



March 2025

Vita Education Services *Bringing Learning to Life for Over 50 Years*

Vita's Work in Bucks County's Former Jail: A Look Back This Criminal Justice Month



Marge Nocton-Barr on the terrace of the Michener Art Museum where the jail once stood.

March is National Criminal Justice Month, an excellent time to reflect on Vita's journey as an educational leader in Bucks County's Correctional Facilities.

Vita has been offering a decision making program for inmates in Bucks County's jails since the 1970's - when the jail was located at the corner of Pine Street and Ashland Avenue.

Vita recently had the opportunity to reconnect with Marge Nocton-Barr, who began volunteering in 1975, for a walk down memory lane at the [Michener Art Museum](#), which now occupies the historic site of the former jail. "There was a warmth in the old jail; the inmates made it a positive experience for all of us," Marge remembers.

Marge read about the decision making program being taught at the "Pine Street Hotel" – as the jail was called by then Warden John D. Case – and wanted to become involved. She remembers pushing the buzzer to be let into the jail the first time and teaching the program in the dirt-floored and windowless basement, where it could reach 113 degrees in the summer.

Vita's mission thrived under the leadership of dedicated individuals. Former Executive Director Fran Stengel vividly remembers her first encounter with a client at the jail. "It was at night, and it was dark. The building was oppressive, and I felt scared. My client sensed my discomfort and reassured me, 'You're scared. Don't worry, I'll take care of you.'" This compassionate gesture put Fran at ease, and she and her client went on to have a productive tutoring relationship.

Vita's Decisions programs – *Decisions for Living*, taught to men and women in Bucks County's Correctional Facilities and *Decisions for Change*, taught in the probation and parole system – remain the foundation of Vita's work not only in the corrections system, but in adult education. We're equally as proud of our expanded Corrections Programming – the Jobs Readiness Program that helps prepare incarcerated individuals for life after release, and our jailed-based English as a Second Language and GED Prep classes that provide incarcerated individuals with rehabilitative education and skill development.

Celebrating Excellent Attendance

Whether in person or online, Vita's English as a Second Language students are making their education a priority. We recently celebrated students who have achieved 85% or better attendance with special certificates recognizing their dedication.

By attending regularly, our students show commitment and responsibility. Their attendance also highlights the exceptional support they receive from Vita's dedicated instructors who create a welcoming environment. Strong attendance can lead to better academic performance and helps students develop important life skills.



Click on image above for a slideshow featuring our amazing students!

BLBB Charitable Supports Vita



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Vita is sincerely grateful for [BLBB Charitable](#)'s continued support!

Thanks to BLBB Charitable's generous contributions, Vita has been able to develop tailored programs that address the unique needs of adult learners in Bucks County, fostering personal and professional growth.

Together, we are making a significant and lasting impact in the lives of Vita's students and their families.

An Outstanding Achievement



Wendi, originally from Guatemala, attends Vita's Warminster Family Literacy Program with her 7-year old child. Wendi

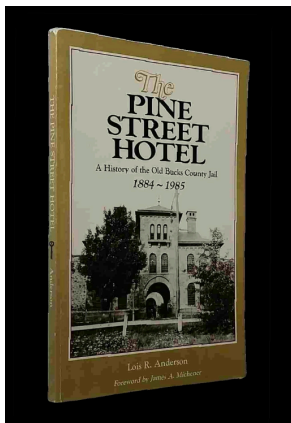
recently shared the exciting news that she passed her citizenship exam and celebrated this milestone by taking the oath of citizenship.

Vita is immensely proud of Wendi and all the achievements she has made on her journey!



Vita Vibes

Keeping with the Criminal Justice Month theme, Vita's Executive Director Heather S. Giampapa recommends *The Pine Street Hotel – A History of the Old Bucks County Jail, 1884 – 1985* by Lois R. Anderson. You can purchase your own copy the next time you visit the [Michener Art Museum!](#)



*My mother, Leslie Skilton, is a founding trustee of the Michener Art Museum, and, thanks to her, I've been visiting the museum since it opened. While I've always known the museum was formerly the Bucks County Jail, it wasn't until I read *The Pine Street Hotel* by Lois R. Anderson that I really got a feel for the history that lives within its walls.*

Anderson's book provides the history of not only the building itself (which was actually the county's fourth jail) but also the stories of the men and women who lived and worked there. Descriptive language puts the reader inside the building – cells were 18 feet long, 12 feet high, 8 feet wide, with no windows until 1972 – to give a feel for how inmates lived. First person recollections from employees and inmates, including a chapter titled, "From a Prisoner's Point of View," provide vivid anecdotes. Historic photos from every decade add to the narrative.

Spoiler alert – Anderson delves into Vita's origins in a chapter titled, "Case Consummates the Community Partnership," in which the reader learns about how Bucks County residents joined jail leadership in advocating for a jail that would work to change the individuals inside for the better. I'm proud to be a part of Vita's work that continues to strive toward that goal.

Join the Vita Team

We Are Hiring!

Digital Literacy and Assessment
Specialist/English as a Second
Language Instructor - Full Time.

Click here to visit Job
Opportunities on our website
for more information.

Volunteer Opportunity: Resume Writing

Vita is seeking volunteer resume writers for participants in our Jobs Readiness program at the Bucks County Correctional Facility. For more information, please visit our [job opportunities webpage](#) and scroll down to the Volunteer Opportunity.

For information, visit www.vitaeducation.org or click below

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