

# LOCALNEWS

## Adult education program moves to RRCC

**BY SPENSER BICKETT**  
Staff Writer

A local adult education program is going back to school, as it changes locations for 2014.

The Adult Basic Education program from the Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency is moving from Backus Auditorium to the Rainy River Community College library.

To celebrate this change, the program is having an open house 1-3 p.m. Friday in Library Room 109 at RRCC. Attendees will be able to meet the instructor, Julie Bernard, and learn about the program, which provides college and career readiness, GED preparation, and English as a second language programs.

The program has operated in International Falls for decades, Beth Peterson, Adult Basic Education manager for AEOA, said. The changing environment of adult education led to this change of location for the program.

"Because of the skills gap in the U.S. and Minnesota, we're looking at partnering with training organizations to help people reach goals past the GED," she said. "Meeting the skills gap helps them be more self-sufficient."

The classes are 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Monday-Thursday, and the programs function like a one-room schoolhouse, Peterson said. Students come whenever they can, based on their availability and timeline they have to reach their goal, she said.

Some students come in for only a few hours a week, while others will be in the classroom for 15-20 hours a week.

The program also caters to the instruction to each student, based on individual need, Peterson said. Students are assessed through an interview and a test to determine their goals and their needs. They then develop one-on-one instruction based on those needs, she said.

There's a wide range of classes the program offers in order to meet these individual needs, Peterson said. They have a basic level of GED preparation, and students can come in at any reading, math, or writing level, she said. College preparation focuses on study skills and things like how to read college textbooks. Career readiness works on interview skills and resume building. And students work with non-English speakers on help with citizenship and learning English. The advent of the Internet has also led to working with students on typing skills and using the Internet.

"We also do life skills things like financial management or budgeting, but we always tie it back in with reading, writing, or math," Peterson said.

This instruction comes at no cost to the student, Peterson said, as the program is funded by the Minnesota Department of Education. The only cost a student might have would be the fee to take the GED, she said.

Bringing the program to RRCC helps students in the program who might be looking at taking college courses, but aren't ready yet, Elena Favela, RRCC interim dean of students, said. It can be good for students working on the GED and looking to attend college to be on a college campus and have the reminder of what they're working for, she said.

"It's symbolic of where they can be when they're finished with the GED," she said. "It can be a good motivator."

The relationship between RRCC and the Adult Basic Education program is just beginning, but Favela said she'd like to see cooperation on instruction between the two bodies in the future. If students take the RRCC placement tests and don't hit the cutoff score, they will have the option of taking development-level coursework through RRCC or Adult Basic Education through the AEOA program, she said.

"I'm excited they're going to be here," Favela said. "I think students from the community working on their GED, being able to be on a college campus will be a good opportunity for them."

Bernard, the program's instructor in International Falls, has been teaching since 1977, when she graduated from Bemidji State University with an elementary education degree, she said. She attended RRCC for two years before moving on to BSU, and taught for 10 years

at St. Thomas Catholic school, and has been the local AEOA ABE instructor for the past 12 years.

Working with the local people for the past 12 years has been the most enjoyable part of the program, she said. Being from a small community, she knows almost everyone who comes in, she said, and has worked with the children of people in her age group, and is now starting to see some of their grandchildren as well.

Moving the program to RRCC will give Bernard more direct contact with college-age people, which she said she's looking forward to. ABE will also be able to offer new programs, with which she's getting acquainted.

"The push has been to get Adult Basic Education involved with local colleges," she said. "This benefits the college and the community too."

Helping people achieve their goals, regardless of what they are has been the most rewarding part of working with the Adult Basic Education program, Bernard said. Helping people fill out applications and writing their resumes, and then seeing them succeed by getting a job is rewarding for them and their families, she said. No matter how long it takes them to achieve their goals, it's a wonderful thing when they do, she said.

"It might take them a couple years to achieve their goal, but if they stick with it, they do," she said.

## Northome-based sled dog race takes off Saturday

Race features  
two locals; three  
generations

**BY EMILY GEDDE**  
Staff Writer

Organizers of the Voyageur Classic Sled Dog Race wished for snow and Mother Nature granted their wish.

With plenty of the white stuff covering the ground, the third annual Northome-based sled dog race begins at 10 a.m. Saturday. Two local mushers, Ryan Anderson of Ray and Tony Mai of Big Falls, are expected to compete in the event.

The race, formerly known as the White Oak Sled Dog Race, has had a challenging start – or lack thereof. The event has been canceled the last two years due to lack of snow in 2012 and inclement weather in 2013.

This year, however, all things look to be a go. Saturday's forecast is calling for partly sunny skies and a high temperature of 28 degrees. According to race Marshall Dan Bergerson, temps could even be a little on the warm side.

"Hard to believe it might be too warm," he said with a laugh Monday as thermometer readings reached almost 50 degrees below zero with the wind chill.

According to Bergerson, organizers are relieved they should finally be able to watch the Voyageurs Classic take off and added spectators can expect an exciting event.

"Trails are groomed and ready to go, markers are going up (Tuesday)," he said. "There's going to be a lot of excitement. Those dogs are

going to be excited as hell taking off down the shoot."

Unique to this year's musher lineup is three generations of the Nelson family racing in the 8-Dog Pro Race. Grandmother Jamie Nelson is a veteran musher known across the country. Locally, Nelson is the musher who, for many years with her team of sled dogs, provided a ride for Santa Claus in the Twas the Lights Before Christmas Parade. She is a four-time John Beargrease Sled Dog Marathon winner and has competed in and finished the Iditarod in Alaska multiple times.


Nelson's son, Erik Nelson, also has a successful mushing background and has competed in the John Beargrease Mid-Distance race multiple years. Erik "stepped off the runners" of the dog sled several years ago to work and expand a family logging business and raise a family, said a news release. His daughter, Elizabeth Nelson, is the third family member competing Saturday.

According to Elizabeth's bio on the Voyageur Classic website, the 14-year-old has been running and training her own dog team for three years. The Voyageur Classic will be her first race, and she plans to participate in the mid-distance run of the Beargrease later this month.

Bergerson said Saturday's event will feature two separate races – the 8-dog pro and the trophy class – and both will take off from the Northome School. A complete listing of mushers and race events can be found on [www.voyageursclassic.com](http://www.voyageursclassic.com).

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