

# Linguists share language of food

*Adult English learners celebrate local program*

**By Luis Fieldman**  
*Staff Writer*

LUDLOW – Nearly 150 people of diverse backgrounds gathered at Memorial Park last week in celebration of an adult learning program aimed at teaching English to speakers of other languages.

The Ludlow Area Adult Learning Center (LAALC) helps adults learn English and offers other support programs by providing free lessons to assist immigrants and refugees in learning the language, transitioning to college, and preparing to join the workforce.

The LAALC hosted its “Spring Celebration” last Tuesday, May 8, with a potluck-style cookout with foods



Turley Publications photo by LUIS FIELDMAN

**Adult English learners and their families gather in Memorial Park for a spring celebration last week.**

from regions around the world.

“We don’t really have a graduation for students at the end of the year, but we have a big party,” said Marcy Magnus, administrative assistant for LAALC.

The program is sponsored

by a state grant and is provided through Holyoke Community College. All lessons and textbooks are provided for free to students. All the program asks for in return is good attendance

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and participation from students, according to Magnus.

"We've got a lot of people who came up from Puerto Rico because of the hurricane, so we've had an influx from that," said Magnus. Students also hail from Afghanistan, Syria, Columbia, Brazil, Portugal and Mexico.

"A lot of our students go to Holyoke Community College, which has a transition to college program. It provides a nice bridge to higher education," said Magnus.

Students in the program have immigrated to the local area from countries around the world, many of them living in communities such as Springfield, Chicopee, Granby, Palmer, Monson and West Springfield, according to Magnus.

Amel Ozdemir emigrated from Istanbul, Turkey, more than five years ago, and she has been with the LAALC for the past four years, currently living in Ludlow. She said when she arrived in the United States, she did not speak any English and had not finished high school before leaving Turkey.

"I am so proud to be here," said Ozdemir. "I love all the staff and teachers, and they are so helpful. This opens doors for everything."

She said her plan now is to attend HCC to get her general equivalency diploma (GED). Her eldest son, Mustafa, just graduated from UMass Amherst this past spring majoring in mathematics, and her younger son, Mohammed, will also graduate from UMass Amherst this winter with the goal

of becoming a brain surgeon.

LAALC Director Peshia Black commended the progress Ozdemir has made in such a short time. She noted that Ozdemir has progressed from Level One to Level Four in a few years, saying, "It's pretty amazing. Not everyone moves as quickly as Amel has."

"Amel has been a great leader in the school, and has inspired other people and volunteers for projects and helps connect new students with the program," said Black.

Brandon Smith, a Level One teacher in the program, noted how difficult it can be for new students coming from countries that do not share the same alphabet as the English language.

"For our Spanish speakers, it is a little bit easier because the alphabet is the same," said Smith. "It's more difficult for our Arabic speaking students because our alphabet is totally different. It's not even just learning a new language, like Spanish or a Romance language, but they have to learn a whole new alphabet, too."

Smith has been an instructor with the program for the past five years. In that time, he has seen students from Iraq, Syria, Nicaragua and Haiti. He said he tries to replicate real-life situations in his class, such as making doctor's appointments, going to the supermarket, and asking for directions, to help students be able to communicate in their new communities.

"It's great to have a bunch of different people from a bunch of different backgrounds, and it makes the class fun," said Smith.