



ALFA-BITS

January
2018

ALFA President's Notes

Remember trying on your parents' shoes as a kid and wondering if they'd ever fit? That's



what being the new ALFA president is like. So many talented and terrific people have led this program in the past. The task is daunting, especially in a time of change and transition.

ALFA is doing new things, trying new things. Online registration was

successfully launched for fall 2017. We are experimenting with new class formats: 10-week classes, one-time classes, participant-led language groups,

and more.

We have added new annual events like Winterlude and The Grand Finale. We offer classes at the Fitchburg Art Museum and the Leominster Public Library. We have added new members, about 70 last year and 77 more in the fall.

None of this happens without input from the ALFA community. So take your course evaluations seriously, talk to your instructors, meet your fellow members, suggest classes you'd love to take, let the ALFA board know your thoughts or contact your ALFA president. With your input and help we can all make those big shoes fit.

Joyce Ayadi Hinckley

Mark Your Calendar

Jan. 8: Winterlude: Intersession film and discussion program, featuring *Desert Dancer* and *Pride*, presented by Joe Moser and Eric Budd. 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Hammond Building G01. Snow date Jan. 11.

March 27: Food for Thought: "Arctic Adventures in Iceland and Greenland" with Eric Vickery. 2:30 p.m., Ellis White Lecture Hall, Hammond Building

April 24: ALFA Grand Finale: "World Tales" with musician Randy Armstrong and storyteller Genevieve Aichele. 11 a.m., Hammond Hall, Main Lounge followed by optional luncheon. "A Search for Justice" with Stephen Collins. 1:15 p.m., Ellis White Lecture Hall, Hammond Building.

May 15: Historic Mystic Seaport. Lunch at Coastal Gourmet. Cost \$88 including transportation and lunch. Departs from Mall at Whitney Field.

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Meet Your ALFA Teacher

Barbara McGuirk: Passion for Learning

The first thing you notice about ALFA instructor Barbara McGuirk is positive energy. To understand where this comes from you need to know a bit about her.

Barbara comes from a large Polish family and keeps many food and cultural traditions going. She has taken on her mother's legacy of being a skilled baker. Her specialty is pies, strawberry rhubarb in spring, apple in fall.

Married to Tom



Barbara McGuirk

McGuirk for 34 years, Barbara glows when she speaks of her two children and two grandchildren. She loves spending time with her family and maybe spoiling the grandkids a bit. Strong family connections have led Barbara and Tom to participate in Bridges Together, which pairs ALFA volunteers with 3rd graders at McKay School to promote cross-generational understanding. You feel the joy in her descriptions of the program and the contacts with the students that have continued beyond its end.

Barbara constantly pushes beyond her comfort zone. As an ALFA student, she has tried to learn new things — meeting nice people and hearing varied perspectives in classes about India, or the Middle East, or physics.

Barbara McGuirk is a complex and thoughtful person who is passionate about education and learning. She taught English for 44 years at St. Bernard's High School and loves the beauty of the written word. It's that love of language she shares with ALFA students when teaching classes on *Hamlet* or *Macbeth* or the British Romantic period.

Both at St. Bernard's and at ALFA, *Hamlet* is her favorite thing to teach. "It has the most varied perspectives," she says. "I like to ask students if they think Ophelia got what she deserved." You're going to have to take the class to get that answer, but Barbara's secret for great apple pie is lots of different kinds of apples.

By Joyce Ayadi Hinckley

How to Get Involved

ALFA could not function without the help of volunteers. If you would like to lend a hand, please contact the ALFA office at Fitchburg State University's McKay Campus School, C-Wing, (978) 665-3706.

We invite ALFAs to submit articles, reviews, artwork, or poems for publication in ALFA-Bits. Email your submissions, requests for information, or story ideas to geo.r.french@gmail.com or call (978) 345-6553.

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Writers, Joyce Hinckley, Joanne Huse

A Course for Every Interest

ALFA's Curriculum Committee has lined up an array of courses in the coming winter and spring sessions calculated to satisfy a wide range of interests. Here's a representative listing of offerings in the coming winter and spring sessions:

Nature — Spring Into Birding, Winter Wildlife.

History — Transatlantic Ocean Liners, Influence of Textiles on History, Italian-American History, Cultural

Heritage Through Image, Industrial Fitchburg.

Health and Fitness — Stretch and Tone, Zumba, Meditation, Yoga Dance, Aqua Aerobics, ALFA Walk, Ski and Snowshoe.

Literature — Dystopian Literature, Young Adult Literature, Community Book Read.

Learning and Polishing Skills — Quilting, Mah Jongg, Art of Paste Papers, Harmonica, Penny Whistle, Drawing Inspired by the Masters, The Art and Craft of Storytelling, French Café, Creating a Personal Archive, Take Your Art to the Next Level.

Art — History of Photography, 1898 Paris Exhibition.

Ideas for courses come from a variety of sources.

Some are perennial favorites that are continued from year to year. Others are suggested by individuals who have expertise in a particular subject or activity and would like to share it with eager-to-learn ALFAs. Still others are suggested by members of the ALFA Executive Board and its Curriculum Committee.

An equally important source of ideas are the students themselves, who make their preferences known via the class evaluation forms they fill out and their suggestions for future courses. The Curriculum Committee has a substantial backlog of proposals for courses, but your suggestions are nevertheless very welcome. Contact us at (978) 665-3706.

ALFA: What's It All About?

ALFA, Adult Learning 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. Each year ALFA presents dozens of classes keyed to a wide variety of interests.

Most classes run for 90 minutes over five weeks. While some classes are held at off-campus venues, most are at the McKay Campus. We welcome your suggestions for new courses, programs, and special events.

