



FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY

ALFA—ADULT LEARNING IN THE FITCHBURG AREA



ALFA-BITS

January
2016

ALFA President's Notes

Most of you know me as the person who is calling you to be a class aide. In September I became the ALFA President for the next two years. My hope is that I can do as good a job as my predecessors. They are a hard act to follow. Linda Olson will be taking over my former job as chair of the Welcoming Committee and in charge of finding the class aides.

I want to welcome all of the new people who have taken ALFA classes this fall. We had almost 600 class enrollments and over 100 new participants. You all are what makes ALFA so successful and we thank you.

We are so lucky to have a hardworking ALFA Board that is innovative, creative, and willing to work and spend the extra time to bring us all an outstanding program for the adult learners in the Fitchburg area. Many of our Board members serve on more than one committee and do a super job on all.

The different committees have some great new offerings. Looking over the new schedule the Curriculum Committee has put together for the third and fourth ses-

sions, I know you were very happy to see all the different classes. By the time you read this you likely are registered and may have even started classes.

What's new? The Shirley Pick Series has organized a Winterlude, ALFA's first film day, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Jan. 13 led by Eric Budd and Joe Moser. Thank you for your time during intersession. I hope that everyone enjoys this new program.

ALFAs also have been busy working with the Bridges Together program at the McKay School, a multi-generational endeavor that pairs ALFAs with third graders from Ms. Tetreault's class in a variety of activities for a six-week period. Kudos to all for such a great program working with the children.

I hope you all had a wonderful holiday season, and I look forward to seeing you at the next session of ALFA in the new year.

Linda Kennedy

Mark your calendar

- ♦ **Jan. 13.** "Winterlude," a film and discussion program led by Eric Budd and Joe Moser. 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.
- ♦ **March 29.** The humorous, thought-provoking multimedia art of FSU professor Jeff Warmouth. 2:30 p.m.
- ♦ **April 26.** A four-in-one ALFA Grand Finale: "World Music: Beyond the Borders" with Randy Armstrong, 11 a.m.; "The World of Bees," a program on bees and the beekeeper's art with Gail Allo, 1:30 p.m.; exhibition featuring the work of ALFA artists and craftspeople 12:15 p.m.; "World Food" luncheon with an international menu, 12:15 p.m.
- ♦ **April 26.** Fundraising art sale and raffle in conjunction with the exhibit of ALFA artists to benefit the Shirley Pick Spring Series, 12 p.m.
- ♦ **May 12.** ALFA Spring Trip to the homes of Mark Twain and Harriet Beecher Stowe in Hartford.

All programs are in FSU's Hammond Building, except for "Winterlude" in McKay Building Room C159. All are open to the public and, excepting the April 26 luncheon and Hartford trip, are free of charge.



New ALFA Weather Policy

When Fitchburg State University cancels classes or has a delayed opening, no ALFA classes will be held on that day. This applies to all classes, both on the FSU campus and at remote locations such as the Fitchburg Art Museum or Wachusett Meadow Wildlife Sanctuary. The new policy was adopted to minimize confusion about cancellations.

Bruce Goyette Hangs Up His Editor's Visor

Bruce Goyette, ALFA-BITS' General Editor since June 2007, has announced his retirement from this ALFA committee. We're happy to report he will continue as an active member of the ALFA Executive Board. This *chef extraordinaire* also will continue to lead his legendary cooking classes.

Bruce, Fitchburg State Class of 1965, is a longtime resident of Townsend. He has worked tirelessly to gather, write, edit, lay out, and put to bed our copies of ALFA-BITS, assisted by Associate Editors Gil Tremblay and George French.

The newsletter has come a long way since Bruce took over. We all appreciate his hard work and take-charge style.

Several ALFA Board members had words of appreciation for Bruce's work:

Shirley Wagner: ALFA has been very fortunate to have Bruce as the editor of ALFA-BITS. His vision was grand, greater than any of us could imagine. He organized an army of writers to share the pleasures



Bruce Goyette

of being in every class and made sure there were photographs to augment the stories. Twice a year, we looked forward to reading ALFA-BITS, vicariously enjoying courses which we had been unable to take. We thank Bruce for documenting the history of ALFA in this unique manner.

Carol DeCarolis: Since taking over the job of editor of ALFA-BITS Bruce has caused it to grow and expand. At a lifelong-learning seminar a while ago, Lisa Moison and I were proud to show copies of ALFA-BITS to representatives of other area colleges. Everyone who saw it was impressed. Bruce edited with care, expertise, and an obvious love of ALFA.

Joyce Hinckley: A do-it-yourself tribute to Bruce. Pick three: a. Chef b. Editor c. Leader d. Friend e. Funny f. Mischievous g. Creative h. Enthusiastic i. Dedicated.

Tough choice? OK, then, you can pick them all!!!

We love you, Bruce.

By Linda Kennedy

On the Road Again

Our ALFA Spring Trip will take us to Hartford on May 12 to the homes of Mark Twain and Harriet Beecher Stowe.

The Mark Twain Home and Museum holds 16,000 artifacts of Samuel Clemens, aka Mark Twain. Here we can delve into Twain's life, family, and literary legacy, as well as his boyhood home. This meticulously restored home, one of the nation's earliest historic-house preservation efforts, is a National Historic Landmark.

