



# The SEED

FALL 2023

## JOE FINE DOES IT ALL | ALUMNI CHECK-IN

City worker. Private eye. CCW trainer. Martial arts instructor. First responder. Published author. Business owner. Public speaker. Bounty hunter. Husband. Father. Joe Fine, GED grad class of 2022, is many things – but *idle* is not one of them.

Joe, now 57 years old, shared his story as a speaker at the Seeds 2022 Graduation ceremony. In many ways, his story is like so many other students: A familiar tale that includes leaving school after 11th grade, getting married, having children, and having to work numerous jobs to provide for a family, followed by several attempts at other GED programs before finally finding Seeds.

But that's where the similarities fade.

By the time Joe had recommitted to his education and joined Seeds, a series of life-altering challenges arose.

A pandemic. Temporary legal blindness. A below-the knee amputation.

### CHANGES SINCE GRADUATION

Since speaking to his fellow graduates, Joe's been as busy as ever.

Because of his GED, he was finally promoted from Cleveland City Truck Driver to Specialty Truck Driver & Trainer,

earning an \$11-an-hour *raise*. Now he not only drives street sweepers, snow plows, gravel trucks, and bucket trucks, he trains others to use them properly, too.

Joe's day job isn't the only thing that changed. He had always taught concealed carry (CCW) classes, as well as martial arts. But both were more of a hobby. Once he had his GED, he filed for an LLC to make them official businesses. Using the Seeds Virtual Classroom as a model, he began to offer the classroom portion of CCW training online, and was one of the first instructors in the state to do so. He completed his private investigator's training, and first responder training, as well.

Joe's first attempt at writing after completing the GED was for himself, as a way of processing everything he had been through. He sent the draft to various staff members and his former tutor, showing them a piece of writing that never would have been possible without their patience and tutelage. They encouraged him to

share it with a much wider audience. Joe's piece was among those published in *Beginnings Volume XXIV*, an anthology of writing by adult learners.

He isn't shy about sharing his story if it can help others and has been giving motivational speeches. "I talk about chasing your dreams, self-defense, character building. Then I go into my own story, and how the GED made everything better," he said. "I tell people about Seeds. And everyone says it sounds too good to be true. But it's true."

"Seeds of Literacy, at its core, is really about giving people a helping hand up," he said in his graduation speech. "Helping people raise up to a level to support themselves, to help their own families. At Seeds, they know your name when you show up. People need that. Seeds can (and will) help you break the cycle of fear and personal challenges that could keep you from graduating." ◀



2023 Crain's Notables in Education Leadership • Bonnie Entler

2023 Social Impact Women to Watch by Nonprofit HR • Bonnie Entler

2023 State of Ohio Northeast Region Outstanding Adult Students of the Year • Sadie Anderson • Shakeiya Edwards

2023 State of Ohio Northeast Region Adult Educator of the Year • Becca Huntington



Spectrum News featured Mother-Son Duo Earning GED at Seeds

Seeds West students Roberta Jordan and son Xavier Long spoke to reporter Taryn Galbreath about what it is like to work towards a common goal in the classroom...together. Watch the interview or read the transcript:

▶ SEEDSOFLITERACY.ORG/NEWS

## Dear Friends,

This fall, I have the distinct honor of saying that I have led Seeds of Literacy for 20 of our 25 years! Sister Kathleen Kilbane planted the seeds of an incredible organization and it has been my absolute privilege to tend to its growth.

### THE UPS AND DOWNS

In 20 years' time, so many wonderful things have happened: we became a 501(c)3 organization, Proliteracy gave us national accreditation, we centralized our location, opened a classroom on the East Side, and expanded staffing.

But we also weathered the 2008 recession, navigated major changes to the GED, grappled with the loss of State Funding in 2018, and of course, pivoted to virtual when in-person learning was suspended for 15 months due to the pandemic.

When things were good, we gained the confidence and strength necessary to survive the times that were challenging — and I think we are better for it!

### MARKING MILESTONES

We ended our 25th Anniversary year in June on a high note. Our Silver Jubilee was our most successful fundraiser ever, thanks to our sponsors, donors, & new friends. We were overjoyed to have Sister Kathleen celebrate with us!

But our biggest achievement came from the students. We shattered our records for: the number of new students registered, the number of graduates, and the number of grads who attended the ceremony with their families. (We may have outgrown the venue!) Graduation is always a special time for me and my staff. But this one I'll never forget. I hope you enjoy reading more about both events on the following pages.