The idea of creating a local adult learning program originated with Shirley Pick and Dr. Philip Fallon. Enthusiastic support from Dr. Robert Antonucci, then president of Fitchburg State, and Dr. Shirley Wagner, then associate vice president of academic affairs, helped make the dream a reality. ALFA is directed by a volunteer Executive Board and advised by Dr. Lisa Moison.

The community response has been gratifying, with enrollments climbing steadily. For information, or to be added to ALFA's mailing list, call the ALFA office, (978) 665-3706, or sign up on the ALFA website, fitchburgstate.edu/alfa.



Your Best Friend ...

The Food for Thought lecture series kicked off its fall program series by bringing in a speaker from NEADS, National Education for Assistance Dog Services. Gerry DeRoche, the CEO of NEADS in Princeton, gave a very informative, thoughtful program about the service dog program and how it has grown and expanded over the years. I had the privilege of visiting the facility with my Girl Scout Troop back in the early '90s. It was a fascinating program then and even more so now.

Food for Thought

The idea of training rescue dogs to help the deaf and hearing-impaired started as a college experiment. With the success of that project under their belts, the NEADS program was formed. Since the early 1980s, the program has expanded and has gone national, now training service dogs to assist veterans, trauma survivors, people in wheelchairs, and those with autism. NEADS dogs also assist psychologists and ministries in hospitals,

It takes two years to train a dog, and only about half make the grade. If the dog does not graduate, it is put up for adoption.

The cost to train a dog is upwards of \$42,000, most of which comes from foundations, charities, and donations. To learn more about this program check www.neads.org.



Gerry DeRoche

By Linda Kennedy

... Your Worst Nightmare

In keeping with the Halloween spirit, author Marianne O'Connor donned a discreet Viking helmet for her Food for Thought presentation of tales of reputedly haunted locations along some of New Hampshire's premier hiking trails. Ms. O'Connor, author of *Haunted Hikes of New Hampshire*, recounted legends such as Devil's Den in New Durham, Chief Chocorua in Tamworth, Sasquatch of Ossipee, the Bomber Plane in Woodstock, and a murder mystery involving Bette Davis in Franconia.



Marianne O'Connor

Most intriguing was the tale of Madame Antoinette Sherri, a New York costume designer who in the Roaring 20s built a posh summer house in the woods of Chesterfield, N.H. For years, she was notorious among the locals for the lavish parties she threw for her bohemian friends from the city and even more notorious for driving around the town wearing a fur coat and nothing else.

After the money ran out, the castle fell into ruin, was vandalized, and finally burned down to the stones in 1962. However, as Ms. O'Connor related, legend has it that Madame Sherri still can be seen from time to time at the top of the ruined castle's grand staircase.

A fitting tale, indeed, for a Halloween presentation.

ALFAs Are on the Road Again

Join ALFA for a visit to Historic Mystic Seaport, a recreated 19th century maritime village that allows you to immerse yourself in the details of daily life in that era and the stories of ships that conquered the sea. Climb aboard the restored Charles W. Morgan, the world's last surviving wooden whaling ship. See demonstrations in newspaper printing, ship carving, open-hearth cooking, blacksmithing and boat building. Get insight into the joys and challenges of family life 100 years ago as you visit the general store, chapel, school, and drugstore.

Special Events Preview

Walk through the Burrows House Garden and the Buckingham-Hall Garden. You may choose to visit the Treworgy Planetarium dome or shop at the museum store. We will meet at the Coastal Gourmet at Latitude 41 for a leisurely lunch.

Our bus will depart at 8 a.m. from the Mall at Whitney Field in Leominster and returns at 6 p.m. Cost, including lunch, is \$88 per person. Seating is limited to 50 people. No refunds unless trip is canceled. Moderate walking on level surfaces with benches available to rest.

By Elaine Page

On Environment, Justice

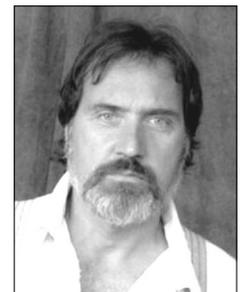
ALFA's Food for Thought series this spring will take us, via photography, to the icy ends of the Earth and, via performance art, to a deeper understanding of America's long quest for social, political, and religious justice.

"Arctic Adventures in Iceland and Greenland" — On March 27, spend an hour with Lunenburg photographer Eric Vickery, who will share his passion for the outdoors and environment in a multimedia presentation on the beauty and importance of peri-Arctic regions.

As an adventure and travel photographer, Eric joined photographers from ten other countries on a winter visit to the south coast of Iceland to experience ice caves, auroras and glaciers. That trip led to his participating in the Arctic Arts Project, whose mission is to inspire with a visual response to climate change and to see the world differently. Eric also journeyed with another photographic team to Scoresby Sound in Greenland to provide drone video and photography of Inuit settlements and the landscape.

"A Search for Justice" — On April 24 Stephen Collins will treat us to a one-man show bringing history to life on stage. In this piece, you will hear the words of William Lloyd Garrison, John Brown, Abraham Lincoln, and others.

This performance piece will examine social, political, and religious justice. What is Justice? Can it be defined, or is it just an abstract concept? What is Truth? How do leaders, both political and religious, use language to motivate people? Is violent action ever justified when all else fails? Is there such a thing as a just, as opposed to unjust, war?



Stephen Collins

Both programs will be held in the Ellis White Lecture Hall in Hammond Hall.

By Emily Fine

How the Other Half Lived

On a warm October day, more than 60 ALFA participants left Leominster at 8:15 a.m. on a Wilson bus for the Lyman Estate in Waltham, where four generations of Lymans spent their summers.