Then we will tour the nearby Harriet Beecher Stowe House, a charming Victorian Gothic Revival home, and its Victorian gardens. Stowe's best-selling novel, "Uncle Tom's Cabin," which gave her international celebrity, was one of more than 30 books she wrote. Her passion for writing allowed her to express her thoughts and beliefs in an era when woman could not speak publicly.

By Cindy Dobransky

ALFA Spring Trip

How to Get Involved

This newsletter and all aspects of the popular ALFA program could not function without the help of volunteers. If you would like to lend a hand, please contact the ALFA office, (978) 665-3706. To submit an article, reviews, artwork, or poem for publication in ALFA-BITS, please contact George French at (978) 345-6553 or send it to geo.r.french@gmail.com.

General Editor, Bruce Goyette
Associate Editors, Gil Tremblay, George French



Volunteer Jane Crocker and her grade 3 wrap group.

Fun and Learning Across Generations

McKay teacher, Sue Tetreault, the Bridges Together/ALFA volunteers, and the McKay students completed the "Lifelong Teaching and Learning" lesson Dec. 3 in which everyone prepares an activity to share.

One volunteer, Mr. Vin, showed the students how to make keys and then gave every student one of their own: the "key to their success."

Students also learned about how bones fit together and how to draw stick figures (courtesy of ALFA's own Norm Fredette), wrap presents, create poetry, braid hair, make Italian cookies, and (my personal favorite) how to give your cat a bath.

So many wonderful moments. ALFA is really shining bright with this project.



By Lisa Moison

Winging It in Western Mass

The ALFA Fall trip began at Magic Wings Butterfly Conservatory and Gardens in Deerfield. After an informative lecture we had the unique experience of walking through an 8,000-square-foot indoor garden that contained fish, turtles, birds, and thousands of free-flying butterflies. Many of us experienced butterfly hitchhikers.

Magic Wings

The butterflies were not shy and attached themselves to our glasses, shirts and bags.

After a tasty meal at Monarchs Restaurant, we took a 12-mile ride up the Connecticut River on the



Quinnikutuk II riverboat. Our captain took us under the French King Bridge and over a 1,000-foot "plunge hole" in the riverbed. He also pointed out a very large 1,500-pound eagle's nest and two eagles.

We also visited the Northfield Mountain Recreation and Environmental Center where we learned how the hydroelectric facility runs inside the



ALFAs tried out a whimsical butterfly chair and got up close and personal with some flighty friends.

Northfield Mountain.

The trip provided wonderful photo opportunities, and the weather and foliage were perfect.

By Elaine Page, Joanne Schreiner Photos

Ample Food for Thought This Spring

Artist Jeff Warmouth will share his amazing creations with us at 2:30 p.m. on March 29. His multi-media art will make you laugh and make you think. (You might also wonder what Jeff ate for breakfast on the days he came up with his works!) Warmouth, who has taught at FSU for 18 years, has exhibited at the Fitchburg Art Museum and has shown his works around the country and in Europe. Do not miss this one! For a preview, check out his website, www.jeffu.tv.

Gail Allo, ALFA instructor, Board member, and member of the Food for Thought Committee, is a woman of many talents. One of those is her bee-keeping avocation. In "World of Bees: To Bee or Not to Bee," Gail will teach us about the vital pollinator role of bees in nature, bee natural history, what's involved in beekeeping, and why bee populations have been struggling. Gail's program, at 1:30 p.m. April 26, is part of ALFA's Grand Finale.

Both Food for Thought programs are in the Ellis White Lecture Hall, Hammond Building.

By Emily Norton

Calling All ALFA Artists

The 2016 ALFA Grand Finale events on April 26 will include our first art exhibit and fundraising art raffle. We are soliciting paintings, jewelry, and three-dimensional works, including flower arrangements, for this exhibit entitled "The World of Vistas." Participants should interpret this title as broadly as possible. ALFAs who would like to participate in a one-day art exhibit in Hammond Hall and/or our first art raffle should contact Gail Hoar by email at gchoar@tds.net or call her at (603) 654-2783.

If you wish to sell your work, 20 percent of the selling price will go to support the Shirley Pick program. The raffle is a separate fundraising event for the Shirley Pick Spring Series. We hope to have four or five artists who are willing to donate one of their works by February so that the items may be photographed for the upcoming raffle drawing on April 26. The winner will select *one* of the items that have been donated. Tickets will be on sale to ALFA students during the spring terms.

By Gail Hoar

Director Nick Capasso Gives ALFAs a Tour of Rapidly Evolving Art Museum

The first Food for Thought special event of ALFA's fall session was a decided hit. Nick Capasso, three-year director of the Fitchburg Art Museum, gave us an in-depth tour of the museum, explaining the changes already made and changes to come.

The museum has signed an agreement with Fitchburg State University to have cooperative programs and to make the museum more accessible to the students.

Capasso said the museum is trying to reach out to the larger community and has set up a hallway area for exhibitions of artwork from local artists. There is also a

project underway to provide studio space for up-and-coming artists, with the goal of helping to revitalize the city of Fitchburg as well as the museum.

