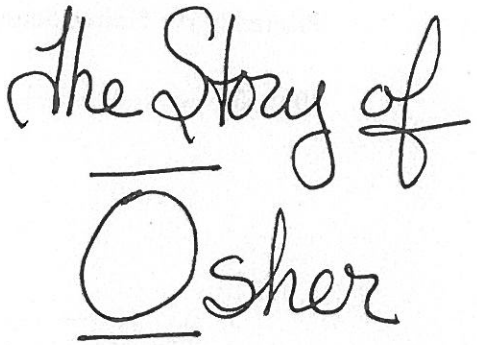
STAYING THE COURSE

Thirty-Five Years of Osher Philanthropy



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CHAPTER SEVEN

LIFELONG LEARNING

Always alert to societal shifts and developments, Bernard and Barbro Osher became increasingly aware of the national statistics on the "graying of America" and began considering what steps might be taken in the fields of education and medicine to have those longer lives be healthy and fulfilling ones. Barbro Osher was already familiar with the European emphasis on the "third age," a term first appearing in the 1970s that attempted to "reconceptualize the ten to twenty usually healthy years following working adulthood."[1] While well informed about third-age programs in her native Sweden, as well as in other countries of Western Europe, she and her husband were eager to learn more about existing efforts that focused on continuing education for older adults in the United States. Together, they were open to the possibility of directing Osher Foundation support to such programs—programs that would celebrate learning for the joy of learning, that had no examination requirements, and that were designed particularly for individuals who already had celebrated their 50th birthdays.

North American Learning in Retirement Programs

The first "learning in retirement" program in the United States was launched in New York City at the New School for Social Research

in 1962 under the name Institute for Retired Professionals; it was the creation of a group of retired public school teachers. Over the next 25 years, numerous similar programs developed across the country. Among the earliest were:

- The University of Kentucky's Council on Aging (1964)
- UC Berkeley's Center for Learning in Retirement (1973)
- The Institutes for Learning in Retirement at Duke and Harvard (1977)
- University of Delaware's Academy of Lifelong Learning (1980)
- UCLA's PLATO Society (1980)
- American University's Institute for Learning in Retirement (1982)
- University of North Carolina, Asheville's Center for Creative Retirement (1988)
- CSU Chico's Prime Timers program (1988)
- Institute for Lifelong Education at Dartmouth (1990)
- CSU Long Beach's Senior University (1996)
- The Maine Senior College Network (1997)

The development of the Elderhostel movement in 1975 was informed by the same concept that the third age could and should be a constructive and meaningful one. The Elderhostel architects were impressed with the "folk schools" of Scandinavia—where older adults passed down to younger generations age-old traditions in folk art, music, lore, and dance. They also took note of the value of youth hostels and conceived of an analogous program for seasoned adults.[2]

Within 10 years of operation, Elderhostel had nearly 1,000 activity sites across the United States and "a mailing list of 500,000

mature learners." The leaders of Elderhostel saw the benefits of longer-term learning opportunities on university campuses for older adults—opportunities that did not entail travel or lodging arrangements—and they believed that their "experienced administrative base" could prove helpful and would be "sensitive to the need to encourage programmatic independence and distinctiveness, yet aggressive in pursuit of the opportunity to facilitate the rapid and substantial expansion of this exciting educational concept."[3]

Created in 1988, the Elderhostel Institute Network (EIN) set about to promote the expansion of what were generically called institutes of learning in retirement or ILRs. Over the next five years, more than 100 new institutes were created, largely with the encouragement of EIN. The resources necessary to continue EIN's "proselytizing" mission became considerable and, within a few years, the question was raised as to whether the EIN should focus on new entrants to the network or should assist the more mature ILRs—especially with such questions as "membership growth, space limitations, and differences between younger and elder members." In 1998, the organization undertook a study on "the best future relationship" between Elderhostel and the ILRs, and by 2002, it became clear that the ILR movement, proud of its own achievements and with individual ILRs wanting to focus on their own development, no longer saw the value in a paid EIN staff. Agreement was reached that the EIN would best become a "dues-free, 'virtual' organization, providing informational services from a special section of the Elderhostel web site," renamed Road Scholar, in 2010.[4]