The day was partly sunny and perfect for the trip. We divided into two groups. One group toured the pretty gardens and the oldest greenhouses in the country filled with exotic plants and herbs; the other group walked through the 1793 mansion with its beautiful parlor and ballroom. Then we switched. Our tour guides were very informative and gave us insights into how the upper class lived in the 19th century.

Special Event

The estate, which covers 37 acres, hosts many weddings and events. Who wouldn't want to have a party there? Lastly, we stopped at the gift shop to purchase some plants for our own gardens.

Next we drove to Concord to have a lunch of pot roast or haddock at the historic Colonial Inn. Both meals were delicious; we left well satisfied.

We spent the afternoon at the DeCordova Sculpture Park in Lincoln. We split into smaller groups and had personal and fascinating tours of some of the outdoor sculptures. Who knew contemporary art could be so interesting? Then we toured the inside art gallery, where an amazing photography exhibit on water was being held, and also had fun browsing and shopping in the gift shop.

The day went too quickly, and we arrived back to our cars by 5 p.m. A good time was had by all. Thank you, ALFA, for an amazing and informative trip. We can't wait until the next one!

By Jody Barnard

Thank You, Volunteers

The Welcoming Committee wants to thank all the class aides and greeters who helped us during the fall semester. It takes a special person to welcome people, keep track of the class, impart information, assist the instructor, and handle the paper work. Good Job!!

The following people served as class aides in this program in the fall: Winnie Beasley, Lauretta Conlon, Brad Kennedy, Richard Olson, Jude McCoy, Jane Epstein, Barbara Reynolds, Diane Rouleau, Margaret Woovis, Linda Norman, Linda Kennedy, and Judy Normandin.

Also, Jackie Vandergriff, Merry Cormier, Anne Seed, Barbara Courage, Karen Pick, Jean Coakley, Debra Pelletier, Jane Rabbitt, Diane Guenard, Rhonda and Mike Golden, and Yvonne "Gerry" Harrington.

Also, Christian Erban, Barbara Hoos, Jane Crocker, Carol McShane, Lucille Sampson, Mary Alice Girling, Sally Hens, Maxine Pincott, Ann Descoteaux, Joanne Bianco, and Sandra Thibodeau.

Serving as greeters in the fall sessions were Linda Olson, Judy Normandin and Joanne Huse.

ALFA, as we often say, runs on volunteers. Thank you all.

By Linda Kennedy

They Cook Up Food for Thought

In this issue, we train the ALFA-Bits Spotlight on ALFA's hardworking Food for Thought Committee, the organizational drive behind ALFA's popular lecture series.

Four times a year FFT presents free afternoon lectures for ALFAs and the community at large. The smooth operation of these presentations belies months of behind-the-scenes planning. The volunteer committee holds five or six planning meetings per year to brainstorm ideas for quality programming and share preparations. The committee recruits and deals with presenters, reserves the lecture hall, generates



publicity materials, processes registrations, and attends to the myriad details that ensure a smooth-running program.

Topics range from local to universal, lighthearted to serious and controversial. Recent programs, have delved into garden insects, haunted lighthouses, bird migration, companion dogs, and immigration, among many others.

ALFA Board member Emily Fine, the committee chair, says the committee is actively recruiting volunteers. "Do you have great ideas for ALFA programs? Are you wondering how you might help plan some great events? The Food for Thought Committee needs you." she said. "We'd love to welcome you as a committee member, and we are eager to hear from you."

If you'd like to get involved, please drop Emily Fine an email at willardbrookfriend@yahoo.com or contact her at (978) 597-3553 to attend a meeting.



Judy Shaughnessy



Debra Faust-Clancy

Welcome, New Board Members

The ALFA board is pleased to announce the election of Debra Faust-Clancy and Judy Shaughnessy as new board members.

Debra Faust-Clancy has been an active and enthusiastic ALFA student for many years. Having lived in Pittsburgh, San Francisco, Boston, and now our area, as well as having a strong academic and professional background, she brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to the position.

Judy Shaughnessy, active in ALFA for five years, recently accepted the position of co-chair of the ALFA's Special Events Committee, which plans the popular ALFA trips. The Fitchburg native now lives in Leominster with her husband Bob. A Fitchburg State graduate with an MBA from Western Massachusetts College, she was a finance manager at Digital Equipment Co. before retiring.

Both are valuable additions to our board. Welcome, Judy and Debra.

Birding Beyond the Basics

Alison O'Hare had big shoes to fill when she took over Dick Knowlton's job at Wachusett Meadow and I'm happy to report that she fills them very well. Alison, a graduate of Mass. Audubon's Birder's Certificate Program, has a calm demeanor, a dry wit and is a veritable font of birding knowledge. Even on hot humid days when the birds were scarce, ALFAs went home with a better appreciation of our "usual suspects": chickadees, jays, sparrows, even crows.

Fall Birds at Wachusett Meadow

We learned to ask ourselves three questions: What does the bird look like? What is it doing? Where did we see it? We learned about how birds sing, how feathers develop, how some cache their seeds for later eating.

On a cold dank day (for humans) we rejoiced at the sight of several pairs of bluebirds who were no doubt hard at work — but appeared to us bird-watchers as happily flitting and flying about for our pleasure.

The ALFAs were very pleased to hear that Alison will be leading a class this spring as the migrating birds start returning. Important birding question: How do you estimate large numbers of birds? Count their legs and divide by 2!

By Joanne Huse, Jon Jones photo



Alison O'Hare preps class for outing.



Joe Moser, left, distributes more reading material.

