Greetings from the NRC

January 2021

Writing on New Year’s Day morning, it is exhilarating to feel the 2021 dawn of hope and anticipation. But while we may collectively be relieved to see 2020 behind us, there are considerable challenges ahead. We enter the year wiser from the many pains experienced – having learned so much about ourselves, about technology, creativity, and resilience. It is important we do not forget those lessons which need to serve us in the short- and long-terms ahead.

Lessons learned are featured in this first newsletter of the year: from OLLI at the University of North Carolina at Asheville, where the silver linings of expanding connections through storytelling will not soon be forgotten; from new ways we taught ourselves to socially interact at various Osher Institutes; and, from the lessons of generosity and partnership in the fundraising responses from OLLI at University of Connecticut members, which thankfully are becoming more and more common at Institutes all across the country.
Our 124 Osher Lifelong Learning programs will undoubtedly need many efforts to rebound in 2021. None have gone unaffected. If our challenges are shared and worked on by both staff and members, Osher programs have the potential to become stronger than ever before. Using the lessons learned from the pandemic with the real hope of safely coming together in-person soon, our New Year is already much brighter.

With gratitude and best wishes,

Steve Thaxton, Executive Director

Osher NRC
National Resource Center for Osher Institutes

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OLLI NEWS

OLLI AT UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT ASHEVILLE
Storytelling
Bill LaRocque tells a story about his grandfather, with instructor Chuck Fink as his encouraging highlighted audience.

At OLLI at UNC Asheville, storytelling courses are popular with members who are drawn to the opportunity to explore traditions, learn new writing and performance skills, and share their life stories. The Institute has been pleased to be able to successfully offer these courses online and to reach larger audiences through virtual events that feature the talents of members.

More than 90% of OLLI at UNC Asheville members move to Western North Carolina in retirement, and many look to OLLI as a place where they can learn more about Appalachian culture. Appalachia is home to a rich and varied tradition of storytelling. As people with lifetimes of stories to share, members have taught courses in traditional storytelling and in the more contemporary “Moth” tradition of “true stories told live.” Members even created an annual summer series “Stories on Asheville’s Front Porch” that blends the talents of OLLI’s novice storytellers with the voices of seasoned professionals, all performed downtown at the height of tourist season. The house is always packed for storytelling evenings held in the OLLI building, and one member, Chuck Fink, hosts a weekly community radio program titled Storyville which features interviews with area “tellers.” Finally, as part of the Institute’s efforts to highlight the rich life stories of members, a team of OLLI volunteers has created a series of short videos titled “Gray Matters: Creating Connections” which are stored on the OLLI at UNC Asheville YouTube Channel.

In the fall of 2019, as part of the theme term “Appalachia: Tradition and Change,” Chuck offered a course titled In the Appalachian Tradition of the Spoken Word. Class members bonded as they learned about regional traditions, perfected a new craft, and performed for one another and then for larger audiences. As everyone distanced during the pandemic, we were deeply saddened to hear that two of the members of Chuck’s class passed away from long-term illnesses. Fortunately, their Appalachian stories had been recorded and formed the inspiration for a program titled “Stories from Heaven and Earth” offered last August on Zoom, blending the recorded Appalachian-style stories of the late Nancy Hammel and Dave Fillpot and the stories told virtually by Chuck and OLLI’s resident stand-up comedian Randy Robins.
In Fall 2020, Chuck offered a new storytelling course titled *Sharing Your Life Story in the Oral Tradition Using Online Technology*. This December Chuck organized an evening event titled *A New Class of Storytellers*. Some tellers recorded their stories, and others performed live. There was an enthusiastic audience of members, family, and friends who enjoyed inspiring, heartwarming stories that showed the talents of members. Chuck writes, “Call me weird, but I would rather teach this class on Zoom. The breakout sessions really built a strong sense of community, and recording the tellers during the last two sessions was a breeze." Call us weird (we’re from Asheville; we expect it), but we found that it was easier to organize an online event than one in person, and we didn’t have to worry about bad weather or driving after dark.

OLLI at UNC Asheville has tried throughout this year to find the silver linings in response to the pandemic, to be grateful for the ways we have grown and the ways that we are able to learn in new ways. These storytelling events allow us to connect to our region and to one another and to stay together, apart.

