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## ELL

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are that they'll be dealing with," said Nisewander, who taught first grade at Delight Valley School until she retired in 2009 and teaches the class on a voluntary basis. "The students are so eager to learn, and the progress is incredible. They've picked things up so fast, and this is only our third session."

Dudley pointed out that the first class of students to graduate from the ELL class is now in first grade, and last year's students are performing well in kindergarten.

"They're doing extremely well, and they're already reading well in English," she said. "A lot of that has to do with Mary (Nisewander). She's amazing."

Jackie Lester, South Lane School District's P-20 Coordinator, has been tasked with integrating local kids' preschool experience with the K-12 system and beyond, and Lester was able to secure private funding for the ELL class.

"We've always wanted to have this class, and now that we have preschools in two schools, it's showed how early we need to get involved, not just with them (ELL students), but with everybody," Dudley said. "Students need to fit in, no matter what language they speak."

In fact, the young ELL students will soon be able to utilize three languages, which effectively turns an early impediment into a stepping stone for further success.

"The children are trilingual," Dudley said. "We actually use the kindergarteners often as interpreters at the dental clinic."

Dudley said that the English language takes predominance with most students by the fourth grade as their ability evolves.

Maria Calmo and Albertina Herrera, two parents of ELL students, say they've found a welcoming environment in Cottage Grove after leaving a devastating situation in their home country in search of the opportunities that this nation is known for.

"There are so many opportunities for me to learn, for my children to learn," Calmo said, adding that the ELL class has



photo by Jon Stinnett

**Elvira and Glenda learn the English words for directions with the help of a hula hoop.**

been helpful for her personally. "The things I don't understand, I can always come to this center and ask, then explain it to my daughter," she said.

Calmo and Herrera said that everything about life in Cottage Grove is different than what they had been used to. Each has applied for and received asylum in the U.S., which recognizes the horrors of their home country.

"If we were to start telling you stories from Guatemala, we wouldn't have time to finish them, day or night," Herrera said.

Now, though, visitors to Peg-

gy's Primary Connection who have accessed its services in the past are coming back to volunteer to help others.

"You can tell they're right here with you, that they're ready to learn," Nisewander said. "They're growing so fast academically, and they're so excited about everything. It's a lot of work, but it's a lot of fun."

Nisewander said that seeing the class today would warm the heart of Peggy Lintula, who founded the center 25 years ago and who passed away recently.

"This is all about Peggy," she said. "This was her dream."

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