The Fromm Institute for Lifelong Learning

One of the earliest learning in retirement programs in Northern California was founded in 1976 by friends of the Oshers, Alfred and Hanna Fromm, at the University of San Francisco. The Fromms, who immigrated to the United States from war-torn Germany in 1936, first went to New York and then settled in the Bay Area. Alfred

Fromm (seen in Figure 7.1) was a fourth-generation winemaker who formed a partnership—Fromm & Sichel Inc.—to distribute Christian Brothers wine and brandy. He assumed control of the Paul Masson vineyards in the 1950s and became widely respected not only as an astute businessman but as a patron of educational and cultural organizations, including the San Francisco Opera, the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, the Judah L. Magnes Museum (now the Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life) in Berkeley, and the Wine Museum of San Francisco. He helped to found the Jewish Museum of San Francisco (now the Contemporary Jewish Museum) together with Bernard Osher in 1984.

Figure 7.1: Phyllis Cook and Bernard Osher with Alfred Fromm on his 75th birthday at the Fleur de Lys restaurant in San Francisco in 1980.

In his autobiography, Alfred Fromm, who passed away in 1998 at the age of 93, noted that three things were important to incorporate into daily life: "the importance of learning, strong family bonds and charity." The Fromm Institute was a highly visible manifestation of his commitment to learning and to charity.[5] His talented wife, Hanna, an ardent patron of robust intellectual activity for retirees, served as the organization's volunteer executive director until just a few months before her death in 2003. Robert Fordham, longtime program director of the Fromm Institute and close associate of Hanna Fromm, succeeded her as executive director. The Fromm Institute now serves more than 1,000 older adults with a wide range of classes that meet once a week for eight weeks. Faculty members are primarily emeritus professors from colleges and universities in the San Francisco Bay Area.

As early as 1984, the Osher Foundation provided funding to the Fromm Institute—an initial gift of $500, followed by a grant of $1,000 in 1985 and a 1988 grant of $30,000 payable at $10,000 per year over the next three years to support the offering of courses on American art at the Institute. Additional grants were provided through 1997. On December 7, 2000, the Oshers, accompanied by Fred Balderston and Stephen Dobbs, had lunch at the Campton Place Hotel in San Francisco with Hanna Fromm and Robert Fordham to obtain particulars about the academic programs and administrative arrangements of the Fromm Institute as due diligence for their own plans of developing a network of lifelong learning programs. Their guests were generous in providing information and encouragement, and the Oshers were appreciative. In 2004, even as the Osher Foundation was already supporting lifelong learning programs in California, Hawaii, and selected New England states, it contributed $100,000 toward the remodeling of Xavier Hall at USF to become Fromm Hall, the permanent home of the Fromm Institute for Lifelong Learning.

The Maine Senior College Network

A second source of inspiration for the Osher Foundation's growing interest in lifelong learning programs for seasoned adults was the Senior College network in Maine, founded in 1997 by Rabbi Harry Sky and a group of committed volunteers. In 1999, leaders of the system's first program at the University of Southern Maine (USM) in Portland convinced the Maine state legislature to make an ongoing line item appropriation of $150,000 per year to the University of Maine System for the "Support the Senior College Initiative." This action allowed USM to hire a staff director whose time was split between administering USM Senior College and developing the new network now comprised of 17 independent groups from York County to Fort Kent, a configuration that was of special interest to the Oshers. The director, Kali Lightfoot, was an acknowledged authority on older adult education and, before coming to USM, a long-time leader within the Elderhostel movement. During a trip to Maine in the summer of 2000, the Oshers visited the USM Senior College, spoke with USM president Richard Pattenaude, and met Kali Lightfoot (see Figure 7.2). They were impressed with the State of Maine's commitment to continued learning for seniors and requested a proposal that was submitted to the Foundation in February 2001. On March 23, the Osher trustees approved a $2.2 million grant award for the USM Senior College with $2 million designated for endowment to support staffing, scholarships, and a distinguished lecture series; a 1:1 challenge grant of $150,000 for space renovation to house the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute on the Portland campus; and $50,000 for transportation needs.