Capasso took us through the exhibit "Land Ho," which mixes old and new art and was arranged to be seen from many different angles. I thought the mix was innovative and worked well together.

The gallery with the African Art also juxtaposes older pieces with modern ones, and the result is fabulous. This was a special event that should be repeated.

By Gail Allo

Thank You, ALFA Volunteers

The Class Aide takes attendance, gives ALFA Alerts, assists the instructor, finds answers to our questions, calls us when a class is canceled, and much more.

Aides in Session 1 were: Gail Allo, Bill Ayadi, Sharon Holt, Marie Stansel, Mary Ellen Hurley, Lynn Houston, Linda Kennedy, Vicki Brunelle, Gail Bloom, Marion Tomasello, Sharon Yousey, Harry Semerjian, Mary Alice Girling, Diane Putnam, Ann Trodello, Joanne Schreiner, Carole Borja, Laurie Sabol, June Duprey, Judith Normandin, and Carol DeCarolis.

Thank You
Thank You
Thank You
Thank You
Thank You
Thank You

Aides in Session 2 were: Rachael Anderson, Nancy Gates, Barbara and James Reynolds, Linda Olson, George and Kathleen French, Laurie Nehring, Virginia Strahan, Nancy Tucker, Kathleen McGuigan, Mary Alice Girling, Barbara Reynolds, Gail Hoar, Carole Borja, Marie Stansel, Odette Harvey, Sally Hens, Karen Pick, and Joan McFadden.

ALFA Greeters, who provide ALFAs with parking and other information, included Linda Olson, Nancy Turner, Helen Lepkowski, and Debra Faust-Clancy.

Thank you all, and especially Linda Kennedy, Judy Normandin, Marie Stansel, and Bill Ryan.

If you would like to help our committee please call Linda Olson (978) 632-5523.

By Linda Olson

Spring Courses Run the Gamut

Once again this Spring, ALFA is offering dozens of courses calculated to appeal to a broad range of interests, from aerobics to zentangle art.

Ideas for courses come from the ALFA Board, individuals interested in sharing their expertise with eager-to-learn ALFAs, the FSU community, and beyond. Especially important are the ideas offered by ALFA students, whose suggestions for courses give the Curriculum Committee a valuable gauge of student interests.

Among the upcoming courses:

- ◆ Exploring Colored Pencils, Looking at Art, Japanese Flower Arranging, World Music;
- ◆ *I Am Malala* Book Discussion, the *Tragedy of Macbeth*, Poetry of New England and Beyond;
- ◆ Zumba Fitness, Stretch and Tone, Fusion Mix, Snowshoe and Ski About, Nature in Spring;
- ◆ Expanding American Histories, New England Architecture, Introduction to Islam, the Industrial Revolution; Italian-American Immigration;
- ◆ Cooks From TV, Depression-Era Hollywood Films, Environmental Themes, The Future ... or Not;
- ◆ Fabric Dying, Mah Jongg, Bridge Skills, Quilting.

Full course descriptions, class schedules, registration forms, and list of special programs are online at www.fitchburgstate.edu/alfa and in the ALFA brochure, which is mailed to active ALFAs and is available at area libraries, senior centers, and many businesses.



Film Series Confronts Challenges In 21st Century American Society

In previous ALFA classes, we have explored global issues in film. For this class Professor Eric Budd chose five films that deal with American issues such as our education system, racism, prisons, wealth inequality, and financial crisis.

Is our educational system up to the challenge of the 21st century? "Waiting for Superman" raised issues we are facing in our educational system, including teacher tenure, standardized testing, charter schools, and failing schools.

"Fruitvale Station" deals with race issues, the legal system, and police actions when confronting African-American suspects.

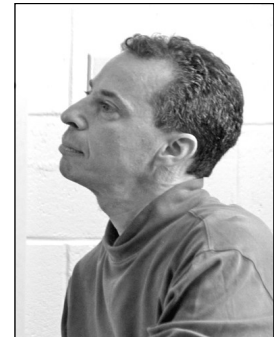
Have we won the War on Drugs? "The House I Live In" shows the effect the anti-drug measures, tough-on-crime laws, and mandatory minimum sentencing have had, including making America the nation with the highest rate of incarceration.

Robert Reich's film, "Inequality for All," explores the inequality of wealth in America, which is the most unequal of all developed nations. Does inequality undermine democracy?

The elements that led to the financial crisis of 2008 are discussed in "The Inside Job." These include changes in policy, deregulation, derivatives, securitization, sub-prime lending, and lack of oversight.

This course was very well presented and highlighted ongoing issues in America. Although America is undoubtedly one of the greatest nations in the world, these areas could be improved.

By Nancy Gates, Joanne Schreiner Photos



Eric Budd

Have a suggestion for a new ALFA class?

We're interested in hearing your ideas.

Contact the ALFA Office at (978) 665-3706.



Chefs Walter Kondig, Odette Harvey, and Bruce Goyette

How Ya Gonna Keep 'Em Down on the Farm Stand?

