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## United Way literacy program helps Tarrant County adults get better jobs

By ALEX BRANCH

FORT WORTH - Donnie Gum has a high school equivalency diploma, reads at a college level and is steadily employed, most recently building storage lockers. He said he was surprised when on a recent adult education test, his math skills tested at the sixth-grade level, short of the eighth-grade skills required for entry into an aerospace manufacturing training program.

"It was a chance to get myself a better career, but since I couldn't remember how to do the math, I couldn't get in," said Gum, of Arlington. "I couldn't believe it." Because of an initiative funded by United Way of Tarrant County, Gum may have a career building airplanes after all. After entering the Adult Literacy Program, Gum passed the math portion of the test, and now he has his certificate in the aircraft assembly class.

"I'm on my way," Gum said.

More than 200 people have enrolled in the literacy program, which is in its third year and teaches potential aerospace employees reading and math skills, said Sue Matkin, vice president of community development for United Way of Tarrant County. About half of those who apply for aerospace manufacturing courses don't pass the test, she said.

"The majority have high school diplomas but haven't had to use the math skills they learned 15 to 20 years ago," Matkin said. "And if you don't use them, you lose them."

A collaboration among United Way, Tarrant County College and the Community Learning Center, the program is intensive; classes are held four hours a day, four days a week.

Most participants spend 12 days, or 48 hours, in class before they pass the test, Matkin said. Classes are held at the Texas Workforce Center on East Lancaster Avenue.

The program is so successful that it has expanded to a Workforce Center in Arlington, she said.

At an aerospace manufacturing training program course Friday, nine of the 22 students were graduates of the literacy program, said Sam Deckich, program head for the Community Learning Center, which operates the manufacturing program.

"It has opened up the door to a good career for a lot of people," Deckich said.

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United Way fundraising campaign Tarrant County United Way supports people and families through local charities. The agency also works to combat child abuse and neglect, senior isolation and childhood obesity and champions adult literacy and early learning and development.

**2008 goal:** \$24.5 million **2007 goal:** \$24.1 million **2007 total collection:** \$24,161,168

To donate Send checks to United Way of Tarrant County, 1500 N. Main St., Fort Worth, TX 76164. Make checks payable to United Way of Tarrant County.

Donate online at

[www.unitedwaytarrant.org](http://www.unitedwaytarrant.org). Source: United Way of Tarrant County