Greetings from the NRC        April 2021

The pandemic has provided us ample opportunities to pause, and to reflect. Many Osher Institutes have incorporated that reflection into their programming this year, often toward trying to better understand the racial, social, and economic inequities in our country. This fits together with a deep appreciation for history held by the majority of OLLI members. Online courses and discussion groups have turned attention to the historic underpinnings of injustice, disparity, and hate. Not surprisingly, that examination and reflection leads many to ask, “What can we do to help make this world a better place?” In some Osher Institutes, that critical thinking and examination is not only personally meaningful, but it also becomes actionable.

Good examples of this reflection are represented in this month’s Osher Network Newsletter. You can read submissions from Osher Institutes at North Carolina State University, The University of Richmond, and Southern Oregon University that show us the range of study, reflection, discussion, and action that are open to their members. Each of these Institutes has engaged members in examinations of these issues of our times – which, of course are issues that span eons.

Now, vaccines bring the promise of a gradual return to being together in person. Hold onto the lessons learned during your reflective times and your interests in these issues.
The opportunities to continue or to launch more of that work which began in times of quiet are plentiful. Let’s not let those opportunities for learning and action be forgotten.

With gratitude,

Steve Thaxton, Executive Director

OLLI AT NORTH CAROLINA STATE UNIVERSITY
The Power of OLLI!
Throughout the year, along with taking classes, lectures, and study trips, members of OLLI at North Carolina State University volunteer with organizations in the community and contribute to local causes. With a typical year’s membership of more than 1,500 adults aged 50+ that is quite a workforce to draw from!

In-person activities are currently on hold but that did not stop assistant director, Joan Hardman-Cobb, and volunteer coordinators, Linda Shell and Diane Schroeder from thinking of a way to help people in need.

An invitation went out to invite members to take part in a donation drive-thru in December 2020 at McKimmon Center in Raleigh. The team asked for food donations for Feed the Pack (NC State’s food pantry) and new socks and underwear for Note in the Pocket, an organization that provides a supply of clothing to school aged children so that they can attend school.

The event ran from 1-3 pm. It was a chilly day, so Linda, Diane, and Joan were well wrapped up, and wearing masks of course, as they stood by their cars with trunks open, waiting for donors to show up – and they did! The cars kept coming for the whole two hours.

OLLI was able to donate 870 pounds of food to Feed the Pack with $125 in donations, as well as approximately 75 pounds of clothing to Note in the Pocket. At the end of the
drive-thru the ladies delivered the donations to the respective organizations. The generous spirit of OLLI was much appreciated.

Submitted by: Joan Hardman-Cobb, Assistant Director, OLLI at North Carolina State University

OSHER INSTITUTE AT UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND
A Community Read of *Caste*

The Osher Institute at University of Richmond (UR) recently engaged in a timely and important community read of the book *Caste* by Isabel Wilkerson. As the U.S. continues to wrestle with its national past of racial and economic inequity and seeks to build a more inclusive and just society, Wilkerson's book asks readers to consider history in a broader way.

To make this free/open to the public event happen, Osher at UR worked with Dr. Rob Urstein and Alex Avery who created Gather, one of many excellent resources listed on the Osher NRC website curriculum resource page.

In early November, Osher at UR began extending invitations to the event while Gather staff helped by handling registrations, scheduling, and session facilitation. Osher at UR partnered with a local bookstore for book sales. They invited members, as well the staff and students from the wider School of Continuing and Professional Studies, fellow Virginia OLLIs, and other lifelong learning programs in the state to participate. Final
figures reflect 202 registrants, mostly from Richmond, but others throughout Virginia and as far away as Connecticut, Michigan, South Carolina, and California.

The facilitated structure of the community read proved to be critical in keeping participants engaged. Three facilitated check-in discussions on various sections of the book were held. Each guided 45-minute check-in, with small- and large-group components was offered mid-day and late afternoon to accommodate differing personal schedules.

Throughout the second week in January, the group finished the read with seven facilitated small-group discussions, giving everyone a chance to join at their convenience and to share their ideas in an engaging, meaningful way. Throughout the read, the discussions added a layer of insight, richness, and deeper understanding that reading alone would not likely have provided.

The post-read survey responses reflected that, on a 10-point scale, every question asked received an average score of greater than 8. And, when surveyed participants were asked if they would like to participate in a similar future event, a solid 100% said yes. The narrative responses to the post-read survey reinforced Osher staff’s perceived value of this activity, with comments such as:

“Being a part of the Caste discussions was an experience worth my time. It not only gave an opportunity for discussion online with the participants, but also prompted discussions with my family”.

