

# ALFA *bits*

ALFA—ADULT LEARNING IN THE FITCHBURG AREA

## President's Notes

With the passing of ALFA's first president, Phil Fallon, I'm thinking about the excellent job ALFA's founders did in creating an organization that could evolve and grow. From a mostly local organization in 2004, we have become a regional life-long learning program with folks attending from 40+ localities. From four classes a year we now have 100+. From mostly senior learners, we now have participation across more of the learner spectrum.

Change brings challenges. How do we maintain our sense of community and connection as we grow? With you; with you taking time to introduce yourself and talk to your fellow ALFA community members, from you taking the risk to meet someone new while learning something new. We maybe miss the importance of this in all the growth but it is the simple things that continue to keep ALFA special.

(continued on next page)



Joyce Ayadi Hinckley  
ALFA President

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## MARK YOUR CALENDAR

### March 31 — Food for Thought

Abolitionist, Emancipation, and Civil War Memory in Central Massachusetts in the Mid-Nineteenth and Early-Twentieth Centuries. **FREE.**  
2:30 PM / Ellis White Lecture Hall, Hammond Hall

### May 11 — Grand Finale: Spice it Up! Feel Great/Be Well

Featuring the hilarious Loretta LaRoche, Doctor of Mirth. **FREE** (Luncheon \$14).  
9 AM–3 PM / Ellis White Lecture Hall, Hammond Hall

### June 4 — Celebrating 25 Years with Keith

An Evening Performance of the Boston Pops Orchestra \$112 – includes your ticket (front floor seats) and transportation. Depart 5:30 PM / From the BJ's back lot. 115 Erdman Way, Leominster.



Ten hardy souls ventured out in 20 inches of snow on snowshoes. For some, it was a first. The ALFA Hikeabout class conquered over two-miles of forest roads and trails in Leominster State Forest during our 90-minute trek. Through it, we encountered animal tracks, a few falls into the soft snow and many laughs. Looking forward to another snowshoe hike very soon.

—Claire Gingras and Debbie Sayles

## Meet Your ALFA Instructors



### CHEFS RETIRING: Chris Barnacoat, Kathy Flynn, Odette Harvey, Walter Kondig

BY JOYCE HINCKLEY

Cooking classes have been part of ALFA from almost the beginning and became some of our most popular courses. All good things must come

to an end, however, and this year, our four celebrated chefs offered their last cooking class during Session I. Chris, Kathy, Odette, and Walter presented “Cooking a Health Heart through Healthy Eating” and shared their skills for a final time.

Chris sums up the thoughts of the chefs about their teaching experience: “A wonderful benefit of becoming one of the regular chefs, with the encouragement of our dear friend Bruce Goyette who started the ALFA cooking classes, was the comradeship and friendship that developed between the chefs and the regular class participants.”

He also wants to give a ‘shout out’ to Dani Langdon, Assistant Director of Professional Studies at Fitchburg State and ALFA’s University Liaison, who created the recipe books for each participant. The chefs are also in agreement that learning about how recipes have evolved, how history has influenced what we eat today, and the nutrition and cooking techniques involved in healthy eating were important components.

Kathy is a retired elementary school teacher with profound knowledge of local history. She says the classes have made her more daring about what she cooks. Sometimes chefs use homegrown ingredients like the garlic grown by Walter Kondig, which is surprising when you consider that Walter loves to bake. Garlic bread for all!

Like the other chefs, Odette was initially recruited by Bruce. Being used to feeding many, she brings a special warmth and Canadian hospitality to her dishes. Odette’s humor is also something shared by all our chefs. Cooking classes involve huge amounts of work and it’s their jokes and teamwork that make them fun.

Chris has been “head chef” or organizer for many years. He used to be an elementary teacher but there’s nothing in his dishes that is either elementary or ordinary. Chocolate Potato Truffles are a delectable dish that surprised everyone when he brings them to a class or event. Hint, Hint.

It’s hard to say goodbye to such a talented and devoted cadre of cooks. Their legacy continues: every cookbook created for these classes is now in the FSU archives; other types of food related courses have developed; and members still prepare the dishes learned in class. ALFA wants to both thank and congratulate them on meals well done.

### President’s Notes *(continued from page 1)*

You may never teach a class or serve on a committee (although I hope you do) but you can help in maintaining the ALFA community. Learn names, smile, and introduce a new comer to others; there are lots of small gestures that create a wave to sustain a community.

Our offerings began as mostly academic classes but now we have programs that address active, creative, and intellectual needs. Most of this is due to feedback from the community about where their interests lie and what they want ALFA to provide. At every class and event, there is a feedback sheet. Please take them seriously and tell us what you want. You may be surprised to find you get just that!

Nothing stays the same. Change is inevitable but your active input can shape the direction of ALFA’s future. How lovely is that?

### From the Editor...

After I quickly jumped in and agreed to be the ALFA-bits Editor, I drove home and started playing the “What if?” game. What if no one will write any reviews? What if I can’t get enough photos? What if I leave out important information? What if I can’t figure out the technology behind this newsletter? After spending the summer worrying about getting ALFA-bits done correctly, I realized I wasted too much energy in that arena. How thankful I am for all the people who got me going in the right direction and for all the contributors. Our ALFA community has a long list of accolades. Let’s add another one: incredibly supportive. Thanks to everyone who helped me to make my first newsletter as editor a successful one. It really does take a village!