With the 2001 endowment of the Senior College program at USM—renamed The Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at the University of Southern Maine, the Osher Foundation began moving forward with alacrity and resolve in contemplating an expanding consortium of lifelong learning programs. Enthusiastic about the Foundation's growing interest in enhancing the lives of seasoned

Figure 7.2: Kali Lightfoot, director of the National Resource Center for the Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes, and Bernard Osher at the Osher Scholars' reception in May 2005 at the Portland Museum of Art in Maine.

adults, Osher Foundation trustee Robert Friend introduced the Oshers to his neighbor and friend, Ed Stolman. A successful businessman who came to California from Nashville, Tennessee, Stolman had been an active participant in the Fromm Institute before beginning to spend more time in Sonoma, where he had a residence and olive grove. He spoke to the leadership at Sonoma State University (SSU), one of the 23 campuses of the California State University system, about starting a lifelong learning program, and the response was favorable, especially since he agreed to provide the seed funding required by the university. At the first meeting, 234 individuals showed up, eager to pursue learning for the joy of learning. The question of longer-term financing arose and Stolman reported that he would speak with Bernard Osher whom he invited to lunch. Within 20 minutes of conversation about the Sonoma initiative, Bernard Osher reportedly exclaimed: "Ed, you're doing exactly what I want to do. I'm going to give you a

$100,000 a year for three years. If you're very successful, I'll give you a million dollar endowment."[6] The Osher Foundation Board acted on June 27, 2001, providing its initial grant of $100,000 to the SSU Osher Lifelong Learning Institute.

Growth of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute Program

By November of 2001, Stephen Dobbs had received an invitation to speak to the extended education deans within the California State University system at a conference in February 2002 about opportunities for support of lifelong learning programs. Keen interest in the topic led him to issue requests for proposals to the CSU and University of California campuses in April. With the consultant assistance of Dr. Peter Dewees, his fellow San Francisco State University faculty member and former dean of continuing education at SFSU, Stephen Dobbs oversaw the early growth of the Osher Foundation's lifelong learning program to 18 grantees: USM and SSU, along with other CSU campuses at Bakersfield, Dominguez Hills, Fullerton, Hayward (now East Bay), San Bernardino, SFSU, San José, and San Luis Obispo, and UC campuses at Berkeley, Davis, Irvine, Riverside, San Francisco, and Santa Cruz. Augmenting the Maine/California group were the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa and the University of Vermont. A few of the programs already existed, like USM's Senior College and the University of Hawai'i's Academy for Lifelong Learning, but most were start-up programs like that at Sonoma State University.

In May 2003, the Osher Board felt that the lifelong learning program should be set on an accelerated course, and Mary Bitterman, an Osher Foundation trustee, was appointed director of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes, a grant-making activity that the Oshers and fellow trustees hoped would become a defining feature of the Foundation. With her academic background and public service experience, the Board thought she could take advantage of

national connections to promote the growth of Osher Institutes at colleges and universities in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Meanwhile, Stephen Dobbs, in his capacity as executive vice president of the Foundation, continued to oversee grant-making in the areas of the arts, scholarships, and integrative medicine.

