

Guest Commentary

Courses available for engaged seniors

By Diane Gruber

Nationwide, students between the ages of 50 and 105 are making new friends and pursuing new educational interests by joining lifelong learning programs in record numbers.

A recent AARP survey determined the three top reasons people gave for pursuing lifelong learning. They included keeping up with what is going on in the world for their own spiritual or personal growth and the simple joy of learning something new.

It is not surprising the Northwest Valley -- home of the nation's first Sunbelt retirement community -- should offer one of the country's most extensive sets of lifelong learning opportunities. Various community boards, community colleges, and non-profit and faith-based organizations provide educational programs for people 50 and older.

One of the Northwest Valley's newest educational sponsors of lifelong learning programs is Arizona State University, which offers classes in Sun City Grand, Sun City and on ASU's West campus at 43rd Avenue and Thunderbird Road. Non-credit courses and lectures in history, politics, art and music appreciation, science, current affairs, film and philosophy are available through its pro-



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grams.

The ASU Lifelong Learning programs are made possible by grants from the Bernard Osher Foundation. A philanthropic organization based in San Francisco, the Osher Foundation supports initiatives in the arts, integrative medicine and education, in addition to lifelong learning. Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes -- or OLLIs -- offer university-quality courses and provide members with university privileges, such as library access, and invitations and discounts to special campus events.

There are 112 OLLIs nationwide connected to universities, including the University of California-Berkeley, University of California-Irvine, Duke University, the University of Nebraska, University of Minnesota, University of Wisconsin and University of Massachusetts.

In addition to ASU, there are OLLI programs hosted by the University of Arizona and Yavapai College. OLLIs are one of the few nationwide networks of lifelong learning programs, and members gain the benefits of resources and classes developed and shared at the national level.

While most OLLIs operate solely on their host campuses, OLLI-ASU has pioneered a unique approach to program development. In addition to offerings on ASU campuses, OLLI-ASU serves the majority of its students in their own communities while also making teaching opportunities

available to talented members of those communities.

ASU began the first of its community-based programs five years ago in Sun City Grand in partnership with the Del Webb Corp. When Sun City Grand became an independent community, ASU continued to nurture the program in cooperation with the Sun City Grand Community Association Management.

Today, the Sun City Grand program is an independent program operated by the residents. This same model, developing lifelong learning programs that will eventually become self-sustaining entities in their communities, is in its third year in Sun City in partnership with the Recreation Centers of Sun City. A similar program is getting underway in Sun City Festival.

ASU's lifelong learning model is attracting nationwide attention as other OLLIs begin reaching beyond their campus boundaries and into their local communities to better serve this new generation of engaged adult learners.

If you would like to learn more about the programs of ASU lifelong learning, please visit lifelong-learning.asu.edu or call the ASU Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at 602-543-6440.

Editor's note: Diane Gruber is the director of Arizona State University's Osher Lifelong Learning program and a communication studies faculty member in ASU's College of Human Services.