

## Classes enhance fluency, food bank

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### Document Text

For Teodora Regino, learning English means a brighter future for her and her daughter. For Yuliya Drobyshevskaya, it means a shot at earning an economics degree from the University of Oregon.

Both moved to the United States recently, one from Mexico, the other from Ukraine. Without fluency in English, they and hundreds of their classmates at Downtown Languages probably would wind up working behind the scenes in low-paying service work - the first jobs slashed in a shaky economy, said Kim Knowlen, assistant director of the Eugene nonprofit center dedicated to teaching English and Spanish.

Many already have lost their livelihoods, she said.

But rather than let students give up their studies because they could no longer afford the \$25 fee for the five-week class sessions, Downtown Languages directors became creative - eliminating the class fee if students contribute two food items to FOOD for Lane County.

"We've been mindful of the fact that FOOD for Lane County is having a difficult time," Knowlen said of the local food bank, which recently reported its supplies are down more than 1 million pounds compared with this time last year.

"And students may not be able to afford the class right now. Five dollars a week can seem like a luxury with the cost of gas and food and getting laid off."

By 10 a.m. Monday, the first day of the free language classes, one barrel was full to the brim. And Knowlen said they'd already called for two more barrels.

The offerings certainly won't fill the major hole in FOOD for Lane County's warehouse, but the effort is generating attention, food solicitor Deb McGeorge said.

Others in the nonprofit community have mentioned how intrigued they were by the unlikely collaboration, she said.

"It's really special and unique, and we appreciate the help right now," she said. "Nonprofits support nonprofits; we're all in the same boat together."

Downtown Languages earns the bulk of its money through English and Spanish classes, and is subsidizing its free classes with that money.

The center, which opened on Willamette Street in 2004, has worked with the Eugene School District, Lane Transit District and other local businesses to help their employees learn basic Spanish, Knowlen said.

Among its classes offered to immigrants are those in basic English, Spanish literacy and U.S. citizenship.

"We do our best to keep the cost of our class low so students can afford them," she said.

The fact was not lost on the students in Heather Young's English Lifeskills level one class Monday. Many in the group - hailing from Mexico, South Korea, Ukraine and a host of other nations - said because the session was free, they could afford to attend.

"I would like to learn more English to be able to find a job," Regino, 24, said with a bit of translation help from Young.

Regino's 2-year-old daughter played on the floor with a few other children as the class practiced saying where they live and where they were from.

"I want to study at the University," said Drobyshevskaya, 23, who moved to the United States from Ukraine just more than a month ago. "You need to learn English."

And though she was only in Eugene for an extended vacation to visit her grown daughter, Alma Gomez said she appreciated an opportunity to give something to her temporary community.

"It's really nice because those that are able to donate money may, and those who can't donate food," Gomez said through Young. "It feels really good to help."

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### **Abstract** (Document Summary)

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