Submitted by: Catherine Frank, Executive Director, [OLLI at University of North Carolina at Asheville](#)

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**Fun with Online Gatherings**

Thousands of courses, lectures, and discussion groups produced by Osher Institutes have proven that online formats are a productive way to remain intellectually engaged. And now, hundreds of social events via online platforms have proven to be the next best thing to being
there. The holiday season brought out even more fun. Positive spirits and the sharing of cultural, faith, or quirky family traditions were often on the agenda.

OLLI at University of California, Irvine held a spirited Holiday Virtual Morning Mingle asking members to share favorite songs or traditions (see photo above). OLLI Manager, Barb Barone recalls that “Jan Elbaum, our 101-year-old member, shared a story of her favorite holiday gift during the Depression years – a box of crayons – a gift worth gold because her parents had very little money at the time.” Although theirs was a morning event, UCI members considered it “5 o’clock somewhere in the world!” Members toasted one another and “Eggnog mixed with Fireball Cinnamon Canadian Whisky was highly recommended by one member,” Barb added.

OLLI at George Mason University readily encourages eating and drinking at home during socials, too. They held multiple events throughout the semester, including a Virtual Thanksgiving Feast. OLLI Executive Director Jennifer Disano explains, “Folks made their own meal at home, and the event was designed around a ‘menu’ of offerings: appetizers (remarks thanking volunteers), entrees (committee leaders explained each committee’s contributions), and dessert (President gave a talk and said ‘sweet things’ about volunteers).” Jennifer also points to their ongoing Ethnic Eats Events. GMU Members Services Committee chair Toni Acton describes this group: “We have been meeting once a month at 6 o’clock to have an Ethnic dinner. Everyone brings in their own dinner, and we meet by Zoom to eat, discuss what we have and where we got it, and socialize…these events allow members to see their old friends and make new friends at the same time.”

At University of Dayton, OLLI Executive Director Julie Mitchell established a schedule of “Java with Julie” get-togethers. Julie admits, “I mentioned how much I missed everyone and that seeing their smiling faces, if only via Zoom, filled me with so much joy to which one of the participants replied, ‘It’s like sunshine – we need each other to grow.’ OLLI is indeed our sunshine and this pandemic has reminded us just how much we need it and each other.”

OLLI at Bradley University has a well-established social calendar which remained active all year. It included December’s Holiday Happy Hour. “Many of the participants wore holiday garb (a few Santas were spotted on the screen) and shared stories ranging from the nostalgic memories of their own fathers playing Santa Claus back in the 50s, and sentimental Polish traditions of breaking biscuits and sharing heartfelt wishes”, reported Michelle Riggio, Executive Director.

Throughout the country, conversation and camaraderie is the one constant for Osher Institutes as they celebrate and socialize online. Social events are even more enriching for those single members during the pandemic. Unique themes and diverse approaches show the creativity of OLLIs. As Toni Acton at George Mason University says, it is another indication that “…members join for the socializing as much as for the classes.”
Last January the newly formed OLLI at UConn Fundraising Team launched its “2020 Vision” campaign to raise $10,000. There was no way of knowing that 20/20 vision was probably the most ironic campaign concept the team could have chosen! In the end, the campaign was successful, and the $10,000 goal was reached in October.

Fundraising Chair, Vickie Nardello, said, “This was the most ambitious campaign we’d ever had, and we went into it thinking we simply had to accomplish the goal to inspire and empower our members. By March I’ll admit I was nervous, and there was even some talk about easing up on the campaign. But we decided it was important to stay focused and keep people engaged on something positive and attainable. Our method was simple: after our initial letter, we gave weekly updates in our e-newsletter, keeping the goal visible, offering a matching grant from one anonymous donor, and getting people excited as we inched closer to our goal.” It was a simple strategy — and it worked.

Once the goal was reached, the team felt it was equally important to celebrate the generosity of its donors. OLLI at UConn turned to the Waterbury Symphony Orchestra (WSO), one of its long-time community partners, to create an event that would feel special and intimate. OLLI President, Mila Limson, said, “The WSO is a fantastic partner, and its goals and audience align closely with ours. After some brainstorming, we held a special evening discussion and concert with Robert Cinnante, Executive Director, Maestro Leif Bjaland, Music Director & Conductor,
Dr. Vincent de Luise, Cultural Ambassador, and Rebecca Patterson, Principal Cello. Even though we were all on Zoom, the event had a joy and intimacy that recognized what a remarkable achievement our donors had accomplished. Now we’re planning for 2021, and who knows what our next campaign concept will be!