The Fall session of ALFA's cooking class focused on using seasonal crops and herbs. Our "Farm Stand" cooks — Bruce Goyette, Kathy Flynn, Odette Harvey, Chris Barnacoat, and Walter Kondig — provided us with recipes for salads, soups, entrees, and desserts.

On the menu were gazpacho, strawberry-rhubarb bars, Brussels sprouts with prosciutto, herbed pasta *primavera*, fresh peach cake, cabbage kale soup, spinach-leek frittata, greens smoothie, chickpea and walnut burgers, and apple *tarte tatin*. Also, carrot salads, Alsatian cucumber, cherry tomato cobbler, and rhubarb cake.

The fun was in the preparation and the tasting. Our cooks also shared their travels, life experiences, and nutrition tips. So if you want a fun course, new recipes, and a delicious time, sign up for their next cooking adventure.

By Linda Olson, Joanne Schreiner Photos



Chef Odette mixes it up.

Farm Stand Cooking

O, What a Worldwide Web We Weave

ALFA's Staying Connected course provided excellent hands-on experience and guidance for surfing the Worldwide Web and getting connected to major social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram.

Professor Kyle Moody helped students with no previous experience connecting to social media to download applications and to run them in real time.

He spent substantial amounts of hands-on time to help inexperienced social media students to load, learn, and use the various applications. He showed great patience and



Kyle Moody

skill in guiding all students to reach their goals. Indeed, the course might better have been titled "Staying Connected for Beginners."

He also explained relevant technical information concerning the use of the different social media platforms and passed on applicable reading materials to enable students to keep up with their new hobby.

Some of us left the classroom glued to our phones, bumping into people in the hallway.

Twitt, Twitt. Thank you, Professor Moody.

By Bill Ayadi, Joanne Schreiner Photo

French Without Intimidation

"*Bonjour*" and "*Comment ça va?*" are two of the phrases we reviewed in our Conversational French class given by an enthusiastic Nancy Fillip. Mrs. Fillip was brought up speaking French, so we had an expert teacher. She made it easy by stressing everyday terms and situations. She was patient in tolerating our attempts at pronunciation, and pushed us to get beyond our self-consciousness when we felt as if we were speaking French "*comme une vache Espagnol*."

Conversational French

Fillip made it fun, and she gave us many hints of ways to approach learning the language. For example, she reminded us of all the words that are the same or similar in both English and French. She suggested that when we try to read French we could look up some of the words we don't get. The language shouldn't intimidate us.



Most of us had taken French in school years ago and it's interesting how much we did remember, and the teacher stressed that to us.

We all were really interested in taking a second class with Mrs. Fillip and hoped that ALFA might offer one in the future.

By Gail Allo

Exploring Our Architectural Heritage

Historic Architecture in New England promised to “sharpen your awareness of architectural design, to recognize its historical sources, and to be able to identify structures by style, age, and integrity.” Anyone who attended would agree that Nicholas Langhart did this and more with

Historic Architecture In New England

vivid and recognizable examples, wit, and a wealth of information and insight.



Nicholas Langhart shared his extensive collection of slides with ALFAs.

Mr. Langhart began with early Colonial, 17th century copies of the late medieval English post-and-beam structures — with the earliest having straw roofs, massive chimneys, and unpainted clapboards or stucco-like wattle and daub walls. Then he showed examples of the Georgian style.

He also illustrated the difference between a meetinghouse and a church and some examples of Bulfinch’s work.

With the introduction of dimensional lumber, walls became the skin rather than the support structure of the house. This led to a host of external house styles: Greek Revival, Italianate, Second Empire, and Victorian Gothic.

We also learned about the changes in buildings, such as steel framing in factories and three-decker houses for the urban worker of the Industrial Revolution. At the same time, architects like H.H. Richardson were designing such enduring works as Trinity Church in Copley Square. We saw exciting examples of the Arts & Crafts Style, Frank Lloyd Wright, automobile suburbs, European Modernism, and others.

This was a very engaging and interesting class for those who were knowledgeable about their architectural environment and particularly for those who weren’t. In both cases, Nicholas Langhart opened our eyes.

By Harry Semerjian, George French Photos



Nicholas Langhart examines a student's historic postal card.

Turning Flowers Into Artworks

Floral design is the art of using flowers and other plant materials to create a pleasing arrangement. The instructor, Gail Allo, helped each participant to use color, texture, and form to achieve a colorful design.

After combining the wide variety of floral materials made available to the class each week, you get to bring home a beautiful centerpiece, bouquet, or even a pumpkin-based design to enhance your table.

Basic Flower Design

Clear step-by-step directions, backed by expert demonstrations, made completing the project easy to follow and fun to do.



The flowers strewn on the work table become transformed into artwork, and each student becomes a designer. Learning the names of the standard flowers and greenery and information about their care gave us the confidence to go on and create designs for home, friends, and special occasions. This class presents a fun learning experience that brings smiles and a sense of accomplishment to one and all. As Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, “The Earth laughs in flowers.”

By Joanne Bianco, Joanne Schreiner Photo

How’s Tricks? Pretty Good in This Class

Students in Dr. Shirley Wagner’s Bridge for Beginners class quickly knew that they had come to the right place to learn something new that would keep their minds active while learning a new skill.

