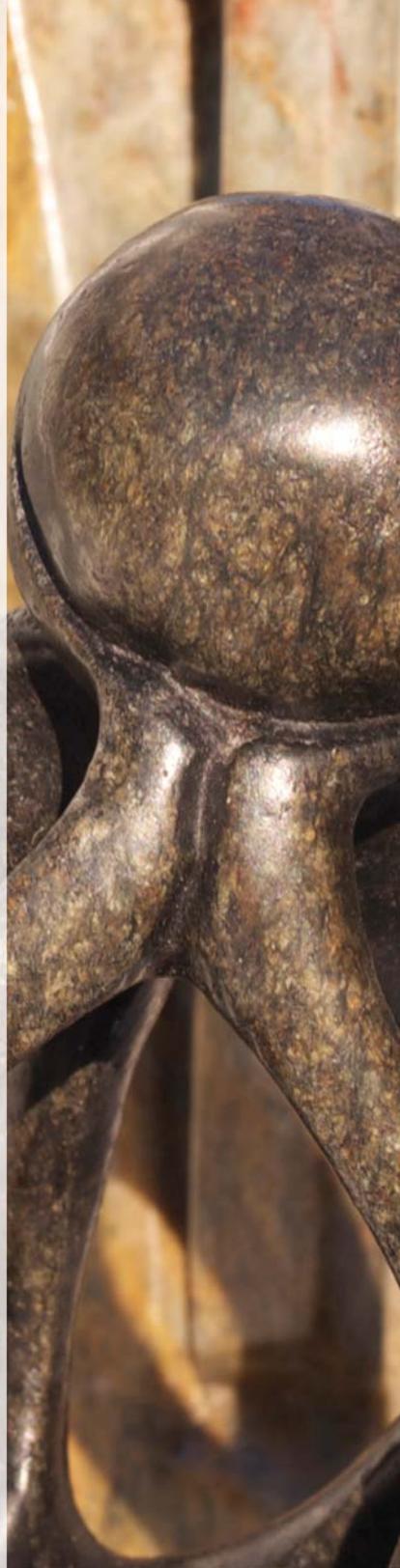




**2015**

Life Of Learning Awards



# Welcome to the 16th Annual LOLA Celebration!

The Life of Learning Awards (the LOLAs) celebrate contributions in Calgary's adult learning field. This year, we will present awards in the following categories:

- Learning Champion for an educator who makes a great contribution to community-based adult foundational learning.
- Learning Communities for a learning program/project that stands out in innovation, effectiveness and breadth of reach into the adult foundational learning community.
- Adult Learner for a learner at a foundational level who loves learning, stands out in his or her efforts to keep learning and inspires others by example.
- Thanks A Bunch showcases a funder (individual or corporation) whose commitment and financial contribution help support the needs of adult foundational level learners.



## Agenda

### Welcome

**Barb Higgins** - Master of Ceremony

**Nancy Purdy** - Executive Director

### Keynote Speaker

**Lesra Martin**

### Award Presentations

**Learning Champion** - Debbie Wiebe

**Learning Communities** -VESL

**Adult Learner** -Shala Quinn

**Thanks A Bunch** - The Rotary Club of Calgary

### Closing Remarks



### MC - Barb Higgins

Barb Higgins is a former award winning newscaster and journalist and ongoing Calgary enthusiast. Barb has always been a huge supporter of Calgary non-profits.

## Keynote Speaker - Lesra Martin

Lesra Martin was once an inner city kid dismissed by society, yet his heart carried hope and courage. He effected profound change in the lives of many, including his own.

Lesra Martin's heartrending story has mesmerized and inspired millions through the major Hollywood feature "The Hurricane". Its star, Denzel Washington, marvelled over Lesra's real life odyssey from a poorly educated Brooklyn teen to a respected attorney. Inspired by his experiences, The National Film Board of Canada produced the documentary "The Journey of Lesra Martin", and the compelling film has been screened at film festivals throughout Canada as well as the Hollywood Black Film Festival, The Urban Literary Film Festival (Greensboro, U.S.) and the 24th International Durban Film Festival, (Durban, South Africa).



He was invited to speak before the General Assembly delegates at the United Nations, where he gave an impassioned speech about the devastating effects of illiteracy and poverty, and at Cambridge University, where he spoke before world leaders. He has been featured on countless television and radio shows, most notably as a special guest on The Oprah Winfrey Show.

Of his eight siblings, Lesra is the only one with a high school diploma. He completed high school as an Ontario scholar in 1983 and received an Honours B.A. from the University of Toronto in 1988. He achieved his law degree from Dalhousie Law School in 1997 and served as a Crown Prosecutor in Kamloops, BC. He now has his own law firm, Martin & Martin Lawyers, in Kamloops.

Lesra has received numerous awards and certificates of recognition for his willingness to be a role model and mentor for youth. "The power to make a difference exists in each of us," he tells audiences. He has shared his message of hope with thousands, appearing before corporate groups, community organizations, schools and universities.

## Learning Champion Award - Debbie Wiebe



Debbie Wiebe is a champion of mental health consumers. Specifically, she's a national leader in peer support and learning for individuals with mental health issues.

During her twenty years at the Canadian Mental Health Association, Debbie has been instrumental in creating and leading Calgary's Peer Options/Art of Friendship program. This innovative peer-mentoring program teaches foundational thinking and communication skills that help participants make social connections. The model allows participants to transition over time from entry-level learners to peer facilitators and on to reintegration into community.