As always, thank you for everything you do to make Seeds grow! ~ BE



BONNIE ENTLER, PRESIDENT & CEO



## MAYORAL VISIT TO SEEDS WEST INSPIRES CLASSROOM

In July, members of the Seeds Leadership Team hosted **Cleveland Mayor Justin Bibb** and his **Chief Education Officer Holly Trifiro** at Seeds West. The Mayor graciously greeted all of the staff, pausing to learn names and roles. He heard about the mission and history of Seeds from Bonnie Entler, and the impact of illiteracy on the workforce from Dr. Carmine Stewart.

Newly published student authors **Melissa Hill Nance** and **Denise Sanders** each shared their deeply personal stories with him, underscoring the need for Seeds services in the community. Moved by their dedication, the Mayor pledged to attend their future graduation.

Mayor Bibb and Holly also played a quick round of GED trivia against our intern,

fielding questions in Language Arts, Social Studies, Science, and Math. The round was designed to show just how difficult the GED is for adults at Seeds *and it worked*. When Mayor Bibb visited the classroom, he laughed as he told the students his score, and expressed how impressed he is with their dedication, and how proud he is of their commitment to education. ◀



## RECORD-BREAKING NUMBER OF GRADS DURING MILESTONE YEAR

Seeds capped off a 25th Anniversary year with the largest graduating class to date. Just hours before the fiscal year ended, the final GED tester passed, becoming the **150th graduate!** Nearly a third of the grads packed the house for the 2023 Ceremony in Cleveland, with even more streaming online. In addition to new grads RALPH HERNANDEZ, SANTINA LAUTER, and ANTOINETTE JONES, a 2013 grad returned as the Keynote Speaker, DUSTIN PASSALACQUA. Two tutors were recognized with the Outstanding Tutor Award: DEBORAH NADZAM MELNYK and KATHY PATTON. Recordings of the speeches, the processional, and awards can all be viewed on our website.

[WWW.SEEDSOFLITERACY.ORG/GRADUATION2023](http://WWW.SEEDSOFLITERACY.ORG/GRADUATION2023)





Photos, videos,  
a complete list of  
generous sponsors,  
and more can all be  
found on our website.

Our 25th Anniversary Year was jam-packed with engagement events and initiatives to commemorate the occasion. It all culminated with

### *The Silver Jubilee: 25 Years of Literacy.*

On Friday, May 19, more than 200 people attended the event, presented in part by Carnegie Management & Development Corporation, at the Cleveland Metroparks Zoo's Stillwater Place.

The location wasn't the only thing new to Seeds – the event also featured the premiere of a new testimonial video donated by Classic Teleproductions, a 360 photo booth, a wine pull, signature drink, cocktails by the carousel, and the Backtraxx Band.

Personal stories stole the show, especially from current student SHAKEIYA EDWARDS, who had tears in her eyes as she talked about how important the program has been in her life. She was a tough act to follow, but her tutor ROY HULME did his best, urging guests to tutor and support Seeds.

SISTER KATHLEEN KILBANE, the founder of Seeds, received a standing ovation when current CEO & President BONNIE ENTLER thanked her for creating a program that continues to grow and change so many lives. Sister Kathleen remained at the helm for the first five years, before Bonnie took over and spearheaded Seeds of Literacy's move to become a separate 501(c)3 organization.

"This event was an opportunity to celebrate the past and introduce new people to Seeds to secure our future," Bonnie said. "I think we accomplished both of those goals, as well as achieving the highest fundraising target to date. We could not have done it without our Board and the sponsors supporting this event. Thank you."



## TUTOR SPOTLIGHT: MARIBETH KATT



Maribeth Katt, an organist by trade, learned about Seeds from a flyer in her church bulletin. She was drawn to Seeds because she saw it as an opportunity to work one-to-one, something she finds incredibly rewarding.

Maribeth attended Tutor Training virtually. "I found it very comprehensive. I learned a lot about the [illiteracy] situation in Cleveland and how I could be most helpful." She also attended the Beginning Reader Bootcamp to learn how to work with emerging readers. "Reading is so key. It's the gateway to everything else."

"I like coming in and knowing there is a specific task to be done, and that my time will be well spent," she said. "I very much like meeting the students, and I love the materials."

Language is her favorite subject but recently, one of her regular students needed help with Math. Some tutors are *Anything But Math*, but Maribeth was willing to give it a shot. "She pulled me into fractions and it was amazing! She taught me a few things!"

"The energy and motivation of the students surprises me, because I don't think I would have that," she admitted. "As we get older, learning becomes harder."

Sometimes tutoring can be a challenge, but Maribeth works hard to figure out how to help struggling students understand the topic or work through the question. "I try to find ways

to connect with the student's experience. I try to think about how I would go about understanding a topic that confuses me. Every day is new," she said.

