

Immigrant now helps others with their English

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Name: Claudia Villegas, 32, Springfield

Claim to fame: Villegas, who struggled to learn English when she moved here from Mexico City five years ago, now helps other recent immigrants master English at Downtown English, a nonprofit agency in Eugene that offers low-cost English language and life skills classes.

How she got here: "I thought I would live in Mexico City all my life," she says. But then she met Eugene resident Colin Crocker Applegate, who was vacationing in Mexico City. They fell in love, got married, moved back to Oregon.

How hard was it to learn English: "I was intimidated to buy a sandwich. They'd ask, 'Mayo or no mayo, mustard or no mustard.' You think, 'I just want a sandwich, I'm hungry, I don't care what's in it!'"

How she got better: She took language classes at Lane Community College. Her teacher was Duane Funk, who would later establish Downtown English. Villegas now works at the agency about 40 hours a week, and also puts in about 20 hours a week at the neighboring Funk/Levis firm as a graphic artist.

Job satisfaction: "I completely understand them," she says of the immigrants struggling to grasp a new language. "I love my profession of graphic design, but this is something where you can really feel you're helping people. It's a real satisfaction."

So now she's completely acclimated to Oregon, right? Well, almost. "My husband has been bringing me extra coats for five years now!"

- Jeff Wright

If you know someone who would make a great subject for a Register-Guard Profile, send it to Jim Murez at jmurez@guardnet.com or P.O. Box 10188, Eugene, OR 97440.

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Abstract (Document Summary)

Claim to fame: [Claudia Villegas], who struggled to learn English when she moved here from Mexico City five years ago, now helps other recent immigrants master English at Downtown English, a nonprofit agency in Eugene that offers low-cost English language and life skills classes.

Claudia Villegas teaches a class at Downtown English in Eugene. She also works as a graphic designer for the Funk/Levis firm. Villegas moved here from Mexico City five years ago.

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