**LPB shows success of adult education**

By JOHN LA PLANTE
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Louisiana offers a wide range of adult education programs, but getting the word to the people who need them can be a frustrating business.

People who don’t read well, or don’t read at all, tend not to scan newspapers, read brochures or tune in to any of the several adult education programs sprinkled through the program schedule of Louisiana Public Broadcasting.

"We’re telling the story to the wrong people," laments Lucille McDowell, special projects coordinator for LPB. "Our audience tends to be quite a literate audience," McDowell said. "Almost no one in our normal audience has a need for basic education.

So LPB’s one-hour special on adult education success stories, airing Sunday, is as much a plea for help from the literate population as a means of informing people who lack a high school diploma.

McDowell said she hopes viewers will pass on the information to people they know and groups that can help find under-educated adults and convince them to return to school, no matter what their age.

More than 1 million Louisiana adults lack a high school diploma.

Their options for seeking that important piece of paper are graphically depicted in Sunday’s special, "Access: New Avenues for Adult Readers," airing at 8 p.m. on Channel 27 and other LPB channels across the state.

The show, put together from parts of a daytime adult education series, depicts the range of people served by adult education, and the value they find in the classes.

"It’s opened up a whole new world for me," said Cindy Rashall, who quit school to marry and didn’t go back until her own children had started school.

Rashall now works at a blood bank, a job she said she couldn’t have gotten without her high school diploma.

Jeff Snyder, a younger GED student featured in the show, quit school after he fell behind his little brother.

"It felt better if I could just drift away and no one would know what happened to me," Snyder said.

But GED classes allowed him to stop drifting and plan a future for himself. He is now a deck hand on a boat, and wants to be a pilot.

A variety of adult education programs are featured, including regular GED classes, one-on-one tutoring and basic education courses offered in vocational-technical schools.

When they finally get into a program, "People learn of options they never knew existed," parish adult education director George Varino said on the program.

In an interview, Varino agreed with McDowell that letting people know about those options is a difficult part of his job.

Instead of the usual types of publicity, Varino relies on three increasingly powerful ways of drawing people into adult education.

For instance, "Our satisfied customer is our best form of recruitment," Varino said.

Most people enrolled in adult education know other people who could make use of the services, he said.

Several of the adult ed students featured in the LPB show said they heard about it from friends or relations.

A second source of students is other social agencies that tend to deal with the poor and uneducated, he said.

For instance, Varino runs a small adult education program at the parish teen parenting center, where many young women have dropped out of school to raise their children.

Businesses provide a third source of students, directly and indirectly, Varino said. Many firms are requiring higher levels of education for their employees, or offer promotions for good workers who become better-educated.

When Exxon is hiring, he said, prospective employees flock to his centers to bone up on skills that will be tested on Exxon’s application exams.

The LPB program features a machine shop in Independence that sponsors its own study halls for employees who attend adult education programs.

Other unlikely sites include the Fairgrounds racetrack in New Orleans, where trainers and other racing workers, young and old, kid each other about doing homework as they handle the horses.

Varino said people with an education deficiency shouldn’t feel out of place in an adult education program, no matter what their age, educational background or other factors.

"We have students from 16 to into their 60s," he said. "There’s somebody like you out there."