At the Board meeting on February 25, 2004, 23 new lifelong learning proposals were brought to the trustees for consideration. All were approved, thereby expanding the network to 41 members. New entrants included eight CSU campuses (Channel Islands, Chico, Humboldt, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Sacramento, San Diego, and San Marcos) and three UC campuses (Los Angeles, San Diego, and Santa Barbara) along with Arizona State University, Brandeis University, Dominican University of California, University of Hawai'i at Hilo, Santa Clara University, Sierra College, Granite State University, Yavapai College, and the Universities of Kansas, Nebraska, Richmond, and Utah. At the June 2nd Board meeting, an additional seven applications were presented and grants were awarded to the University of Dayton, Duke University, George Mason University, Kennesaw State University, and the Universities of Minnesota, Oregon, and Pittsburgh, raising the total number of Osher Institutes to 48.

At four of the Osher Board's meetings in 2005 and 2006, 53 additional colleges and universities were added to the consortium of Osher Institutes, now providing for 101 grantees in the program—from the University of Alabama at Huntsville and the University of Alaska at Fairbanks, to Tufts, Hampton, and Vanderbilt Universities. As a result of Mary Bitterman's appointment as Foundation president in May 2004, and the continued growth in the Foundation's portfolio of grantees, David Blazevich was hired as senior program officer in October 2006 to be the lead on the Osher Institute program and to work on other selected projects.

In 2007, there were 19 new entrants to the Osher Institute network; in 2008, four; in 2009, two; one in 2011; and two in 2012. Over the decade in which the Osher network was developing, a few institutes proved unable to meet the increasingly high standards set

for grantees in the program. The economic difficulties that began to plague the nation in 2008 made programs attached to public institutions' continuing education departments particularly vulnerable, as those departments were meant to house fully self-supporting programs, and several of the Osher Institutes were not yet self-sufficient. Eleven institutes were eventually discontinued, and the Osher Institute at the University of California, San Francisco, evolved into a Mini Medical School program affiliated with the Osher Center for Integrative Medicine at UCSF.

Characteristics of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes

When reviewing the remarkable diversity of grantees within the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute network, one is struck by the common threads uniting the members of the consortium: lifelong learning programs specifically developed for seasoned adults; university connection and university support; opportunities for volunteer leadership; engagement of emeritus faculty, current faculty, and peer leaders; and a varied repertoire of intellectually stimulating courses.

Osher Institutes offer an array of programs from semester-length courses to short courses and special lecture series. Curricula feature the arts and humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. Institute offerings are remarkable in their depth and breadth—from "History of the Jews in Norway," "Intergenerational Ethics," and "The Punic Wars" to "The History of Islam," "Mathematics: From Egyptians to Archimedes," "Wagner: The Man, His Art, and The Ring," and "Great Nebraskans." Lectures cover an array of topics including Giuseppe Garibaldi, black historiography, the internment of Japanese-Americans, The McCarthy era, recent developments in the Arab world, existentialism, contemporary Nigeria, and Italian opera. Nearly every Institute has a course on memoir writing and families of Institute members have been grateful for the results. Creative writing of a more general nature also is popular at the

Institutes, and many of them publish first-rate journals containing short stories, essays, poems, photographs, and drawings.

Special interest groups connect subsets of Institute membership around subjects from discussion of *The New Yorker* and Stonewall LGBTQ issues to critical thinking about Vietnam. Theatre and choral enthusiasts band together, as do bird-watchers and travelers interested in visiting both local sites of interest and foreign destinations. Travel is often related to coursework; for example, students took trips to Cuba following a course on Cuban history and culture; to Montana and Wyoming after a course about the Plains Indian Wars; to Thailand after study of Thai culture; and to Lyons after French language classes. While senior centers and other community programs enhance the lives of older adults primarily with programs focused on crafts, body movement, and games such as bridge and mahjong, the Osher Institutes also provide such activities—note "Ageless Archery," "Bellydance Fitness," and yoga.

