Cool Picnic Kicks Off New School Year

By Marlene Haus, Membership Chair

Tuesday, August 30, 2016, witnessed another Back-to-School Picnic for the Osher membership. It was a great happening! First, the weather cooperated. From 5:30 to 7 p.m. the temperature was mild with very little humidity. Second, there was a variety of entertainment: Bhangra—an Indian dance group of CMU students who wowed us with their skill at drumming and their graceful, very cool athleticism; The Originals—an all-male a cappella singing group of CMU students—whose wonderful voices and songs delighted us; and The Chromatics—a very professional barbershop quartet (not CMU students)—four resounding male voices who charmed us with some old favorites, their humorous banter, and their great bow ties. All very, very "cool."

The menu for the evening was an old-fashioned picnic with grilled hamburgers, hot dogs, etc. Thanks to CulinArts, the CMU catering service, we were able to keep the cost down and yet serve a delicious buffet. Our thanks to Danielle and Pam from that service, who worked with Osher Executive Director Lyn Decker and the Membership Committee.

Under the big, beautiful white tent donated by CMU, 150 members renewed friendships with classmates from last year and made new friends and met classmates whom they will see during the coming semesters. That tent sounded like one big "chat room."

The Membership Committee feels gratified that the picnic fulfilled its purpose of kick-starting the new school year in a congenial, fun way. Very "cool."

Many thanks to the Osher office staff—Lyn Decker, Christine Dashti and Chelsea Prestia—who helped so much with this event. Thanks also to our President, John Olmsted, and the board for their attendance and support. And finally, a hearty vote of thanks to the hard-working members of the committee: Francine Abraham, Sarah Angrist, Linda Bishoff, Dolores Blumstein, Circe Curley, Dick Fisher, Roz Goorin, Dee Kaufman, Jane Klivans, Marla Perlman, Allen Schwartz, Shirley Schwartz, Rochelle Steiner, Rita Zecher.

All very "cool" people.

At the picnic, from left: Marlene Haus and President John Olmsted; CMU Bhangra—student Indian dance group

Photos by Joe Shirk
From The President

By John Olmsted

The year 2017 will mark the 25th anniversary of the lifelong learning program at CMU as well as the 10th anniversary of our receipt of the first $1 million endowment. We're looking at our Annual Meeting in April as the official kickoff of the 25th anniversary year, as April 1992 was when the founding members first met to discuss setting up an adult lifelong learning program. At our 2017 Annual Meeting, we expect to have CMU Provost Farnam Jahanian (or his designated representative) as our featured speaker. At that meeting we will present the university with 25 Adirondack chairs in 25 different colors, to be placed at appropriate spots all around the CMU campus. This gift will contribute directly to a project called “Improving Nooks and Shared Spaces for Students” that is being pursued by a campus Task Force on the CMU Experience.

We are nominating our benefactor, Bernard Osher, to receive an honorary doctorate from CMU at the 2017 Commencement. Bernard Osher has been described as the "quiet philanthropist," but although quiet, his support of lifelong learning is manifest across the US. Our anniversary year would be a particularly apt time for CMU to recognize this outstanding philanthropist for his support of lifelong learning, not only at CMU but also at 118 other educational institutions scattered throughout the US.

Osher at CMU is outstanding primarily because of its talented and dedicated corps of study leaders. We plan to recognize a select number of these people at appropriate times during our 25th year, with particular attention to those who were among our pioneer group of study leaders. If you have favorite study leaders whom you would like us to recognize, please nominate them by sending me an e-mail.

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We are also considering an oral history project in which the experiences and reminiscences of veteran Osher members would be videoed and then archived on our website. We are especially eager to hear from veteran members who have reached advanced age. Capturing their perspectives about the lifelong learning experience at CMU will produce an invaluable historical archive for future Osher participants.

Osher at CMU augments its course offerings with lectures and social events. We plan to augment these in ways to be determined. For starters, our Holiday party is being moved from December 2016 to January 2017, when it will be the first event of our anniversary year. The entertainment will feature Stephen Schultz, CMU music professor, regular study leader for Osher at CMU, and concert flutist, and we expect also to have CMU music students performing.

A 25th Anniversary deserves some special publicity. We hope to have a design competition for a logo that will grace our publications, website, and stationery. More frivolously, is anyone up for painting The Fence? Joe Shirk did it in virtual fashion last year. Perhaps we have some young-at-hearts who will do it in real time late some night next year.