Dr. Wagner, a certified American Contract Bridge League teacher and a former teacher and manager of the Twin City Bridge Club, was the right person to guide students through the maze of rules in a journey that would result in

Bridge for Beginners



Dr. Shirley Wagner

a beginning understanding of the wonderful game of bridge. Said to be the greatest card game of all, bridge can provide immense challenge and enjoyment for the rest of your life.

Bridge is more complicated than other card games, and learning the many rules was like learning a new language. Players learned the terms used in the game, the rules, and, most important, how to communicate between partners. Dr. Wagner also taught the basics of bidding, playing, and defending.

By the end of classes most of the students already had signed up for the bridge class in Session 2.

By Barbara Reynolds, Joanne Schreiner Photo

Exploring Nature's Earthen Floor

Joe Choiniere, instructor and property manager of Mass Audubon's Central Sanctuaries, and his son Ethan provided us with a wealth of fungi knowledge not readily known by the average forager. The field searches were ideal, as the brisk sunny October weather made our trek through the trails of Wachusett Meadow Wildlife Sanctuary in Princeton a comfortable pursuit.

Fall Mushrooms

I was astonished by some of the mushrooms' peculiar traits. One species feeds off another for survival. Another, the Purple Tooth Bracket, is colored purple at the edge of the bracket and has tooth-like structures underneath, thus the name. The banded and colored fruiting body of the Turkey Tail Bracket does bring to mind a turkey's fanned tail feathers.

The Tinder Mushroom, which resembles a horse's hoof, makes an excellent fire starter once dried, hence the name (Ice Man had one of these with him when he froze to death several thousand years ago). Our guide, Ethan, lit one for us at the start of our trek, and it lasted 45 minutes. The incense-like fragrance when burned is captivating. Many mushrooms have medicinal uses and can be found in natural health stores in powdered form. Mushrooms have an array of colors, including brilliant red caps, yellows, grays, and green.



We did not pursue edible mushrooms, but did touch on poisonous ones, such as the Poison Pigskin Puffball, which has a scaly, leathery brown outer covering with purplish black spores in the center.

The course was so intriguing we lost track of time exploring the fungi in the forest; no one was in a hurry to leave the trails as we were bringing our finds for critiquing from Joe or Ethan. I would recommend this most informative course for anyone curious about nature's earthen floor!

Story and Photo by Jim Page

They Gave at the (Microsoft) Office

The Microsoft Office class, held in a McKay Building computer room, was of necessity limited to 12 students. Students had a range of competence levels and, thus, different needs for content. Each student had to have full-time access to a terminal.

Instructor Julie LePoer sought out the expressed needs of each student and incorporated them in her presentations. She used Microsoft Word as the introduction to skills that then could be applied to Excel. Later, it became apparent that these same techniques could be applied to the other programs we learned about in the five sessions. With handouts and visual instructions, Julie taught us how to find answers at home for how to master any particular skill that we might need. Microsoft Publisher was also heavily covered as an extra bonus.

Microsoft Office

By Bob McDermott



ALFAs take a break to show some of their "abstract realism" pastel paintings with artist Lisa Regopoulos (left).

Seeing Art Through a Pastel Kaleidoscope

What is abstract realism? If I were to sum up what it means to me, I would say it teaches the artist to "loosen up." I completed Lisa Regopoulos' class with a more relaxed way to approach my art compositions.

Lisa gave us a quick, step-by-step demonstration each week, showing us how to use sanded paper with alcohol and pastel or acrylic paint with pumice, charcoal, and pastel. One week we used watercolor as an underpainting and added charcoal, and pastel. Using these different mediums helped me to experiment.

Abstract Realism In Pastels

We learned how to do "blind" contour drawings. We learned to apply different types of compositions, including asymmetrical, L-shaped, horizontal, vertical, and cruciform. Lisa encouraged the class to not be afraid to experiment. The class learned to use color to get an emotional response: red for aggression, for example, or blue for calm.

Many techniques were used to slightly distort and blur a real object and still have it remain recognizable. Using a variety of lines, shapes, and space, we learned, makes your composition more interesting. Lisa frequently reminded us to leave some areas of your painting restful.

Abstract realism is like looking through a kaleidoscope with all the different colors, shapes, and lines. I am fortunate to have gained a fun, relaxing, creative new way to view abstract art.

By Elaine Page, Photo by Joanne Schreiner

ALFAs Make a Splash in FSU Pool

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Fitness guru Amy LeBlanc led ALFAs in a program of cardio and muscle toning at the FSU Recreation Center Pool. Our intrepid correspondent dried off long enough to send in a capsule review — on time and under budget!)

Buoyancy: yay! Buoyancy: argghh! Workout: great! Instructor: amazing!

By Joanne Huse



ALFA hikers and their eager mascot take a break during a trek in the Leominster woods.

Intrepid Hikers Get a Taste Of Hidden Leominster Marvels

Instead of “ALFA Walkabouts” this class should be called “Gorgeous Parks in Leominster That Nobody Knows About” or maybe “Hidden Leominster Marvels.”

This energetic group of ladies and one intrepid man did five separate hikes — a couple in September and a couple in October, during some of the finest outdoor weather that can be found in New England: brilliant days with strong sunshine and Fall colors just starting to peek through. The walks are easy if you are fit; only one member of our group — me! — had a little trouble keeping up.