“The topic matters – Caste was such an important book. Extremely timely to have a discussion on this one…I was glad to join conversations with other LLI members across the state (and other states). It felt like a common voyage of discovery and awakening”.

Osher at UR is looking forward to similar events in the future and appreciated that the Gather staff helped make this community read so worthwhile.

Submitted by: Peggy Watson, Director, Osher Institute at University of Richmond
One of OLLI at Southern Oregon University’s (SOU) instructors is up to something that speaks to the power of collaboration between OLLI programs during these challenging times, and the amazing opportunity distance learning gives Institutes to do so. Instructor, Irv Lubliner, has historically taught courses ranging from math to blues harmonica, but in 2019 he also began teaching a course centered around a book that is close to his heart.

The book, *Only Hope: A Survivor’s Stories of the Holocaust* by Felicia Bornstein Lubliner is a collection of Irv’s mother’s writings about her experiences in Polish ghettos and Nazi concentration camps. In Irv’s four-week course, “The Holocaust Through the Eyes of a Survivor” he shares his mother’s stories and his experience as a child of Holocaust survivors. As Lubliner states, this is “some of the most important work of my life.”

In October 2020, Lubliner mentioned to OLLI at SOU assistant director Rob Casserly that he would be happy to offer this content to other OLLI programs. Rob posted to Basecamp (a networking application for OLLI staff) about Irv’s offer. As Lubliner said at the time, “It’ll be like going on a promotional tour, but without leaving the house. Furthermore, it is satisfying to share with others, mostly retired, who value lifelong learning.” The response was overwhelming, and Irv currently has scheduled similar presentations at 31 different OLLI programs in 20 different states, and the list continues to grow.

Rob notes, “I had no idea so many people would take Irv up on the offer, but Irv is thrilled with the response.” Irv calls it his “OLLI book tour.”
Parts of this article are from information provided in the Ashland Tidings article “OLLI teacher reaches far and wide” by OLLI at Southern Oregon University member, Laura Simonds.

Submitted by: Rob Casserly, Assistant Director, OLLI at Southern Oregon University

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Osher NRC 2021 Webinar Series

Mark your calendar for the next Osher NRC webinar of 2021 on April 21st 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.

Osher Lifelong Learning Institute and Member Benchmarking Data

The National Resource Center for Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes (NRC) has conducted a variety of surveys of both Osher Institutes and their membership to create benchmarks of demographic and operational data. In this webinar, NRC staff will review
these data and offer insights on the research findings including membership demographics, distance learning, finances, volunteer committee structures, and more.

**Presenters**
Kevin Connaughton  
Manager of Adult Learning, Osher NRC

Stacey Rivera  
Manager of Operations, Osher NRC

Steve Thaxton  
Executive Director, Osher NRC

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

THE OLLI INSIDER

AN ADVICE COLUMN FOR OSHER INSTITUTE STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

Dear Olli

Dear Olli,
I am an Osher Institute staff member trying to encourage some of our members to turn their cameras on during Zoom classes. I find that many class participants want to see and interact with their fellow participants both auditorily and visually. Furthermore, as someone who coordinates the class, it is much easier to run discussions and Q and A’s when I can see the members. Any suggestions?

~OLLI Coordinator

Dear OLLI Coordinator,
In this era of remote learning, there are a lot of ways to simulate the in-person class experience, seeing and hearing fellow classmates is one of those areas. Regarding your question, on the encouragement side, a simple reminder to the members at the start of class can help. This verbal reminder can highlight that their fellow classmates want to see them, and seeing them makes it easier for you, the coordinator, to ensure that they are able to participate in class. On the other hand, it is important to remember that there are several factors as to why a member may not want to have their camera on; it could be a bandwidth or hardware issue, they may not feel comfortable sharing the background visuals of their home, or they may not feel presentable that day. Basically, it comes down to this, you can’t, nor should you
force someone to turn on their camera, but gentle reminders and encouragement may increase the member's comfort in doing so.

~Olli

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

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QUICK TIPS FOR HELPING OPERATE AN Osher Institute

Quick Tip - Refer a Friend - Get a Free Class

Word of mouth has long been one of the most effective marketing tools for Osher Institutes recruiting new members. With this in mind, the OLLI at University of California, Irvine recently advertised a promotion where members can refer one or more friends to OLLI and for anyone who signs up, the current member gets a free class. What a great incentive and win-win!

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CAREER OPENINGS IN THE OLLI NETWORK

Job Board

Director, Osher Lifelong Learning Institute
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Director, Osher Lifelong Learning Institute
California State University, San Bernardino

Osher Program Manager
San Diego State University

Program Coordinator, OLLI
California State University, Chico

OLLI Program Director
Granite State College
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