Parsing a Russian Literary Icon

Most of us have heard of Anton Chekhov, many have read his stories, and many have seen at least one of his plays. Professor Joe Moser introduced us not only to a comprehensive understanding of his life and philosophy, but also provided an extensive overview of his works.

As he wrote in his introduction to the class: "More than 110 years after his death ... Chekhov remains among the most influential short story authors in the world, as well as one of the world's most frequently produced playwrights."

The Subtle Genius Of Anton Chekhov

Professor Moser warned us in the ALFA brochure there would be a lot of reading, but because Chekhov's writing is so insightful and impressionistic, it wasn't a burden. Professor Moser did an amazing job of preparation for the class. We read biographical pieces and criticisms and saw movies. Each week we were assigned questions to think about for the next class. Our discussions were animated and interesting.

I have been in other classes given by Professor Moser and always find them to be informative and thought-provoking. I would sign up for any course that he might teach in the future.

By Gail Allo, Gail Hoar photo

World Musician, Storyteller To Perform at Grand Finale

ALFA's Grand Finale in April will begin with a presentation by world music's Randy Armstrong accompanied by storyteller Genevieve Aichele. Their program, "World Tales," is an award-winning performance of storytelling, music, and movement.

Randy Armstrong is already familiar to many who requested a return performance after his last visit to Fitchburg State. Genevieve Aichele is a theater artist and director, storyteller, playwright, and teacher. She often performs as part of the Armstrong & Aichele duo.

The performance, under the aegis of the Shirley Pick Spring Series, will be at 11 a.m. April 24 in the Hammond Hall Main Lounge. It is a free event. Those signing up for the optional post-performance luncheon will pay a \$10 fee.

The Grand Finale will conclude after lunch with Stephen Collins' one-man show, which illuminates America's search for social justice through the words of Abraham Lincoln, John Brown, and others. (See Page 3 for details.)

Shirley Pick Spring Series Preview



Genevieve Aichele



Randy Armstrong with some of his world music instruments.



Steeped in the Lore of Tea

Coffee or tea? For some people it is one or the other. Participants in the Specialty Teas Series represented both ends of the spectrum and somewhere in-between.

Danielle Beaudette instructed us on the subject of tea with enthusiasm and expertise, covering the basics of growing, harvesting, and processing tea. We learned about the social impact of tea in history and its health benefits.

Specialty Teas Series

Classes were rich in sensory experiences such as pairing tea with chocolate and cooking with tea. Every class was accompanied by four to five teas for sampling. Everyone found several new teas to their liking that could be added to their repertoire.

Danielle prepared a five-course meal for the class with each recipe containing tea in some form, a seasonal menu including salad, chicken, rice, green beans, and a fall fruit compote. One of the interesting facts we learned: White tea bags are processed with bleach and chlorine and affect the true taste of the tea. Brown bags will not alter the taste.

Danielle is a gifted presenter and teacher whose long love affair with tea is evident. Everyone agreed that the course was enlightening and gave us another way of relaxing — sitting down and enjoying a good cup of tea. Our appreciation for all the benefits of tea has grown as a result of this class.

Review and photo by Claudette Williams

Just Pucker Up and Blow

While mostly associated today with Irish or Celtic music, many different styles of music can be, and have been, played on the versatile penny whistle. In this class, Steve Brown demonstrated various folk styles from England, Ireland, and Scotland and also exposed us to more contemporary uses of the whistle.

Introduction To Penny Whistle

The penny whistle, or tin whistle as it also is called, is a simple instrument and, with only six holes, is relatively easy to learn to play. The trick, of course, is learning to play really well. While none of us in the course is quite ready for Carnegie Hall, Steve introduced us to the method to get there.

Listening to others play is an integral part of learning. To that end, the book instruction was accompanied by a CD so we could hear what our notes should sound like. Additionally, each class began with a recording of some really great whistle players, which showed what skilled musicians can do with this simple instrument and inspired us to prac-



Steve Brown and the penny whistlers.



We Welcome Your Ideas

We welcome your suggestions about how we can make ALFA even more responsive to your interests and needs. If you have ideas for a new course or special event, contact the ALFA Office, (978) 665-3706.

Humanity: Dodo Redux?

Dr. Robert Champlin covered the five major extinction episodes in Earth's history, from 570 million years ago when oxygen first appeared in the atmosphere to our present Cenozoic Era in which the last major ice age appeared. A lot has happened in between!

Dr. Champlin discussed possible causes of mass extinctions, including asteroids, volcanism, sea level and climate change, methane eruptions, oxygen depletion, and, finally, *homo sapiens* — us! His experience in fossil gathering and mammal development has taken him across continents and made for fascinating discussions with much humor thrown in. In discussing the food chain, he wryly simplified the definition of *ecology* from "relationships of flora and fauna with each other and their environment" to "Who eats whom?"

In our present sixth mass extinction, human activity is paramount. The carbon cycle is reaching a "catastrophic threshold" as 300 gigatons — 300 billion tons — of carbon are absorbed every year by Earth's oceans, which cover 71 percent of the planet's surface. The oceans are quickly becoming an acid sink, killing off all soil microorganisms on the ocean floor. Since microorganisms are at the bottom of the food chain and since our planet is just one big organism connecting everything, carbon is killing all life above microorganisms on the food chain!



By Betty Gelinias

tice, practice, practice so we might play as well.

Steve is a talented musician and enthusiastic teacher. He engaged the students and encouraged others in the class to contribute their talents. Hopefully, a Penny Whistle II will be offered soon.

By Tony Ingrisano, GRF Photos

Fascinating Look at Our High Court

This course, led by Dr. Paul Weizer, proved to be a fascinating look at the work and law interpretations of the United States Supreme Court. The course began with the history of the Court as an institution, dating back to the Federalist Papers and the Constitution.

