Greetings from the NRC

Promoting well-being is central to Osher Institutes both inside the classroom and beyond. Learning opportunities to practice wellness come together with experiences in nature. Then there are the partnerships across campus and the local community. Pair these with the opportunity to connect with longtime friends and newcomers and you fully understand the culture of well-being at OLLIs.

In this month’s newsletter you will find out about the many ways mindfulness and meditation find their way into the offerings of OLLIs. You will also read about one OLLI’s research collaboration to bring robot pets to older adults to combat loneliness and isolation. The Curriculum Corner features a floating classroom, and the Quick Tip brings a new idea to create a welcoming in-person environment for longtime members, as well as those just finding their way to OLLI.

Through these courses and activities it is clear that the culture of well-being is thriving across the Network.

With gratitude for all you do for the Osher Institute Network,
As technology advances, so do the ways in which humans find companionship. The OLLI at George Mason University (GMU) partnered with a neuroscience team on their campus to offer their members the opportunity to participate in a research
study looking at the effects of oxytocin in fostering short-term bonding between older adults and robot companions like Aibo, pictured here.

The research team, led by Associate Professor Frank Kreuger, believes that these robotic companions can positively impact the well-being of older adults. Sarah-Seval Aydin, a research assistant in the Psychology Department, notes that companionship helps promote emotional well-being, reduces loneliness, and enhances cognitive abilities, leading to happier and healthier lives. Through participation in this study, the members of the OLLI at GMU not only have an opportunity for companionship, but can also be part of cutting-edge research that could inform interventions for isolation and loneliness to improve the lives of other older adults.

OLLI at GMU executive director Jennifer Disano says, “OLLI Members are ready and willing participants for university-based research efforts. Schools such as Bioengineering, Public Health, Nursing, Psychology, and even Economics often reach out to OLLI for older adult subjects to help with cutting-edge research studies. We support this engagement as another layer of relationship building and integration with the university and as an added value of OLLI Membership.”

Collaborations like this are a win all around as it allows OLLI members access to innovative opportunities, allows researchers to advance their work through access to a potential pool of participants, and highlights the Institute as a valuable part of the university community.

Submitted by: Jennifer Disano, Executive Director, OLLI at George Mason University
Meditation and mindfulness may seem like a new age fad to some, or a religious practice to others. However, OLLI members across the nation have discovered they don’t need to be a hippy or practice Buddhism to benefit from these practices. The performance of meditation and mindfulness can promote physical, mental, and emotional health. In addition, it can reduce stress, increase self-awareness, and even improve sleep quality. For many OLLIs, these factors, along with the offering’s popularity with members, have made meditation and mindfulness a staple offering.

Mindfulness and meditation content takes many forms. It can be singular sessions, multi-week classes, or even special interest groups. OLLI at University of California, Berkeley (UCB) offers “Meditation, Volunteering, and Positive Neuroplasticity,” bringing together academic and experiential learning. OLLI at the University of Alabama in Huntsville offers “The Heartfulness Way of Life with Heartfulness Meditation,” a practical heart-based relaxation and meditation class. And at OLLI at University of Texas El Paso, director Lynn Provenzano leads the “Meditation: Relax, Release, Revitalize” class. From Zen meditation to Yoga Nidra, there are numerous examples of these types of classes across the network.

Institute members and administrators see these types of classes as a benefit to their OLLIs. Susan Hoffman, director of the OLLI at UCB states, “mitigating stress and engaging with purpose are the two main targets in our Berkeley course which follows the wisdom of the Greater Good Science Center.” Lynn Provenzano sums it up well, “the benefits of meditation support a better quality of life that extends to every aspect of a person’s being, especially beyond what we know to be physical. Ultimately, our members seek peace of mind and kindness. Our OLLI members
return again and again to our meditation classes to gain new insights and develop simple practices they can easily integrate into their lives.”

Osher Institute at University of South Florida
"Floating Classroom" Eco Tour

**Course Length:** One day  
**Course Instructor:** Tampa Bay Watch: "Biologist Dakoeta, Intern Rebecca & Captain Mo"  
**Course Delivery:** Private Chartered Boat

From a tiny Ghost shrimp to baby birds and Petunia the dolphin, the OLLI Outdoors Special Interest Group (SIG) went on a “floating classroom” Eco Tour with Tampa Bay Watch, a local non-profit dedicated to the protection and restoration of the Tampa Bay Estuary. The science-based tour packed in a diversity of species to study up close. The mission was to record marine life in Area 6, identify dolphins, and visit the birds nesting on Bird Island. Arriving at their first stop, Dakoeta and Rebecca cast a fisheries trawl net and carefully went through the haul, identifying species from the designated spot. Members volunteered to record the species, along with conditions – temperature, salinity, and wind speed. It was Citizen Science in action! The last stop was Bird Island. Here, birds are protected by a mangrove island and can safely breed and raise their chicks. A highlight was seeing the baby birds and the just hatched Brown Pelican chicks who are white when born. While returning to dock at the St. Petersburg marina, the group was treated with an up close and personal "show and tell" talk about the local marine life of Tampa Bay.
More details and photos about this experience can be found on the [USF OLLI Connects blog](#).

### QUICK TIPS FOR HELPING OPERATE AN Osher Institute

#### Quick Tip - Welcoming Name Badges

Creating a welcoming environment is particularly important as new members are recruited to join an Osher Institute. But it is rare that members know exactly who is a new and who is a long-time member. If your OLLI issues name badges, this tip is for you. Like OLLI at Penn State York, simply color code new member name badges and amply communicate that members wearing red badges should be heartily welcomed into the OLLI. It is a visual cue that signals the social opportunity to strike up a conversation and make the new members feel noticed, included, and welcomed by their new Osher Institute friends. Newly issued badges can move to the general membership color at whatever interval is appropriate. But then the formerly new members might be encouraged to engage as welcomers going forward!

### CAREER OPENINGS IN THE OLLI NETWORK

#### Job Board

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<tr>
<th>Position</th>
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<tr>
<td>Director of Osher Lifelong Learning Institute</td>
<td><a href="#">Texas Tech University</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant Director of Osher Lifelong Learning Institute</td>
<td><a href="#">Texas Tech University</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Program Coordinator, Osher Lifelong Learning Institute</td>
<td><a href="#">Colorado State University</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Osher Educational Coordinator</td>
<td><a href="#">University of Missouri</a></td>
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Osher Program Coordinator
San Diego State 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
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