The desire of the Foundation has been to support institutes that share fundamentals but also reflect the distinctive characteristics of their campuses and communities—namely, that each would be a variation on the Osher lifelong learning theme. To reinforce the concept of shared identity, the designation of each grantee as the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at the University of [university name] became a condition of the Foundation's grant-making, along with the use of a logo consisting of a simple circle with the words "Osher Lifelong Learning Institute" inside. Some programs employ the short form "OLLI" to describe themselves, while others prefer the more formal title of "Osher Institute."

Architecture of the Osher Institute Grant Program

When the program began in 2001, the Foundation initially offered annual grants of $100,000 for up to three years to institutions of higher education to develop and implement educational services for older adults. Originally, benchmarks for annual renewal were

established so that grantees were expected to have at least 100 members by the end of year 1, 200 by the end of year 2, and 300 by the end of year 3. Once they reached the level of 300 members, Institutes could stand eligible for consideration of a $1 million endowment grant to provide permanent support for the program.

By the end of 2005, however, it became evident that the annual membership size of an Institute was a significant factor in determining its prospects for success and sustainability. In working with its grantees, the Foundation realized that a consistent source of funding beyond Osher support was essential to the development of strong and enduring lifelong learning programs. It also found that membership revenue provided the most reliable and annually-renewable source of such support. It was therefore determined that setting a membership goal of at least 500 individuals for endowment consideration would encourage Institutes to develop a larger base for generating revenue, which, in turn, would lead to better-financed, healthier, and more sustainable programs.

The Foundation's benchmarks were consequently adjusted in early 2006. Since then, Institutes have been required to have at least 500 unduplicated dues-paying members annually to be considered for endowment. To assist existing grantees in reaching the increased membership level, the Foundation added the possibility of a fourth annual grant of $100,000 to the structure of the grant program. Such support has been made available to Institutes that are funded as start-up programs, with preexisting programs generally restricted to three annual grants. In addition, all Institutes must now have at least 350 members to qualify for consideration of Year 4 support. Further, when an endowment gift is made after operating support has ended, a bridge grant of $50,000 is provided along with the $1 million endowment to permit continued operation of the Institute while income accrues from the investment of the endowment funds.

By 2006, Bernard Osher decided that Institutes with more than 1,000 members that maintain program excellence and strong university support might be considered for a second $1 million

endowment gift. In late 2009, however, given uncertainty in financial markets, the Foundation temporarily suspended consideration of second endowments. In May 2010, in an effort to help larger institutes remain robust through challenging economic times, the Board approved by unanimous written consent the possibility of post-endowment $50,000 annual operating grants to programs whose memberships sustainably exceed 1,000 dues-paying individuals and that meet additional criteria, including the submission of a satisfactory fundraising plan. In November 2010, the Foundation once again contemplated awarding second endowment gifts, but only if an Institute met all endowment criteria, exceeded the 1,000-member benchmark, and possessed an effective fundraising program to generate sufficient contributed revenue to augment earned revenue and Osher support.

The National Resource Center for the Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes

Bernard Osher looked to the day when the Foundation, which is a spend-down foundation, would no longer be in operation, and wanted to ensure that there was "connective tissue" between and among the growing number of Osher Institutes. Accordingly, on October 20, 2004, he encouraged the Foundation board to commit $2 million to an endowment fund to support a national resource center (NRC) for the Osher Institutes at the University of Southern Maine, the site of the first Osher Lifelong Learning Institute. (An additional $1 million endowment was contributed to the NRC in March 2008.) Kali Lightfoot was named director of the NRC, which was designed to promote education and communication within and beyond the network. Among its activities are the publication of monthly e-newsletters, an annual packet of resources for leaders, and the maintenance of a public website. The website, www.osher.net, includes resources for every aspect of managing an Institute, as well as an archive of videos and handouts from past conferences, an

OLLI Authors page with information on books published by institute members, an AskOLLI blog where leaders can discuss issues, and a proprietary intranet for the exclusive use of Osher Institutes. The NRC also provides advice and counsel for institute staff and leaders, offers technical support for regional institute meetings, maintains a social media presence, provides online user groups, and conducts professional development activities through the hosting of discussion groups and dinners for Osher Institute participants in the meetings of related groups such as the University Professional and Continuing Education Association (UPCEA) and the American Society on Aging (ASA).