Review of the 2016-2017 Supreme Court Term

We also received a breakdown of the decisions by vote split for the 2016-2017 term, which were very consistent with the percentage of vote splits for previous years. It was surprising and somewhat reassuring to see the high percentage of vote splits ranging from 9-0 to 7-2.

The course reviewed cases involving freedom of speech, freedom of religion, education law, gerrymandering, and right to counsel. Some cases involved an application of the law that most persons would not think would apply in that situation.

In all the cases we were provided with the precedents reviewed by the Court and key quotes from the Court's ultimate ruling. We also were asked to weigh in on whether or not we felt it was the correct ruling — which led to interactive class participation.

This is a course that all ALFA students, regardless of political persuasion or religious or social leanings, could benefit from taking due to its relevance to everyday life. I have been taking ALFA courses for over two years and this has been my favorite class.

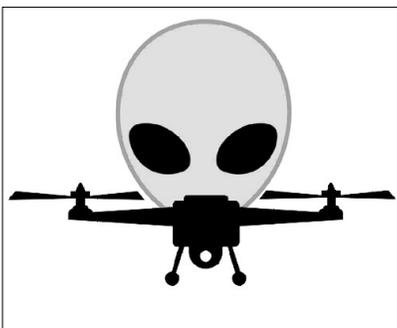
By Paul Clancy

UFO: Unmanned Flying Object

Having owned and flown drones for the past four years, I wasn't quite sure what to expect out of Steve Swartz's class. I have to tell you that Steve's presentation on the subject was a very exciting eye-opener.

His introduction to the various aspects of drone ownership was quite thorough — from a safety viewpoint, to the FAA rules and regulations, to ultimately the actual hands-on experience with his drone on the final day of the class. In this unique class, Steve brought an opportunity to learn not only how drones affect our lives today, but how they will affect our future.

All About Drones



The videos that Steve shared throughout the course taught us not only how much fun can be had with personal drone ownership, but also how drones are used in other countries. One such example was how drones are used to study and analyze crops from above, along with what steps are needed to improve growth. Another example is how drones are used in remote areas to help locate and rescue people who are lost in the wild.

Personally, because of this wonderful ALFA class, presented so well by Steve Swartz, I now plan to utilize my drone and its onboard camera to create more artistic work.

By Robert Thomas



Chefs Odette Harvey, Walter Konig, and Kathy Flynn.

The Pasta Is Prologue

The fall 2017 ALFA cooking class honored the Fitchburg State Center for Italian Culture by preparing foods that reflected the 20 regions of Italy. In addition to eating delicious dishes, we were presented with a brief geography lesson about the regions in which the dishes originated.

Culinary Tour of Italy

From beef ragu with grilled polenta from the north, where meat and dairy products prevail, to Sardinian-style minestrone soup, beef braciolo, and Sicilian lemon and pistachio cake from the south, our journey was delicious and delightful!

The cuisines of southern Italy are known for their abundant use of fresh fruits and vegetables, spicy tomato-based pasta dishes, pecorino cheese made from the goats that they raise, and olive oil.

The camaraderie demonstrated by the instructors — Chris Barnacoat, Kathy Flynn, Odette Harvey, and Walter Konig — was infectious, making the class informative and fun! As the instructors prepared the delicious dishes in front of us, we learned cooking techniques and methods that will encourage us to try new recipes and dishes that remind us of our culinary journey through Italy.

By Pam Storm, Debra Faust-Clancy photos



A stirring performance by chefs Walter Konig and Chris Barnacoat.



Ladies and gentlemen, start your search engines .

Keeping Tabs on Your Tablet

Do you want to take a course that is enjoyable as well as educational? If you do, this is the course for you.

Barbara Friedman is a joy. She is very knowledgeable about the functions and uses of the iPhone and iPad. Although her course is considered advanced, she makes sure that all of the class members are familiar with basic and common functions

Advanced iPad and iPhone

of the devices. She showed many ways to enhance our use of the iPhone and iPad

as well as some shortcuts to our devices' functions.

We enjoyed learning about Facebook, podcasts, unique passwords, Google Maps, and how to make the best use of our storage. We learned how to connect to local libraries, using our library cards to gain material and books. Barbara also suggested many good apps, demonstrated the use of attachments, and showed us how to synchronize with other devices such as computers and smart televisions.

Her greatest desire is to be sure that everyone in the class understands the material. All questions were welcome and answered. No questions were considered "dumb." With this relaxed and congenial atmosphere, my wife and I truly enjoyed the course and learned a great deal.

By Jack Sampson, GRF photos



Barbara Friedman

FLOWERS FOR FETES

— Gail Allo, right, has a special way of guiding her students to create an amazing arrangement. Every student has the exact same flowers, yet every finished arrangement is uniquely different. At the end of each class, every student leaves with a look of pride on her face and a beautiful seasonal arrangement in her hands.

Karen McNall photo



Seasonal Arrangements

'Fooling Around' With Music

If you can sing or hum a tune, and you like music, the Harmonica I class just might be the way to fulfill your fantasy of becoming a musician.

Paul Luria, the instructor, is a master musician in the broadest sense, with a breadth of musical knowledge that seems to know no limit.

Harmonica I

It isn't necessary to have any prior musical training to enjoy this class. Paul encourages the class to trust their ears and have fun "fooling around" on the harmonica. As he is fond of saying, he will help you read the music just well enough that it doesn't affect your playing.