Although 2020 was a tough road for everyone, OLLI at UConn accomplished a fundraising goal that would have been difficult during “normal” times. Reaching the goal just shows the appreciation of members to their OLLI and the hopefulness of better times ahead.

Submitted by: Fiona de Merell: Director, OLLI at the University of Connecticut

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**NRC UPDATES**

**Osher NRC January 2021 Webinar**

Mark your calendar for the first Osher NRC webinar of 2021 on January 27th beginning at 2pm Eastern/1pm Central/noon Mountain/11am Pacific/10am in Alaska and 9am in...
Hawaii. This webinar is open to all staff, volunteer leaders and members within the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute Network. Register for the webinar here.

**Effective Hybrid Teaching Models**

As the landscape of education continues to change, so do Osher Institutes. Some have experimented with or moved into hybrid learning models and others are exploring this option for the future. As OLLIs continue to adjust to the new reality, hybrid or blended learning may be in the future. In this webinar, three Osher Institute leaders discuss their movements into hybrid learning, what they have learned, and how they have adjusted to this learning model. What do Institutes need to consider? What are the challenges and benefits? What types of technology are needed and what operational changes are necessary? Learn all this and more in this informative webinar.

**Presenters:**
Robert Levrant  
Director, OLLI @ University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Leslie E. Pont  
Executive Director, OLLI @ University of Virginia

Jeaneece Schmidt  
Lifelong Learning Specialist, OLLI @ Casper College

If you have interest in being a presenter or have ideas for other topics, please contact Kevin Connaughton (kevin.connaughton@northwestern.edu).

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**AN ADVICE COLUMN FOR OSHER INSTITUTE STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS**

**Dear Olli**
Dear Olli,
As we begin the new year, I would like to celebrate our members and our OLLI staff for their tremendous dedication to our community during these difficult times, any suggestions?
~OLLI Director

Dear OLLI Director,
It is always a benefit to celebrate your OLLI, the staff, and the members; as Nelson Mandela said, “Remember to celebrate milestones as you prepare for the road ahead.” And 2020 was certainly a milestone year. There are many ways to celebrate your members remotely: Zoom parties, eCards, thoughtful letters, newsletter shout-outs, etc. These are all great ways to highlight and thank individuals for their contributions in 2020. But even more important, is gratitude. We often forget to hold that mindset in our hearts as the stresses of day-to-day life wear on us. So celebrate your members, staff, and OLLI, but be grateful for them too. If you approach these important people with gratitude every day, you are celebrating them every day. This is a full circle approach – members, be grateful for your director and staff – staff, be grateful for your director and members – directors, be grateful for your staff and members. And we can all be grateful (even me) for OLLI.
~Olli

Have a question for Olli? Please send it in care of Kevin Connaughton (kevin.connaughton@northwestern.edu).

QUICK TIPS FOR HELPING OPERATE AN OSHER INSTITUTE

Quick Tip - Automatic Captioning in Zoom

Zoom has a new feature, one we have all been anxiously awaiting - automatic captioning. While not 100% accurate, Zoom is now able to convert what is being said in both meetings and webinars to reasonably accurate text, in real-time. Below are the steps to activate captioning in Zoom accounts:

- Sign into Zoom and go to "Settings"
- Under "Meetings Advanced" go to "Closed Captioning"
- Turn this setting on (it is off by default)
- Check "Enable Live Transcription Service"
Once you start a meeting, click on the "..." button to expand the Zoom toolbar, then click the "CC" button
Click "Enable Auto Transcription"

CAREER OPENINGS IN THE OLLI NETWORK

Job Board

Program Coordinator, OLLI
Brandeis University

Is there a staff opening at your Osher Institute? Please send it to us at oshernrc@northwestern.edu

National Resource Center for Osher Institutes, Northwestern University
Wieboldt Hall, Sixth Floor, 339 East Chicago Avenue, Chicago, IL 60611