The National Conferences

An additional responsibility given to the NRC was the organization of national meetings for the institutes every 18 months. Beginning in 2003, the idea of having a conference to facilitate the productive exchange of "best practice" information in the dynamic field of older adult education was raised with the Foundation. Sonoma State University put forward a successful proposal to host the first Osher Institute meeting in April 2003 and UC Irvine followed suit with a conference in October 2004. The two institutes not only hosted the meetings, but made all of the arrangements regarding design of the conference program, as well as arrangements for room, board, and transportation.

Although the two meetings were expertly conducted and certainly successful, it was evident that the network was becoming too large for a single grantee to undertake a national conference on its own. Once the NRC was in operation, it assumed responsibility for conference planning and organized the third Osher Institute meeting at the Hayes Mansion in San José in April 2006. The NRC has been able to retain excellent conference planners for what have become large and complex sessions, while helping to establish a strong sense of community among the Osher Institute grantees.

In light of the increasingly national character of the Institute network, subsequent national conferences were held outside the State of California—at the Chateau Elan Conference Center in Braselton, Georgia, in April 2007; the Wigwam Resort in Phoenix, Arizona, in April 2008; Canyons Grand Summit Hotel in Park City, Utah, in October 2009; Eaglewood Resort in Itasca, Illinois, in April 2011; and The Broadmoor in Colorado Springs, Colorado, in November 2012. At these gatherings, typically two representatives from each institute attended—one often representing the university administration, such as the Institute director, and the other usually coming from the volunteer leadership of the program.

The conferences have proven useful to both the Foundation and its grantees. An evaluation is circulated by the NRC at the conclusion of each conference in order to obtain recommendations for improvement. While individual comments are invariably made on program content, cuisine, and accommodations, what characterizes every evaluation is the enthusiasm that attendees bring to the meetings and to their interactions with fellow Osher Institute participants based on their opportunity to share experiences—both good and bad—and to learn from one another in a safe and hospitable environment.

Among the concerns named by the participants are how to successfully fundraise to ensure the sustainability of their Institutes over the years to come; how to cultivate more diverse memberships, culturally, ethnically, and socio-economically; how to deal with difficult behaviors in classes and on trips; and how to develop sound and accomplishable business plans. From the start of the Osher Institute program, Bernard Osher spoke about the importance of three sources of support to sustain them: contributions, often in-kind, from the host campus; membership and course fees; and philanthropic donations, beginning with Osher grants and endowment gifts. With many universities experiencing financial difficulties, it has become ever more incumbent on the Osher Institutes to attend to membership growth and to strengthen their fundraising ability.

The LLI Review and Outreach

Between 2006 and 2011, in furtherance of its educational mission, the NRC annually produced *The LLI Review*, a national journal on older adult education. The journal included articles from participants from within the Osher network, as well as from other lifelong learning programs across the country. Issues had sections ranging from life stories and poetry to articles on research and theory, best practices, and learning resources. Dr. E. Michael Brady, professor of adult education at the University of Southern Maine, served as editor, assisted by a group of associate editors and an editorial board made up of directors from a cross-section of Osher Institutes. A decision was made to discontinue *The LLI Review* in 2012—after publication of six issues—given the rapid growth of online publications presenting similar content, as well as competing program priorities and resource demands.