Paul provided us with a wide range of popular tunes to learn. Many, like "You Are My Sunshine" and "When the Saints Go Marching In," most of the class was familiar with. Some, like "Wayfaring Stranger" and "Aura Lee," were new to some of us, but fun to learn. The class also covered the basic structure of the 12-bar blues and some harmonica riffs so that we could play along while Paul strummed the guitar.

Paul's positive attitude is a relaxing influence. It seems he is deaf to every missed note! The class is a great introduction to learning the harmonica.



By John Trainor

Beyond Rosie, a Riveting Saga

Do you have a Star-Spangled Heart or do you want to work instead of wait? You can make an invaluable contribution to the war effort and bring the boys and victory home.

In Women of World War II, we learned women in the U.S.A. and across the world answered the call and served in the factories, farms, and armed services. They were an essential part of the war effort and changed attitudes about what was suitable work for ladies.

Women of World War II

Asher Jackson and Dani Langdon used vintage films and posters, presentations, and discussions to explore the experiences of "girls" working in factories and in the military. They provided insight into who they were and what their lives were like during and after the war.

Many myths were dispelled. The fact is, most women in the factories had worked before, many were married, and female military served overseas.

All of this was made incredibly real by our exploration of relevant collections in the Fitchburg State archives. Seeing ration cards or pinup calendars was interesting — but actually touching a document that said women were made officers by the same act of Congress as their male counterparts was moving and humbling.

For me that was the point: These were real women who accomplished so much that I was left grateful for their contributions and to our instructors who told their stories.

By Joyce Ayadi Hinckley



Assessing a Long-Ago War

As a veteran of the Vietnam War, and being a microcosm of the war, I was especially appreciative of this outstanding course, in which Professor Theresa Fava Thomas gave a clear and interesting understanding of how and why the war developed.

The course traced the Vietnamese history and culture from French colonization, to Japanese occupation, to the American involvement, and finally the American exit in 1975.

Vietnam: A Century of Conflict

Her in-depth knowledge and wealth of anecdotes and trivia from the war gave us a fuller understanding of the big picture.

Through the course it became clear that the peoples' understanding of the politics underlying the war and the public's realization of impossibility of winning the war would never have been realized without media exposure! Three cheers for the free press and the First Amendment.

In many ways this course it was cathartic for me. Theresa Fava Thomas did an excellent job!

By Joe Byrne

(Note: Vietnam War veteran Joseph D. Byrne, 1Sgt. U.S. Army, Rtd., served from 1966-1969.)



Where Everything Is Possible

"Seers and Seekers" is a mesmerizing course which transports you from the present day to the era of famous/infamous personalities of our New England cultural, literary, and commercial past.

This course flew by, whether measuring minutes or weeks, due to the remarkable talent of Sally Cragin, who introduced us to New England characters as if they were personal friends. She presented nuanced descriptions of the times and personalities of familiar icons including Henry David Thoreau ("widely traveled, in Concord") and lesser known, but equally enchanting, 19th century characters such as Lydia Pinkham whose "pink pills for pale people" are still available as an herbal supplement.

Seers and Seekers

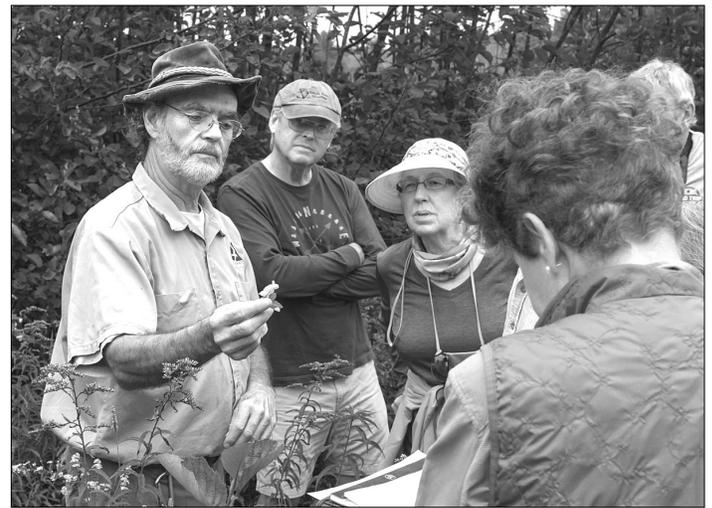
You will feel, through Sally Cragin's ability to connect with us, and with them, a personal kinship with individuals such as Joseph Palmer, who was persecuted and jailed for wearing a beard, and Louisa May Alcott, whose fortitude enabled her family to survive the Transcendental Era. You will identify with family dynamics we all struggle with, searching to understand death and loss of people and stature, which never leaves us but changes who we are, enabling us to embrace chaos and tragedy and grow through the scars of living.

The course was a humorous and adventurous look at how New England in America became the place where everything is possible — not just in the larger cities, where Isabella Stewart Gardner and Emerson made their marks, but locally where the efforts of Eleanor Norcross, truly well-travelled, dreamed of enabling the children of Fitchburg to learn to draw in a museum of their own, and through whose efforts we now enjoy the Fitchburg Art Museum.



Sally Cragin

By Gerry Harrington



Joe Choiniere, left, fingers a fascinating foral find.

A Moveable Feast of Nature

Awesome, excellent, wondrous, impressive, amazing, marvelous. Did you think I was talking about the program at Wachusett Meadow Wildlife Sanctuary in Princeton? Although they also apply, these attributes were given by the participants about our leader, Joe Choiniere.

For me — an avid hiker who usually hurries through the woods following the shoes of the hiker in front of me — this course was an eye-opening experience. We walked leisurely and observed nature at its finest — the many varieties of late flowering plants, trees, and mushrooms, as well as the seeds, nuts, and berries that feed the woodland animals.