"I was working with a student and the material has some political cartoons to read and decipher," she said. "It was so great to talk about current and historic events that the cartoon addressed. We laughed and had fun with it together."

To others who are considering becoming adult literacy tutors, Maribeth had this to say:

"It's very rewarding and impactful. It is a chance to make a difference in a life. The students are incredibly appreciative."

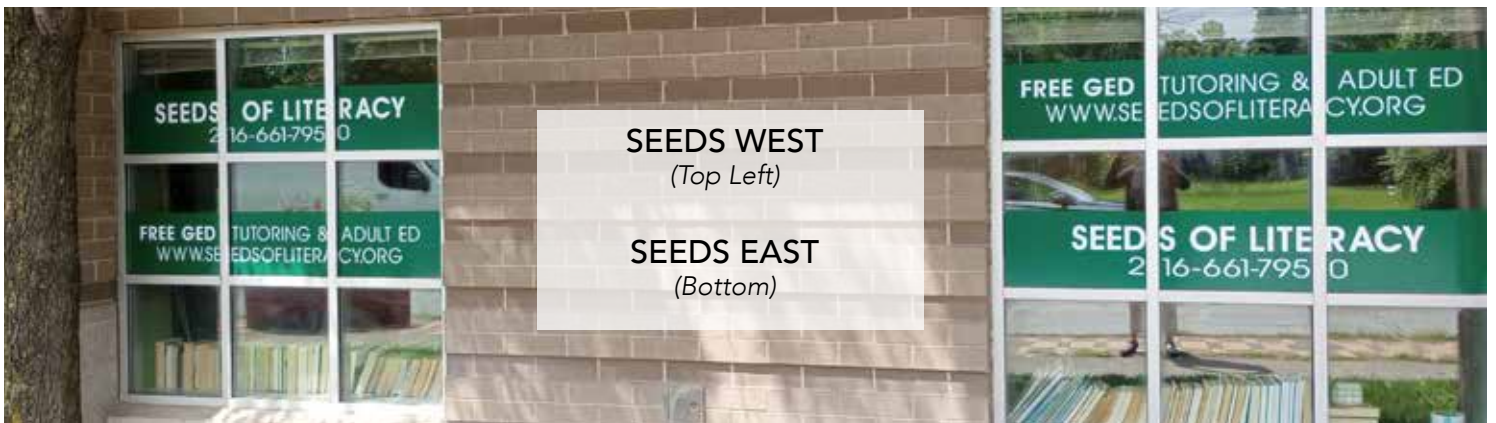
She also wanted to mention the support provided by the staff. "Helpful and friendly! Whether they are interacting with students or tutors, they are really instrumental in making the program run smoothly, and making Seeds a place that is welcoming and rewarding for all."

If you or someone you know is considering becoming a tutor at Seeds, visit [WWW.SEEDSOFLITERACY.ORG/VOLUNTEER](http://WWW.SEEDSOFLITERACY.ORG/VOLUNTEER) to learn more and select a training date. ◀



## SEEDS EAST: THE GREEN BAND TREATMENT

Seeds classrooms are both located on busy streets along major bus routes. But without visible exterior signage, Seeds East has relied entirely on word of mouth to recruit students. This summer, windows facing Kinsman Road debuted green bands that mimic the classroom on West 25th Street. "The new signage will raise our visibility in an area of great need," said President Bonnie Entler. The Kinsman neighborhood has a shocking **97% adult illiteracy rate** with nearby Mount Pleasant faring only slightly better at 85%, according to the available research.





NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION  
U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
PERMIT NO. 763

3104 W. 25th Street  
Suite 3  
Cleveland, Ohio 44109  
**SEEDSOFLITERACY.ORG**



**OUR MISSION**

To provide free personalized education that empowers adults to thrive in our community.

# TRIVIA TIME



**MARKET GARDEN BREWERY**  
**THUR • NOV 16 • 6:30-8:30PM**  
OHIO CITY ROOM 1947 W. 25TH ST.,  
CLEVELAND OH 44113

Do you have a knack for fun facts? Confident you could conquer 8th-grade polynomials? Have you been boasting about your biology knowledge? Do missing Oxford Commas make you cringe?

THIS IS THE EVENT FOR YOU! Join us for this thrilling showdown of wits and wisdom. Back by popular demand, it's another Trivia Game Night with Seeds of Literacy!

Showcase your smarts and support Seeds while raising awareness about the importance of adult education. You'll play against other attendees for \$ prizes, plus BRAGGING RIGHTS.

Individual tickets can be purchased using the form after the QR code. Sponsorship opportunities are also available.



**TICKETS \$50**