The NRC has also looked into various activities in which clusters of institutes might engage. One promising initiative in 2009 brought six institutes together to participate in a pilot project, sponsored by the National Science Foundation: CSU East Bay, Southern Oregon University, University of Montana, University of Pittsburgh, University of Richmond, and the University of Southern Maine. The project, funded by a $75,000 grant, aimed to have Osher Institutes collaborate with local science centers and museums to bring informal science education to older adults. A non–Osher Institute colleague invited to participate in the planning grant happened to be affiliated with another Osher grantee—the Exploratorium. Its director of extended learning was able to contribute the valuable insights of a potential collaborator from the world of science. While the pilot study was complimented by NSF, the group's submission of a four-year $3 million grant to launch and develop similar initiatives at Osher Institutes across the country was not funded. A revised proposal was submitted to NSF in January 2012 and that, too, was declined. With hundreds of proposals under review in the category

by NSF and with only 15% being funded, the NRC and participating Institutes knew that the chances of funding were slim. With federal funding constraints growing and a reordering of priorities on NSF's part, the NRC has decided for the present not to re-submit its application.

The Value of the Osher Institutes to Their Host Organizations and Communities

The nearly 120 grantees in the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute program have developed successful programs that benefit their host organizations, whether a college or university, and the communities in which they are located. Several Institutes have raised funds to support projects on campus—a Faculty Grant Fund to support the continuation of research or smaller projects that might otherwise be abandoned because of budget cuts, and an OLLI Scholars program that provides $1,000 fellowships to graduate students, who, in turn, teach courses at the Institute in their fields of interest. One institute conducted a fundraising drive to help the university's Office of Military Services assist veterans as well as active duty military and their families to make successful transitions within the university community. Still others encourage their members to contribute their time and talents through participation in specific projects—a Citizen Scientist program in which Osher members participate as researchers alongside graduate students in various university research laboratories and the development of an intergenerational concert band on campus with Osher members performing with student musicians to large and enthusiastic audiences.

Other outreach programs target the host community. Once becoming informed about pressing community needs, Osher Institute members have engaged in a variety of service projects. One Osher Institute's members provide literacy tutoring to low-income seniors in a depressed rural area, while another's members tutor and mentor at-risk elementary school children in partnership

with the local school district. Still others bring music instruction to children in underserved schools and help immigrant families with English-language training, job placement, and continuing education. Additional programs have connected with local residents over environmental concerns, incidents of religious intolerance, and social concerns including poverty, homelessness, and hunger.

Through the learning environments they create and nurture, Osher Institute members often gain a sense of common purpose and a desire to effect improvements and promote greater understanding within their communities. Some members have mentioned that it is now in their "seasoned" years that they have found the time, interest, and knowledge to benefit a larger world. In doing so, their lives are enriched as are those of the people and communities they serve.

The Value of the Osher Institutes to Their Members and Their Members' Families

One companion of the aging process is loss—loss of life partners and siblings; loss of the camaraderie of the workplace; loss of varying amounts of physical capacity and financial strength. An invaluable aspect of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes is the sense of community informed by social facilitation. People find that they have a good reason to get up in the morning. The Foundation receives numerous communications from Osher Institute members about the life-enhancing aspects of the program.

> "I've fallen in love with learning all over again."
>
> "I've signed up for ten classes this semester. I keep telling myself I have to cut back, but then I look at the offerings, and I think I just can't let this opportunity go by."
>
> "I lead a Great Books discussion group, and each time I learn so much because the people in the class have so much to offer. They are doctors, lawyers, teachers, nurses, accountants,

mothers... [They bring] their own unique experiences to the discussion."

"The Institute keeps the wheels turning. You don't want to sit home and watch television all day. You should be out there thinking, and listening, and questioning all sorts of approaches to all sorts of problems."

"There's something inspiring about walking across a college campus and seeing the young people going about their day and realizing that I too have a day of exciting intellectual pursuits ahead."

Many letters also are received from family members who are delighted that their fathers, mothers, uncles, aunts, and grandparents are enjoying fresh opportunities for learning, making new friends, and expanding their intellectual and social horizons. One letter began its praise of the Osher Institute program in an unorthodox way.