If we stood still, our incredible naturalist could point out 20 or more plants. Did you know that sulfur butterflies migrate as late as November, or that the stormy weather from hurricanes may have caused thousands of migrating hawks to shift their travel plans westward?

We were fortunate to have sunny and warm weather for our unstructured walks, which, combined with cool nights, caused more colors to appear this fall. Who would know there were so many varieties of sumac or dogwood or multiple species of dragonflies or hawks? Joe also pointed out changes in the clouds as a storm was approaching: "micro-scales" with a sundog effect.

Really, I wish I had a recorder for all the information we received. I've signed up for the next session and would highly recommend others with a love of nature to do so, too.

By Kathy Coulson, Jon Jones photo

Early Fall: A Nature Banquet

November Walk

By Lois Gallagher

I took a walk in the cold November sun
Where the air is as crisp as it ever gets
And evergreens stand firm in their resolve to
live up to their name
And brown leaves lie trapped under thin ice
Looking up to from whence they came.

I took a walk in the cold November air
Where squirrels in gray coats scurry in their pre-
winter rush
And crows strut their black feathered stuff
On frosty green carpets so lush
And queen's lace curls against the cold.

When Culture Clash Hit the Streets

In various ways, we remember it. But what do we really know about it?

The 1968 Democratic Convention, held in Chicago, chose Hubert Humphrey as its presidential candidate; in November the Democrats lost to the Republicans and Richard Nixon — and we all know how *that* turned out.

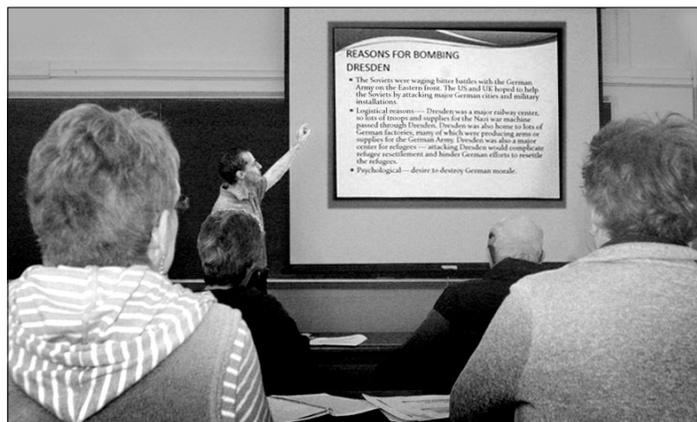
Chicago 1968

But let's back up to late August of 1968 and recall: The Vietnam War was ramping up and the number of American casualties was climbing. Campuses across the country were seething with rage against the war in particular and the establishment in general. Racial discrimination and poverty were causing unrest in our largest cities.

It all came to a head at the Democratic Convention. Both inside the fortress-like convention hall and outside in Mayor Richard Daley's hot, strike-ridden city, heads butted figuratively and literally. And when it was all over, what did it mean, what really happened, what did we learn?

Katherine Jewell's class was an exercise in role-playing some of the major figures of this turbulent time. This technique pushed the ALFA students to look at all the viewpoints, question long-held beliefs, dig deeper into the motives of the diverse participants. It was an exhilarating experience for all.

By Joanne Huse



Eric Budd expands on peace studies talking points.

Give Peace a Chance

Professor Eric Budd's class on offered students an opportunity to look at the impediments to peace that we experience on our planet. We covered the origins and resolutions of conflict, just-war theory, and the results of war which inevitably lead to terrorism, torture, loss of privacy, and physical destruction.

Peace Studies

The class was given a questionnaire which allowed students to measure if and when they felt violence is appropriate. This was not an easy decision to make!

Professor Budd's handouts and his outline of Afghanistan's history leading to civil war were revealing. Also very helpful were the class comments on misunderstandings which they have personally experienced. Our last class ended with humanity's treatment of women throughout history. Needless to say, there was lively dialogue on this subject!

One comes away with an appreciation of how lasting peace is so very difficult to achieve.

By Betty Gelinias, Gail Hoar photo

Brevity the Key to Stories' Power

Do you like to read stories? Do you like to tell others about what you have read? Do you want to know the reaction of others to these same stories? If you have answered "yes" to

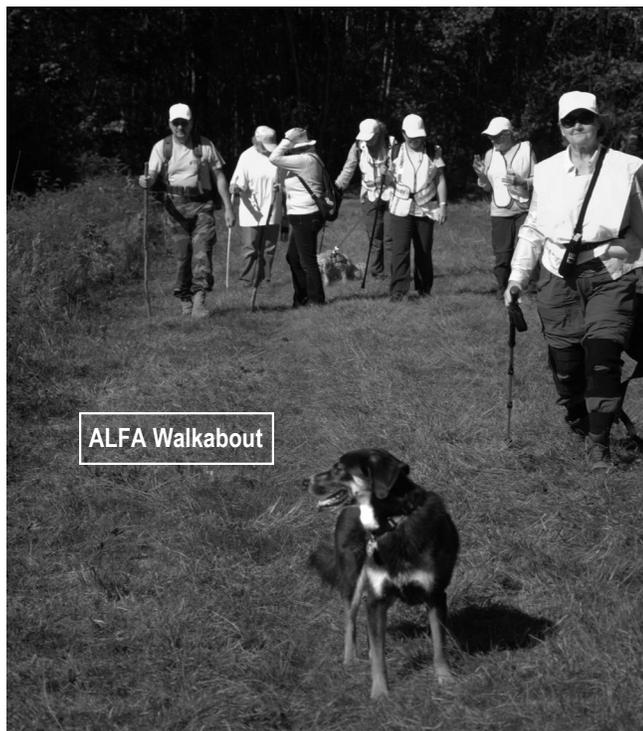
Great New Short Stories

any of these questions, you would have loved being part of the group who joined Professor Ben Railton in the ALFA class Great New Short Stories. These are all new stories selected from U.S. and Canadian magazines published in 2015. The authors — and for many of them this is their first time being published — give us a window into what is currently being written.

