

# Adult Students Wanted at Del Valle

By Cathy Tyson



New Del Valle Education Center director Steve France and office staff, Jenny Knapp, Lissa Heptig and Carolyn Madderra Photo C. Tyson

Despite funding concerns this past spring, Acalanes Adult Education at the Del Valle campus near Rossmoor is open and administrators want to encourage enrollment to help keep the program healthy; fall classes are starting soon.

Since the adoption of Assembly Bill 86, a bill to redesign the statewide adult education system to speed up academic and career success, funding for adult education has changed dramatically. Now revenue comes in the form of block grants that are distributed to regional educational consortia to develop joint plans for serving basic adult education students. The goal is to focus on adult students who have low levels of literacy, need to learn English as a second language, and high school dropouts who want to earn a diploma, along with career education to help transition those students to post-secondary education and the labor market.

While the overhaul is not a bad thing, it clearly leaves behind adults who simply want to be lifelong learners and pursue education for the joy of it and for some mental exercise.

“Bottom line, we want to meet the needs of our student population,” said new director of the Del Valle Education Center, Steven France. Unfortunately without support from the state going forward, classes are now entirely paid for by student fees –

which translates to a roughly 25 percent increase in the cost of each class. France says that works out to about \$7 more per class hour – less than the cost of a movie.

The school continues to offer a range of fall classes, everything from art to language to money management. Administrators are encouraging students to sign up, because unlike in past years, a minimum of 15 students are required to enroll in each class in order for the program to be sustainable. Less than that threshold means either the hours of instruction will decrease, cost per student will increase, or the class will be canceled. Robust class enrollment will allow the program to grow and expand class offerings.

This past spring, the future of the program was in doubt. A number of full-time staffers have been laid off, including former director Frank Acoido, in response to the sea change in state funding. France didn't have to go far to fill the position; he was the former director of the Acalanes Center for Independent Study, which is also on the Del Valle campus.

In order to fund its popular adult enrichment classes, administrators at Del Valle had to take a hard look at what it really costs to run its programs. Students were surveyed to see if they would support a 25 percent increase in class fees to cover overhead, insurance, utility costs and

more, which they did. Seniors get a 10 percent discount, and the costs are still fairly reasonable. For example the one-evening-only class, “Savvy Social Security Planning for Couples,” is \$25, and 10 “Italian 1A” classes cost \$130, or \$117 for seniors. It's anticipated that pricing classes to represent the actual cost of delivering the service should be a sustainable model going forward, barring any big surprises.

There is also a push to look at additional options to help utilize the recently renovated campus, which is only open during the day and just two evenings per week as a way to maximize usage and cut back on expenses. There continues to be strong community support as well as support from the Acalanes Union High School District to keep the facility open.

The vast majority of students at this facility live nearby, in Rossmoor or in Lamorinda, and are interested in enrichment classes. The best way to show support is to sign up for a class or two and learn something new, France says. Registration for these and many other classes is available online at [www.acalanes.k12.ca.us/adulted](http://www.acalanes.k12.ca.us/adulted) or by phone or in person at the Acalanes Adult Education office at 1963 Tice Valley Blvd. in Walnut Creek. Some classes start the week of Sept. 14, others later this fall; check the class schedule for all the details.

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## Climbed Whitney. No Big Deal.

Two Lafayette girls take it in stride

By Chris Lavin



Bea and Esther Dean on Mount Whitney Photo provided

Imagine being a parent and saying to your little kids who are wearing heavy packs on a steep mountain in inclement weather, “If there's a big gust, drop down and just lean into the mountain.” What?

That's what Jeb Dean of Lafayette told his girls, Bea and Esther, ages 8 and 9 respectively, on their journey up Mount Whitney this summer. But he didn't have to worry. His two mountaineering girls had it under control.

“Most of the time the wind was blowing us into the mountain,” said Esther, who is 9. “So we didn't really have to fight it that much.”

The Dean family took to Whitney over the summer for a weeklong sojourn to the top of California's highest peak, which at 14,505 feet, remains one of the state's premier destinations for adventurer-seeking hikers. It's a hard, arduous, and long journey for most. But most of the ones who complete it are not under the age of 10.

“I was very fine,” said Esther, who was carrying about 18-20 pounds at any given time. “It was kind of exciting but scary.”

It took a week, and they hiked

70 miles. They took an assemblage of food for their movable campout, and they mixed it up: salami, candy, cheese, sausages, instant mashed potatoes, dried cherries, pine nuts. At night everyone could choose their own dinner, a kind of hiker smorgasbord. “It was good,” Esther said.

“We've done lots of trips,” dad Dean said. High Sierras, elsewhere. They spent nights together in a tent, but got to see the Perseids meteor shower on their trek to Whitney, which was a highlight. They came upon numerous hikers along the way who wished them well. One had a pre-printed “Mount Whitney” sheet that the girls held for a photo at the top. “Lots of people knew who we were by then,” said Dean. Such is the nature of traveling with children on long journeys on well-worn paths.

Near the top, the hikers got to leave their main packs below, and reach the summit to get their final view. “It was great,” said Esther. Did she do anything while she was up there? What was the final outcome?

“We had M&Ms,” she said. “They were really good.”

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