"I spoke with a good friend yesterday. Her parents just joined OLLI and are signed up for several courses this fall. Given the amount of time that my friend's parents will be spending at OLLI, they have backed out of some 'opportunities' to take care of their grandchildren. I've experienced this as well.

We have decided to UNITE and form a new group, 'Adult Children against OLLI,' the ACAO.

Our parents have worked hard throughout their professional lives. They deserve to use their retirement years providing free childcare and not learning, growing, and exploring new ideas. Because of the OLLI 'agenda' a growing number of parents of young children in this community are being asked to do the unthinkable: Take care of their children themselves, especially on the evenings and weekends.

> Seriously, congratulations on the success of OLLI! Although we'll miss taking advantage of our parents, we're respectful of their time and thrilled that there's a community resource like OLLI."

Still another testimonial came from an Osher Institute member who participated in an Osher Institute program along with her 92-year-old father. "My father... relishes his classes. Osher benefits my entire family. My bed-ridden mother reads most of the handouts and [they give] her 66-year marriage something new to talk about." The writer ended by saying, "Our Osher program is vital and enriches so many people's lives."

Looking Forward

For centuries, writers have waxed eloquent about the power of learning and education and their relationship to one's quality of life. Leonardo da Vinci cautioned that "Just as iron rusts from disuse, even so does inaction spoil the intellect," while Nobel Prize winner Rosalyn Yalow expressed the view that, "The excitement of learning separates youth from old age... as long as you're learning you're not old." American philosopher and educational reformer John Dewey wrote that, "Education is a social process... Education is growth... Education is not a preparation for life... [It] is life itself." Henry Ford, the automobile magnate who popularized the assembly line, found that, "Anyone who stops learning is old... Anyone who keeps learning stays young," and the champion of non-violent change Mahatma Gandhi suggested that one should, "Live as if you were to die tomorrow... [and] Learn as if you were to live forever."

The testimony of the more than 115,000 members of the Osher Institute network, found in 290 cities and towns across America, speaks to the value of continuing education and to the benefits of a learning community that is simultaneously challenging and encouraging. With 10,000 baby boomers turning 65 every day, it is critical that seasoned adults have access to intellectually stimulating learning experiences coupled with social facilitation.[7] It is estimated

that Americans reaching the age of 65 today may live another 17.9 years—19.2 years for females and 16.3 years for males, and that by 2050, 40 percent of 65-year-olds will celebrate their 90th birthdays.[8] Older adults at Osher Institutes and beyond have become significant volunteers in their communities and consider retirement not as the end "of boring or demanding jobs," but as an opportunity "to do other things." This third age or "midcourse" for people in their 50s, 60s, and 70s, is now being described as "the period in which individuals begin to think about, plan for, and actually disengage from their primary career occupations and the raising of children; launch second or third careers; develop new identities and new ways to be productively engaged; establish new patterns of relating to... [others]; leave some existing relationships and begin new ones."[9]

It is in everyone's interest that seasoned adults remain as vigorous, informed, engaged, healthy, and optimistic as possible given their sizeable percentage of the national population and their consequential position within American society. Importantly, it is older Americans who consistently vote in higher proportions than other age groups. "In 2000, 67.6 percent of the older population, compared with 49.8 percent of those aged 25 to 44, said they voted; of all the votes cast that year, some 20 percent were by people age 65 and older."[10] The nearly 120 Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes on university campuses in all 50 states and the District of Columbia—while constituting only about a quarter of the formal older adult education programs in the United States—hold the distinction of being members of an influential and fully national "best practice" confederation that is informed and supported by an endowed National Resource Center. Since 2001, the Foundation has underwritten the creation of fresh new institutes, as well as providing funds to assist established programs of reputation and promise to expand their services. The seasoned adults participating in the programs of the Osher Institutes now and in the future will be enabled to live ever more meaningful lives that will benefit them, their families and communities, and the nation as a whole.

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