateful to be here. She says, “To be here, it means an opportunity to be free. Coming here, our lives were saved. Therefore, I want to give back whatever I can.”

## A winner gives back



Josef von Rickenbach is the founder and CEO of PAREXEL International Corp. Originally from Switzerland, Joe is also the winner of the 2014 ILC Immigrant Entrepreneur Award for Life Science Business. Ever since, he has been a loyal sponsor of the Awards and supporter of The ILC. In his own words:

“It was an honor for me to be recognized. The Awards Dinner is an inspiring event that I enjoy every year. I am proud to be part of an American tradition of welcoming immigrants, and I’m proud to support The Immigrant Learning Center’s efforts to educate Americans about the critical contributions immigrants make to this country.”

# Thank You Donors

*It is with our deepest thanks that we recognize the following community groups, corporations and foundations that made financial and in-kind contributions to The ILC between November 1, 2016, and June 30, 2017.*

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