President Obama hosted the White House Frontiers Conference, co-hosted by CMU and Pitt on October 13
August of this year two of our past presidents passed away—Julian Eligator and Patricia L. Swedlow. On August 18, Julian Eligator died at the Smilow Cancer Hospital of Yale New Haven Hospital. An internist for 35 years, at retirement Julian became a member of Osher at CMU. After serving as treasurer, he was president from 2008-2010. He then became a study leader, teaching a popular course on The New Yorker magazine. Julian is survived by his wife, Rhoda—an active Osher member, three children, and seven grandchildren.

On August 19, Patricia L. Swedlow died in Lansing, Michigan, after a long battle with lung cancer. An active Osher member, Pat served as president from 2005-2007. In her career, Pat was a registered nurse anesthetist. Among her many activities in the Pittsburgh community, she served as president of the First Unitarian Church and the League of Women Voters. She is survived by her three children; three grandchildren; five stepchildren; her best friend, Osher member Gloria Kleiman; and many friends.

It is sad to lose two of our Osher members who served us so well, but we are grateful and thankful for all they gave of themselves for Osher.

Osher Visits RAND Corporation

In a two-hour session on October 18 in its headquarters, speakers from the RAND Corporation, a nonprofit, nonpartisan institution, spoke to Osher members. The speakers discussed the corporation’s history and its approach to developing solutions to public policy challenges to security, health, and prosperity.
Off to the Opera

By Sam Webb

I took Osher’s spring 2016 offering on the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust. It was billed as visiting the venues in the Cultural District of Pittsburgh and meeting the talented people who make things happen there. Well, it was just that. I met J. Kevin McMahon, president of the PCT with his company of sharp, clever and high-energy individuals and visited all of the theaters in the Cultural District. What that meant for me, as a student, was that the classes were far from dull. I hope this class will be offered again.

I was not completely unfamiliar with the Pittsburgh Cultural District, having once subscribed to season tickets to the Opera during the years of Tito Capobianco’s reign (I saw Pavarotti choke), a couple of seasons at the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra during the Maazel years. Went to several of the Broadway Series, from the first showing of Phantom, to the last revival of Hello, Dolly! with Carol Channing, The Sound of Music sing-a-long at the Byham, and a local production of The Mikado at the O’Reilly. I’ve walked around at the Gallery Crawls and the Three Rivers Arts Festivals. The only place new to me was the Cabaret Theater because I don’t drink.

What was sad for me was that I hadn’t seen a show in the Cultural District for several years now, one of the reasons being that I’m on my own and taking in a show just isn’t that exciting when you’re going stag.

I let slip this reason on the last day of classes to a nice young lady in marketing for the PCT and she asked me, “What would you like to see the most?” I said that I missed going to the Opera. I told her that it was the sheer spectacle of it all, that you have to be there in person, and that it’s just not the same listening to a performance on the radio or from a recording. (She must have thought I was channeling Nicolas Cage in Moonstruck.)

She said, “OK, let’s start with Opera.” And, she told me to get in touch with the Friends of the Opera and gave me their contact information (Anyone can access it online--just type in “Friends of the Pittsburgh Opera,” explore the website, and go from there).

I joined the Friends of the Pittsburgh Opera, and I have tickets to the next Opera on Tuesday night. So, wish me luck, I’m off to the Opera.

From the Pittsburgh Opera website, two scenes from Giuseppe Verdi’s La Traviata, performed in October. Alfredo was sung by Cody Austin, and Violetta was sung by Danielle Pastin. Photos via David Bachman.

Sam Webb welcomes comments at sagexlibris@yahoo.com. Cell: 412 915-8954.
Something Special After the Osher Class

For the Birds
by Joan Morse Gordon

Usually, when most of us Osher members sign up for a class, we ask and hope to be enlightened by the instructor, with the prospect of some participation on our part. That was newish members Fran and David Fall’s expectation when they signed up for a day at the national Aviary on the North Side. The class consisted of an hour of lecture and an hour of a ok behind the scene. There was much to see: an incubator for hatched abandoned eggs, a staff member feeding a newborn with an edropper, a room with playpens for non-flying birds.

When the tour was over, David, a dentist, who started his training in veterinary medicine, was intrigued by techniques used in the Aviary, and asked to stay on and serve. The director, Pilar Fish, a doctor of veterinary medicine, welcomed the Falls into her office, which was shared at the moment by a lying parrot, a recovering patient (the birds have names and are treated as patients). She described various techniques, from cataract surgeries, to fixation of broken legs, wings, to repairing fractured cracked beaks and bills.

