



United Way  
of Bradley County

## United Way grant helps Mosaic Center provide services to our diverse community

*(This is the fifth in a series of articles on local programs receiving United Way grants from the Bradley Memorial Health Endowment Fund.)*

The Canadian city of Vancouver has been engulfed with many nationalities over the past few weeks during the 2010 Winter Olympics. While not as many countries are represented, obviously, Cleveland and Bradley County have their share of diverse people and cultures.

Over 63 nationalities live in this area, which can make communication and other aspects of residency difficult. The Mosaic Center is working to provide services that will connect everyone together to build an even stronger community.



The Mosaic Center is affiliated with the Ocoee Regional Multicultural Services (ORMS) offices, an organization designed to welcome new legal immigrants to this community.

The Mosaic Center's purpose is to open the lines of communication between people of all nationalities and to find ways to assist each other and, in doing so, create a better community for everyone. Organized in 2005, the center's primary goal is building unity through educational opportunities and acceptance and understanding of cultural differences.

"When you think of the colors of the mosaic, you will see so many different colors, and the name Mosaic Center comes from these different colors representing different nations," explained Rafael Lastra, Mosaic Center Coordinator. "To me, it is like stained glass, with all the colors going together to make one beautiful sight."

Mosaic Center literature explains the name: "our community is made up of many individual groups from many different nationalities, and each one matters. Working together, helping each other, we can make up a beautiful new picture of Cleveland."

Lastra, who works at Lee University, said that it is amazing to think of all the different nationalities present in Cleveland and Bradley County. When he first attended Lee College, as it was known in 1965, he said there were very few different nations represented. Now, he said there are well over 50 nations represented by students at the school.

With so many different nationalities in this area and differences in culture, the most prominent difference is language. The Mosaic Center provides translation services to the community to help both those who speak other languages, and those native to this community, understand each other better.

"While we provide these services, we also educate everyone about these differences, because we believe that education is the key to preparing Cleveland to be a stronger community when it comes to diversity," said ORMS Board Chairman Gary Ray. "Education also can help remove the barrier of language, which creates better understanding, and helps to build stronger relationships."

A grant from the Bradley Memorial Health Endowment Fund, which is administered by United Way of Bradley County, is helping the Mosaic Center provide additional translation services to the local area, while also helping with educational opportunities.

"Our primary goal with the hospital funds is to be good stewards by using the funds to address identified needs of our community," said Matt Ryerson, United Way of Bradley County's Vice President of Community Investment Strategies. Increased translation service availability was identified as a specific need.

"The Mosaic Center is a perfect example of this commitment as they are directly addressing the growth of diversity in Bradley County," he said.

This includes translation services for the local school systems, and also for local government, businesses and industry.

"We want to get into translation for our businesses, so if there is a business out there that is doing global work and they have an interest in translation of a document they received from another country, or sending a document in their language, then we provide those services as well," Ray explained.

With new industry coming into Southeast Tennessee, such as Wacker Chemie in Charleston and Volkswagen in nearby Chattanooga, providing these services couldn't be any timelier.

"Our primary focus is education, which involves all aspects of language," Ray said, "and we have several other programs addressing that issue, including our ESL (Extended Language School) program and Culture Camp."

Brigitta Hoeflerle, Vice President for Educational Opportunities for ORMS, coordinates both programs. She is excited to offer both to the community.

"The Extended Language Program, which started the first of February, is for students of all ages," Hoeflerle said. Offered during the program, which is held on Fridays from 4 p.m. to 5 p.m. and on Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. at Montessori Kinder on Tasso Lane, are instruction in German, Russian, and Spanish.

Hoeflerle said that there are 30 students currently enrolled in the program.

She added that the Culture Camp will return in July for the second year. The camp, for children ages 4 to 10, will also be held at the Montessori Kinder site.

"It was awesome last year, where we had about 33 children enrolled and this year we are hoping between 35 and 40 children," Hoeflerle said.

She noted that the camp helps children learn about foreign languages, while also helping legally-immigrated children in the area learn better English language skills, and allowing both groups to learn more about each other.

"I think it helps everyone, and especially children from this area to learn to be more tolerant of others and be more appreciative of what we have here," Hoeflerle said.

Ray also mentioned the ESL program for moms, which is reaching a specific group of people.

"We are a partner in the Family Resource Center at Blythe Avenue (the old Blythe Avenue Elementary School), and have been there for a number of years, and one of the unique organizations located there is Head Start," Ray explained. "We see moms bring their kids in every day and they are trying to communicate with the staff, and we have helped to translate documents for them, so we thought it would be a great idea to put in a class just for those moms."

The program has proven successful as several of the mothers have enrolled.

Ryerson said that programs like this help to unify the community.

"In a growing community, one of the blessings is the growing diversity, but that is also one of the challenges," he said. "The Mosaic Center and the ORMS programs associated with the center are doing work to make sure that this growth in diversity makes Bradley County a more unified and stronger community."

"We are very excited to be a United Way partner, and very excited to be able to provide these services in our community," Ray added.

To find out more about the Mosaic Center, contact Lastra at (423) 584-6515, or go to the Mosaic Center website at [www.clevelandmosaiccenter.com](http://www.clevelandmosaiccenter.com).

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**CULTURE CAMP** – Children worked together to learn about different nationalities during the Culture Camp held last year at the Museum Center at Five Points. This year's Culture Camp is scheduled for July.



**LANGUAGE CLASSES** – The Mosaic Center and Ocoee Regional Multicultural Services are providing instruction in several languages, to help bridge the communications gap in our community due to the increased diversity of nationalities. Here, students are participating in a German language class.



**DIVERSITY FORUM** -- The Building Community with Diversity Forum recently held at Cleveland State Community College was sponsored by The Mosaic Center of the Ocoee Regional Multicultural Services and Humanities Tennessee.