

## **Bartuneks Giving the Gift of Words**

by Mark Morelli, from "Portage Volunteers: People Helping People" column, *Record Courier* daily newspaper

Imagine if this article looked to you like nothing more than a bunch of ants crawling across the page.

To many adults in Portage County, the letters of the alphabet that fill these pages have no meaning. But a Garrettsville couple who have spent their lives teaching reverence for words and ideas now help kick down the barrier to literacy.

The Rev. Edward Bartunek and his wife, Winifred, of Garrettsville spend a few hours each week at a table at the nearby public library tutoring adults who want to learn how to read.

They are part of the Portage County Literacy Coalition, which promotes basic literacy skills through tutoring and workbooks.

Illiterate adults are not stupid. In fact, the way they “sneak by” in a world of signs and written directions is extremely clever.

“Adults who can’t read are very resourceful,” said Mrs. Bartunek, who began tutoring 50 years ago, before a long career teaching English and Latin. “For instance, at a restaurant, they’ll say ‘that looks good, I’ll have the same.’ They won’t have to look at the menu. But it’s a lie. You assume something about them that’s not true.”

Illiteracy also can be dangerous, she said.

Misreading labels and medical directions, for instance, make illiteracy a sort of Russian roulette.

And knowing how to read means more than just being able to enjoy books.

“We have exercises in the use of telephone books, reading a

newspaper and then drawing conclusions about what might be in the article,” Winifred said. “Everyday things.”

The Rev. Bartunek, a Hiram Christian Church minister who retired in 1986, learns as much as his students do.

One of his pupils is an auto enthusiast. Bartunek would assign him articles in road and track magazines to read. The student would report on the article, proving his new reading skills and at the same time, teaching Bartunek about cars.

Such memories make volunteering worthwhile.

Mrs. Bartunek recalls tutoring a man whose first original writing was a heartfelt letter of condolence, words expressed from the heart.

She also remembers the dedication of a man who worked all day and skipped his evening meal in order to make it on time to his tutoring session.

Perhaps someday one of their memories will be the time when one of their students approaches the Bartuneks and says, “I read the article about you in the paper.”

For more information, call 292-2892.