Recently, Debbie adapted the Art of Friendship peer mentor model to address the social needs of downtown residents displaced by the 2013 flood. Another adaptation serves individuals isolated in long-term care facilities. Yet a third adaptation is aimed at helping mental health clients focus more deeply on recovery and the actions that can lead them there.

Debbie works at many levels to pave the way for learners with mental health issues. She's in the background renewing the peer mentor model, securing funds, leading and training staff, and managing facility use. She has also served on the national Canadian Mental Health Commission and subsequently as a founding member of the Peer Support Accreditation and Certification Canada committee.

In the words of a colleague, "Debbie has a unique vision. Fundamentally, she is passionate about seeing someone else find the dignity to become an encourager." Debbie helps those who are well along in recovery find ways to encourage others who may be at the beginning of their journey.

Mental illness is filled with issues of stigma, marginalizing and isolating individuals. Debbie stands up to that stigma, helping mental health clients learn from each other and become friends.

## Learning Communities Award - VESL

Since 2005, VESL (Volunteer ESL Tutor Training Project) has supported the training of volunteer English language tutors across Calgary. This is a collaborative effort of four Calgary ELL service providers: Bow Valley College, the Calgary Public Library, the Calgary Catholic Immigration Society and the YWCA of Calgary. Bow Valley College graciously acts as lead partner and fiscal agent for this Calgary Learns funded program.



VESL provides six workshops throughout the year led by seasoned ESL instructors. Workshops are offered free-of-charge to volunteers tutoring English language learners with foundational learning needs. In the past two years alone, VESL has trained 285 tutors from ten organizations.

The program also supports tutors through its website. [vesl.ca](http://vesl.ca) contains open-access workshop materials, tutor tips, volunteer profiles and other useful information. The results are rich and far-reaching. Volunteer tutors often play key roles in helping foundational learners identify learning needs and access resources. VESL training ensures learners participate in authentic and relevant learning.

Here's just one example. "I found idioms to be one of the most difficult topics to explain to learners", one tutor writes. "Without the VESL workshop on idioms and the inspiration and practical advice that I received there, I would not have had the knowledge or skills to tackle this topic in my ESL tutoring." As idioms became an increasingly popular tutorial topic, this tutor's learners began to research and present unfamiliar idioms to their classmates, learning best by teaching.

VESL helps ELL service providers attract and retain dedicated volunteers. VESL in turn builds the capacity and credibility of volunteer-run ESL programs. The tutors are building a vibrant volunteer network while learning side by side. And their learners reap the benefits of it all.

## Adult Learner Award — Shala Quinn



“Canada is my sun,” says Shala about the country that has become a home and place of dreams for her and her family. Shala, like many girls in the rest of the world, did not have the benefit of schooling. She became a child bride and mother in her early teens. In the early 90’s, Shala moved to Canada as a single mother with her children. She taught herself to speak, read and write English by watching television and listening to her children.

Shala first became a student at Bow Valley College in the Adult Basic Literacy Education program. In 2014, she enrolled in the Lifeline to Literacy program. Today, she is a fulltime student in ESL classes during the week and continues with her Lifeline to Literacy program two nights a week. In addition to taking classes day and night, Shala is always searching for part-time employment to support her family.

Shala’s achievements in Calgary are a remarkable testimonial to her belief in education as the key to her empowerment and her future. All of her teachers have spoken highly of her dedication to her studies, her positive attitude and her caring nature.

Despite her very busy schedule, Shala still finds time to volunteer with a number of non-profit agencies in her community. An inspiration to all those around her, one of Shala’s greatest successes is as a shining role model for her children. Her daughter says, “My mother is the perfect example of someone who loves to learn. She reminds us always of the importance of learning and how we can achieve greatness through learning.”

## Thanks A Bunch Award - The Rotary Club of Calgary

Over the past 16 years The Rotary Club of Calgary has supported strategic enhancements in Bow Valley College adult literacy programs. Rotary's Adult Literacy Committee funds new learning materials, volunteer and staff training, specialized computer hardware and much, much more.



Two part-time programs have particularly benefited from Rotary's ongoing commitment: the SARAW (Speech Assisted Reading and Writing) program and the ABLE (Adult Basic Literacy Education) program. Both programs serve persons with disabilities and ABLE also welcomes non-disabled learners who read at grade 2 – 4 levels. Literacy learners make great strides in these programs. As one learner said, "Reading was a big barricade to me but I've conquered it."

Rotary's support often has immediate profound impact. Their \$500 literacy bursaries are awarded annually to 18 learners at the College. \$500 means a lot to these learners, many of whom are single mothers and/or unemployed. A bursary can mean they don't have to go to the food bank that month, or that they can afford bus fare to get to and from school.

Bursary award recipients say it best: "I've already felt something was missing in my life by not finishing high school. Winning this award gives me the extra determination to succeed in my goals. Thank you!" and "This award mean a lot to me because I am trying to be a good example for my daughter."

Members of the Rotary of Calgary's Adult Literacy Committee, Dean Gjertsen, Al McMillan and former member Paul Cochrane are the hearts and minds behind this continued support. Their dedication to Calgary's literacy learners is evident through their timely, vital donations. According to a College instructor, "The support from Rotary has encouraged many to continue with their learning journey."

Thanks a Bunch, Rotary Club! You ROCK!



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