ALFA Walkabout

weather that can be found in New England: brilliant days with strong sunshine and Fall colors just starting

On the day that we hiked Sholan Farms in Leominster, we could smell the apples practically bursting from their skins they were so heavy laden on the trees. The orchards have thirty-six different varieties. The farm is adjacent to a former reservoir of clean, clear water that is used for swimming by smart locals who keep this information quiet.

The Barrett Park hike featured two brand new pavilions and a large spraying fountain in the middle of the pond. The pavilions and paddle boats are available for rental during the summer months.

At Doyle Park, we passed through woodlands, open fields, meadows, formal gardens, and parklands as we walked the 3.5 miles of easy trails. I loved the Monet-inspired bridge at one end of the pond. The park includes the former Pierce estate. We had fun peeping through the mansion windows and pretending we were filthy rich.

These walks are highly recommended for getting outdoors and enjoying New England in the Fall with vivacious, cheerful companions.

By Debra Faust-Clancy

Teasing Out the Stories Within the Story

Ben Railton knows how to capture a class’s attention. From day one, when reading the first short story of the five assigned, he had us focused on questioning what was, seemingly, so simply and straightforwardly unfolding. Yet all was neither simple nor straightforward.

By the end of that first day, he led us to understand that a well-written short story is

New Voices In American Fiction

a work of art with stories within stories and many subtle messages in each carefully conceived phrase or word.

As the class progressed, each work took on greater depth than was apparent at first reading. The 90 minutes flew by, propelled by Professor Railton’s thought-provoking questions and comments. The lively discussions often went on long after class was over.

The five readings he selected represented an enticing cross-section of the literature being written today by voices with varied world views — two representing the U.S. and others representing Nigeria, Panama and Russia. Yet each class session had one thing in common: the many-layered story that unfolded under Railton’s brilliant guidance.

I now understand why people told me not to miss taking any class taught by Ben Railton.

By Gail Hoar



Around the World With Five Expert Guides

Tanzania was our destination as we listened to Ped Pedersen describe climbing Mount Kilimanjaro. Much preparation was needed before leaving, and extreme physical effort was required of the men who carried food, water, and camp equipment to the 19,341-foot summit.

Another visit to Africa was with Gail Hoar, who described life in a village in eastern Chad where she was engaged in research. She shared wonderful stories, beautiful pictures, and a more recent video. She also updated us on the villagers she had known during her time there.

Bill Ayadi took us to Tunisia where we saw desert sunsets, fertile farms, and fabulous beaches. A treat was seeing Bill’s family and watching as they prepared a meal. We were able to enjoy one of these Tunisian specialties, as Joyce Ayadi Hinckley made some for us to sample.

The stunning Dolomite Mountains of Italy were brought right into the classroom by way of Aldo Bianco’s photography, which also captured the charm of Slovenia and Croatia. This area is rich in history, and Aldo had much information to share.

Gail Allo captivated us as she told of her journey across north central India. She had a wild rickshaw ride, was invited to a stranger’s wedding and attended a cremation ceremony.

By June Hagen

Armchair Travel — Encore

Thereby Hangs a Tile

The ALFA Mah Jongg course was held at the Fitchburg Senior Center with 12-15 people in attendance weekly. The instructor, Barbara Reynolds, provided us with handouts at every meeting, building on the previous week's lesson.

Mah Jongg is a game of tiles played by the Chinese. There are two versions, American and Chinese. Barbara taught American, which has a few more tiles. The goal is to form a pattern of tiles pre-determined by a Mah Jongg "year card." There's a new one every year, so patterns that players must attempt to form change yearly. The runs can be compared to the card game rummy.

Barbara solicited the help of three other experienced players. Each helper took a table and worked with whomever needed help. Barbara drummed in rules of the game and encouraged all to play frequently to improve.

All enjoyed the experience and the enthusiasm



Barbara Reynolds, instructor of Mah Jongg class, explains one of the fine points of the game.

and dedication of our instructor. We also appreciated the assistance of the helpers. We all found the course challenging and fun.

By Ella DeNault, Joanne Schreiner Photo



ALFAs get a chuckle out of Dr. Paul's response to a question.

Not Just What, but How and Why

Dr. John Paul's course on The Reformation covered a vast expanse of history from the Renaissance to the Counter Reformation and beyond.

As with all history courses there were many events, dates, and names to remember, but what was most rewarding and enjoyable was Dr. Paul's passionate and inquisitive approach, as he was always asking, "How and why did this happen?" His enthusiasm kept us constantly attentive and appreciative.

He shared with us videos, maps, and handouts that clearly took many hours to produce. Above all else, this course made clear how historical and contemporary events are a combination of interrelated factors: politics, economics, religion, scientific discoveries, and inventions.

Dr. Paul is to be commended for making the study of history both interesting and valuable. His inquisitive spirit would seem to me to be exactly what our ALFA courses are all about: keeping alive the passion to learn and live.