We read two assigned stories before each class and then, facilitated by Professor Railton, we discussed the literacy form of a short story, how it is distinguished from a novel, and the power that comes from its brevity. The characters, themes, and effectiveness of the stories were discussed and compared.

A most intriguing and rewarding aspect of this class was being part of an enthusiastic and highly verbal group who were all willing not only to state their ideas and opinions but also to listen to the ideas and opinions of others. It was precisely this that brought us to a more complete understanding of the stories. Here's looking forward to stories from 2016.

By Jane McFadden



LEADER OF THE PACK — ALFA'S perennial hiking and snowshoeing program, led by Sally Hens and Karen McNall, has attracted a fair number of repeat hikers over the years, but none more loyal than Sally's canine companion Bailey, who has assumed the role of leader of the pack since the beginning. Bailey likes to take the lead, but also keeps a keen eye on the hikers — and any other critter or tantalizing scent she comes across. It's a ruff job, you might say, but somebody's got to do it.

GRF photo

Mid-east Fare for Mind, Body

The innovative Dining to Learn course was Joyce Ayadi Hinckley and Billy Ayadi's latest stop on an ALFA-inspired Middle Eastern journey.

Our class of 12 students got the lowdown on the evolution of food stemming from three sources: China, Persia, and Egypt. We got to taste exotic spices such as sumac and smell flavorings such as rose- and orange-flavored water, which are used in Turkish Cuisine.

Dining to Learn

Joyce prepared some Middle Eastern delights, including baklava, for us to try prior to the dining out portion of the class. She even shared some of her treasured cookbooks so we could peruse recipes at home.

To assist in Middle Eastern food preparation, Joyce and Billy took interested students to a Middle Eastern Market in Worcester.

For the remaining three classes, we dined in three local Middle Eastern restaurants: Iraqi, Afghan, and Turkish. This allowed us the opportunity to try new foods under the experienced guidance of Joyce and Billy. What a delicious way to expand one's food horizons!

This stimulating cultural and culinary class was food for the mind and body. The Dining to Learn class was an epicurean delight.

By Maxine Pincott, Gail Hoar photo



ALFAs, above, sample Middle Eastern fare at Zaytoons on High Street in Clinton. Dining to Learn instructor Bill Ayadi stands by instructor Joyce Ayadi Hinckley seated at head of table. ALFA-Bits photographer Gail Hoar took the course and had this to say: "What a tasty assortment of reasonably priced food! And the most wonderful thing about this course was getting to know others in the class over casual conversation and planning for future ventures. We are even adding things like a Middle Eastern food shopping experience and possibly a trip to a mosque — all starting with our lunch-time conversations and evolving from there."

Would You Like to Teach 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.



Biking Group on the Gardner-Winchendon bike path.

New Biking Class on a Roll

This ALFA session hosted an experimental biking class. The leader, Claire Gingras, recently moved from Belchertown where she participated in group bike rides. She had been looking for a similar group to ride with in the Fitchburg area and had not been able to find a group that matches her desire to have a low-stress, reasonable-speed ride. Claire contacted ALFA to see if she could collect people to form a senior biking group.

The class consisted of three rides on a bike path that runs between Gardner and Winchendon. The bike path is part of a Rails-to-Trails project where old railroad beds are paved for bikers. Before the group started to ride, Claire covered some basic "bike path etiquette" and off we went.

This bike path is 6 miles long. Most of the riders traveled a full 12 miles at a reasonable pace of 11 miles per hour. The path goes through some of the area's most beautiful woodlands, giving riders views of spectacular wetland with the trees just turning colors and a lake at the Winchendon end of the trail.

We were lucky to have perfect sunny weather for all three rides, and most of the riders plan to continue to bike together.

Review, photo by Bradford Kennedy



OVER HILL, OVER DALES — During the 2016 Fall session of ALFA Walkabout, the idea of hiking in England was presented, and five ALFAs decided to go hiking in the beautiful Yorkshire Dales in June 2017. Highlights included hiking in the rain and wind, sharing trails with sheep and cattle, scaling stile after stile, crossing rocky streams, meeting hikers from many other countries, staying in an elegant manor house, and eating delicious meals. Judi Desmond, Lois Gallagher, Sally Hens, Barbara Jablonski, and Karen McNall, the "Fab Five," bonded as a group. An amazing experience was had by all!

— Karen McNall



© Jon C Jones

POD PEOPLE ? Among the many experiences ALFA offers, you might get up close and personal with the milkweed bug, as ALFA-Bits photographer Jon Jones did during an outing of the “Early Fall: A Nature Banquet” course at Wachusett Meadows Wildlife Sanctuary. His image, above, shows the intricate markings on the tiny bugs congregating on a milkweed pod. They are considered pests by some because they compete with monarch butterflies, which also feast on milkweed.

Jon Jones photo

ALFA Weather Policy

When Fitchburg State University cancels classes or has a delayed opening, ALFA classes will not be held that day. This applies to all ALFA classes, both on the university campus and at remote locations.

ALFA Calendar Spring 2018

Session 1 Session 2 Holidays

	S	M	M	W	T	F	S
Jan 2018	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
	28	29	30	31	1	2	3
Feb 2018	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
	25	26	27	28	1	2	3
Mar 2018	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
Apr 2018	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
	29	30	1	2	3	4	5