“As I observed these techniques, I, of course, related some of procedures to what we do in our offices. When I saw how frustrated they were by some injuries they couldn’t treat, I suggested that some dental techniques could be the solution,” said David. As a result, Dr. Fish twice visited David’s office and saw, among other methods, how a composite bonding material which set in minutes with a visible blue spectrum light would work for cracked beaks and bills. And how the stork’s broken leg could be splinted with a sipping straw.

David Fall, a past president of the Pittsburgh Academy of Dentistry, has, in the past, solicited members to send expired materials or outdated supplies, instruments or equipment to Dr. Stephen Defusco, who, with his daughter, has been going to Haiti on a dental mission. This year, in addition, he has shared his experience at the Aviary and has requested many dental items... for the birds.
The Art And Science Of Recruiting Study Leaders
By Sally Cohen

A few years after I joined the Academy of Lifelong Learning (now Osher at Carnegie Mellon), I was asked to become chair of the Curriculum Committee. A.L.L.’s membership was quite small then, and I was told that the curriculum was the driving force of the organization. I learned rather quickly that it was the Study Leaders, whose course descriptions ultimately ended up in the program catalog, who stimulated the A.L.L. members to register for courses and learn about various topics that interested them.

But the question was asked, “How do you find the study leaders?” In no time, my newspapers and magazines were ripped apart as I pulled out articles about people who were involved in unusual but understandable activities. I took notes and names of people whom I or others had talked with, and these along with suggestions and materials from others were given to Curriculum Committee members to contact. It’s the new courses that people often look for; previously taught courses are still popular, but new ones set people up for experiencing often unknown or little-known information.

Personally, I enjoyed talking with professors (mostly from CMU) and reversing the Q&A process. That is, I would ask the questions about their work, research activities, positive and negative issues in their fields, and they would give me the answers. As they talked, I would identify descriptions, ideas, etc., that I felt our members would enjoy hearing and learning about, or that they had a specific interest in, and I also would note topics that would be difficult for our members to comprehend and that would need additional clarification, for example, statistics, or unfamiliar terminology connected to particular subject areas.

Many professors were very interested in doing this, and we got positive feedback from class members and from the instructors themselves. One thing that has been consistent—and we are very proud of—is that practically all of our study leaders have told us or written to us praising the class members’ attention and interest, their knowledge (noting that students often offered course-related information gained from work or living experience to supplement that given by the study leader). The most complimentary comment we get—in various formats—is: “This is the best teaching experience I have ever had.” And, despite their busy schedules, most of them return to teach either the same course or a different one and also to refuel the positive feedback tank.

At the members’ Picnic August 30: far left, Helen Faye Rosenblum; left, Martha Raat and Zelda Curtiss. Both members, Helen-Faye and Zelda as study leaders, Helen-Fay has taught short stories and novels for many years. Zelda’s field is the environment.

Photos by Joe Shirk
Full Circle
by Byron Gottfried

Several years ago, when Sally Cohen was still Curriculum Committee chair and I was assisting her, she asked me to contact Raja Sooriamurthi, a CMU faculty member in Information Systems, who was interested in teaching an Osher course, and also perhaps joining the organization. I thought it was unusual for Raja to express an interest in Osher membership, since he was relatively young and was very busy professionally, like all CMU faculty. So I decided to pay him a visit, thinking there might be an interesting story there.

I was not disappointed. I managed to catch Raja in his office at Porter Hall in the middle of a busy day. After discussing generalities about the Osher program for a while, he said that he was interested in meeting me because he’s known about me for several years. I had no idea what that was about. Raja then proceeded to tell me that as a boy growing up in India, he had used a textbook that I had written many years ago to learn computer programming, and that the book had influenced him positively in making a career decision. I was both flattered and impressed, as I got to know this bright, outgoing young man. (Young, that is, by Osher standards.)

Since that time, Raja has become an active member of Osher at CMU. He teaches a course entitled “Puzzles, Games and Problem Solving” when his schedule allows. Not only is he a well-liked study leader, but also a member of the Osher/CMU Board of Directors. He and I both served on last year’s Nominating Committee. But most importantly for me, I consider him a valued friend and colleague.

I have recently asked Raja to join me in a writing project, and he is giving it some thought. I would like to work with him. Perhaps together we can inspire other young people around the world. The story will then have traveled full circle.
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