By Richard Olson, Joanne Schreiner Photo

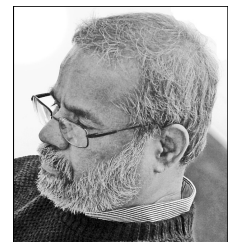
Put Your Ailments in Hands of Gods

You have a headache. What are you going to do?

For ancient Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans you might ask the gods for help. Which gods? Have you displeased a particular god or do you just want to ask for help? Then consider different gods once you sort this out. If you're Chinese, there aren't gods to ask, but you may have to restore the *qi* by balancing your yin and yang. For some Christians the suffering from the headache may get you closer to Christ.

Gods, Maladies, Medicine

If the gods don't heal, you try other treatments. Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, African tribes, Muslims, and Christians all had extensive knowledge of herbs and other ingredients for medical use. Ginseng tea was a favorite Ming-era Chinese headache remedy. Willow bark (related to the active ingredient in aspirin) was used by Islamic physicians in the 8th century. Chamomile tea was popular from ancient times till today.



Dr. John Paul

To become a physician, even in antiquity, you had to study. In some cultures, you became a priest healer and in others a clinician of healing arts. Depending on time and culture the focus would vary from spiritual to practical and all in between.

But your head still hurts, and you want more information. Maybe take an aspirin — or better yet, take Dr. John Paul's Gods, Maladies, and Medicine course the next time it is offered.

By Joyce Ayadi Hinckley, Joanne Schreiner Photos



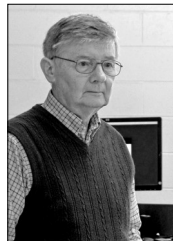
Cutting Through the Climate Jargon

Our instructor Bob Champlin began this course by telling us that initially he did not believe that global warming was affected significantly by humans, but he has found the scientific evidence so overwhelming that he now offers this ALFA course. We strongly recommend that ALFA students should take this course — whether a

Climate Change: Is It Real?

believer or not a believer that carbon emissions are accelerating global warming and causing rapid global climate change.

Bob Champlin is a Professor Emeritus of Fitchburg State University where he has taught geology for 30 years and has won a Vincent J. Mara award for excellence in college teaching. He is thorough in his research and with his presentations.



Bob Champlin

He is dealing with a very complex subject, yet Bob Champlin explains global warming and its implications in clear, understandable language that helps us to get through the difficult jargon. He supplies us with informative graphs and visual aids and suggests

readable books to further our knowledge.

It is a very scary topic, but one which we must confront if we are going to leave our grandchildren a chance for a safe and comfortable life. We highly recommend this course to all ALFA students.

By Ronda and Michael Golden,
Joanne Schreiner Photo

Doing the Old Hand Jive

Just imagine attempting to lead 10 seniors to perform to one set of dance moves in unison. Judith Lindstedt set out to help us condition and align the body to improve posture, and to learn overall body control — but wouldn't it be nice if it looked like a dance?

She comes prepared for the challenge and is demanding, funny, and relentless. She often calls out, "Sally what are you doing?" Sally has no clue; she is interpreting the verbal instructions (as

Jazz Stretch For Exercise And Movement

she hears them) with mind and body.

So when we are bent over at the waist and Judith says put your hands up, where do those hands go? With 10 people in the class, there are at least three ways to go wrong. With a roll of the eye, Judith patiently demonstrates once more and seems thrilled when all arms and hands and legs move (in some manner at least) in the same direction.

Our performance aside, it is clear that our instructor is 100 percent invested in ensuring each of us perform our movements to gain the most benefit for muscles and joints and to avoid injury. Judith is a class act.



By Sally Hens



SOME LIKE IT HOOT: Paul Luria regales ALFAs with background on a folk song before leading them in melody and harmony in the popular Hootenanny: Sing-a-Long course.

Joanne Schreiner Photo

Islamic Reign in Spain Made Plain

The "Dynamic Duo" does it again, an experience not to be missed! Islamic Spain from 711-1609, as Bill Ayadi and Joyce Ayadi Hinckley demonstrated, was a "shining light in the Dark Ages." This class — using a comprehensively researched, colorful, and thought-provoking Power Point presentation, linked to videos, artifacts, technical demonstrations, and personal accounts of visits to the area — was a "shining light" in the ALFA culture.

The history of the conquest, settlement, final destruction, and legacy of the Islamic period in the Iberian Peninsula was fully developed. The reasons for the rapid conquest were explained. The Islamic culture was far in advance of any that existed in Europe at the time, a Golden Age with incredible advances in the sciences and the arts. This was supported by the integration of many technologies from other cultures leading to an agricultural revolution able to feed, house, and educate a large population. It was a multi-cultural society, a period of unique coexistence among "people of the book."

Nonetheless, the seeds of destruction were present from the beginning. Continual internal conflict combined with external pressures to retake the territory led to the eventual destruction.

As with any class presented by Bill and Joyce, so many "twitching" connections were made. These explain the legacy, both positive and negative, of the period and connect the threads that weave throughout history, shedding light on the present.

By Chris Barnacoat, George French Photo



Bill Ayadi, Joyce Ayadi Hinckley

Fitchburg State 50 Years Ago

Fitchburg State's class of 1965 recently observed its reunion, and ALFA members Walter Kondig, Ned Daniels, and Bruce Goyette attended. During our freshman year, tuition was \$100, and the following year it doubled, much to the dismay of all students.

A Reminiscence

During initiation, we all had to don beanies, including commuters, and had to address all underclassmen as Mr., Miss, or Mrs. Shirts and ties were mandatory. Freshmen also had to master the "Alma Mater" and had to sing it upon request of an upperclassmen.

Dorm rules throughout the year included study hours from 8 and 10 p.m. House mothers monitored Miller and Palmer Halls closely, as men were not allowed beyond the lobbies. A loud bell was rung and the warning of "Man on the floor!" was yelled so all could hear it.

Students who chose to work between classes received 85 cents per hour.

All meals were served family style. The unfortunate one who sat in the middle of the table spent most of his time passing serving plates and seldom had time to eat an entire meal.



By Bruce Goyette

Using Your Tablet in Daily Life

This was the exact class I was hoping to take, and as a very, very senior member of ALFA I entered the class with trepidation and anticipation. Instructor Barbara Friedman, fortunately, made every one of us feel at ease and gave us her total attention and patience.

We were given a large sheet of paper that said, "Tell me what you want to know." We checked off our preferences: photos, games, read books, relaxation, library books, find directions, news of the day, Facebook, and recipes.

We learned the basics of the iPad and found great diversity in the class, and we all wanted to master our iPads to use it in our daily lives; we learned about apps as well as the many things that one can learn about topics such as cooking and shopping.

The instructor had great slides to assist us. We even learned about Bluetooth. Taking pictures of each other was great fun. We also learned how to create our own music and mastered Google.

I recommend this class for all iPad owners. Thank you, Barbara, for making us so aware of the product.

By Jean Miller



ALFAs discuss one of the "convoluted philosophical arguments" untwisted in David Svolbas' class.

There's So Much More to Plato Than Shadows Cast on a Cave Wall

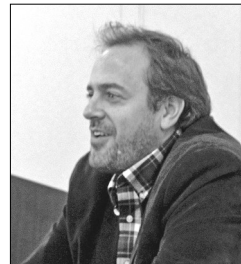
David Svolba manages to bring what seem to be daunting and elusive concepts in Plato's *Republic* out of the shadows into the light. Although five weeks is barely enough time to begin to grasp the complexity of Plato's philosophy, Professor Svolba, with a few illustrative swipes of his hand across the board, untwists Plato's most convoluted philosophical arguments.

He brings Plato into the present and helps his students understand how Plato's philosophy is relevant in our contemporary world.

In order to cover more material than is possible in the time allowed, Professor Svolba periodically sent us links to selected online articles delving into the historical background of Plato's time or into further discussions of one of the books in *The Republic* to complement assigned reading.

Professor Svolba's enthusiasm for the subject is contagious which leads to exciting class discussions on everything from contemporary politics to Freud. Philosophy taught by Professor Svolba is an opportunity not to miss, and his Plato students have recently unanimously asked him to teach further courses on related topics.

By Gail Hoar, Joanne Schreiner Photos



David Svolba

Interested in teaching an ALFA class?

Do you have a special interest or field of expertise? Would you like to share your knowledge with engaged lifelong learners?

If so, contact the ALFA Office, (978) 665-3706.

ALFA: What's It All About?

ALFA, Adult Education in the Fitchburg Area, offers non-credit daytime classes and special events organized by its member-volunteers in partnership with the professional staff at Fitchburg State University. In four sessions over the course of the academic year ALFA presents dozens of classes for a wide variety of interests. Each weekly class runs for 90 minutes over five weeks. Courses are tailored to the interests of ALFA students, who are urged to suggest new courses on the evaluation form they complete after each class.

Among the many courses offered during the Fall 2015 sessions were: New Voices in American Fiction, Jazz Stretch for Exercise and Movement, Calligraphy, Quilting, Armchair Travel, Aqua Aerobics, Plato's *Republic*, Contemporary Issues in American Film, Farm Stand Cooking, Historic Architecture in New England, Abstract Realism in Pastels, Zumba Fitness, Child Development Theory, Mah Jongg, Animal Behavior and Cognition, and many more. While most classes are held in the McKay Campus Building, several are held elsewhere on the FSU campus and at off-campus venues

such as the Fitchburg Art Museum, Sholan Farm, and Wachusett Meadow Wildlife Sanctuary.

The concept for an adult learning program began more than 11 years ago when two neighbors, Shirley Pick and Dr. Philip Fallon, former Superintendent of Fitchburg Schools, happened to meet by their homes in Fitchburg and engaged in a conversation about the possibility of establishing a program of local adult education. Spearheaded by the two, the idea gained further momentum from Dr. Robert Antonucci, former President of Fitchburg State University, and Dr. Shirley Wagner, Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs.

The community response to ALFA has been enthusiastic. Enrollment in Fall 2015 totaled 595 in the two sessions. Gratifyingly, more than 100 of those taking courses last fall were first-time students.

Having begun with a handful of communities, the program, directed by a volunteer Executive Board and advised by Dr. Lisa Moison, now serves some 17 cities and towns. For more information, or to be added to ALFA's mailing list, contact ALFA's Office at (978) 665-3706.