—Nancy Y. Fillip

## ALFA REVIEWS

### Introduction to Opera

BY CAROL DECAROLIS

“Too highbrow... Too loud... I don’t know what they’re singing...” These are all comments you may have heard about opera. But once you have taken Gail Allo’s illuminating Introduction to Opera class, you may feel differently. Opera is for everyone. This class started with



opera’s beginnings, through the Dark Ages, Middle Ages, and finally the Renaissance when opera was developed in Italy. Gail explained the different kinds of operatic voices as we listened to examples such as mezzo-soprano,

lyric soprano, and coloratura soprano. We also learned about the major composers and common opera terms including buffo, leitmotiv, and libretto. Gail’s love of opera is contagious and her knowledge is outstanding. Every season the Metropolitan Opera in New York broadcasts ten operas which can be seen live at theaters throughout the world. These are shown at the Solomon Pond Mall and a few other nearby theaters, October through May. Check out *Madame Butterfly*, *Porgy and Bess*, *Turandot* and *Tosca*.

**GET INVOLVED**

ALFA could not function without the help of volunteers. If you can lend a hand, please contact the ALFA office:

**Fitchburg State University**  
**McKay Complex, Room C-154**  
**(978) 665-3706 • [alfa@fitchburgstate.edu](mailto:alfa@fitchburgstate.edu)**

We welcome your ideas for news items as well as artwork, poems, and articles for publication in the ALFA-Bits newsletter. Contact us for information about submitting your material.

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**DESIGN, PRODUCTION & MAILING**—Fitchburg State University Print Services

### Fall Into Birding!

BY ANN-MARIE LABOLLITA

I have been a back-yard birder for years and signed up for my first official bird watching class. I have learned a great deal already in Alison O’Hare’s *Fall into Birding* class. We met at Wachusett Meadow Wildlife Sanctuary on Monday mornings in Princeton. Class often begins with a short lesson and discussion on identification and then we eagerly set off on our group walk at this beautiful Audubon property, enjoying the fall season while looking for birds. We spent one morning looking for migrating hawks and were not disappointed. We had another informative session indoors learning about feathers, patterns and colors in birds. All of this was fascinating and I highly recommend this interesting and relaxing class. Oh, and there are always a few silly bird jokes to look forward to.





## Wood Carving

JEAN COAKLEY

Ed Laetz led a group of motivated students at Fitchburg Art Museum in his Wood Carving class. Inspired by some examples, given some initial direction, precautions, and encouraged by his relaxed attitude, we began carving! Ed reminded us, “You can’t really go wrong—it’s only a piece of wood.” He gave us rough forms of our projects that he had cut on a band saw and provided us with finished examples of the projects. From there, we carved (not whittled!) his rough-cut forms into mittens, snowmen and stars. Much conversation, many questions, and wood shavings flying made the time go by swiftly! Projects were stained, painted, and with the attachment of a hook, were made ready for display. We also learned about the kinds of wood used in carving, grains of wood, techniques, tools, many available resources, and the existence of local carving groups. A highlight of the class was when Ed favored us with some fiddle music while we carved!

## Vietnam

BY BARBARA MCQUIRK

Professor Teresa Thomas took this ALFA class through the many phases of Vietnamese history, from the days of French colonialism to the American involvement in the Vietnam War. So many events shaped Vietnam as it rose from a French colony to the country that was torn in two in the turbulent nineteen sixties. The rise of Ho Chi Minh as a political leader, the division of the country at the Geneva convention, the Nhu family’s government in the south, the protest of the Buddhist monks, guerrilla warfare facing the American troops, and the backlash of the protesters in the U.S. are just a few of the pieces of the history of this unpopular war. Several members of the class who served in this conflict added their own stories to the fact-filled lectures. With all her courses, Professor Thomas always give a clear and informative view of the times she is presenting.

## Through the Eyes of a Child: Children and Global Issues in Film

BY GAIL HOAR

Eric Budd tackled a difficult set of topics that dealt with the exploitation and/or the under-valuation of children as documented in a series of films.

Whether the child was a 13-year old teacher in a rural Chinese village, child soldiers in Africa, or a twelve-year-old boy living in poverty on the streets of Lebanon, the difficulties children face and their ingenious methods of finding ways to survive in spite of the odds was poignantly presented in each film. Many of the leading child actors in these films were able to convincingly portray their characters since they often were plucked from the very environment in which the story was set. Emotionally charged discussions followed each film, but this often occurred only after many moments of deep silence before anyone felt able to speak. Perhaps those who took this class will proceed in life with their eyes, ears, and hearts a little more widely opened to the trials humans face in a world who struggle with stability and economic challenges.



## French Café

ANNE GILMAN

What fun it was to make new relationships and speak French at the French Café. Bill Ayadi has spawned an enthusiastic group of French language lovers. Bill grew up in Tunisia and wanted to meet others who were passionate about speaking French and improving their skills. The class attracted a diverse group of people who learned French at school or in their families. Only French was spoken unless there was a real struggle to find the right word. We read and discussed literary French novels, such as *L’Etranger*, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* and *Les Jeux Sont Faits*. Bill’s research on the background of these books, both historically and politically, helped us better understand and talk about the themes at that time and how it affects us now. The French Café is a real treat for those who want to sharpen their skills. Many thanks to Bill for bringing this to ALFA.



**NOTE TO  
POTENTIAL CLASS  
AIDE VOLUNTEERS:**

During the weeks before classes begin, the Welcoming Committee tries to contact ALFA members to ask them to serve as class aides. That’s not always easy because proliferating robocalls and solicitations have made many people leery of answering calls from numbers they don’t recognize. We understand! But if you receive a call from Linda Olson or Linda Kennedy, and we leave a message, please respond.

**ALFA SALON — Libraries are Still a Great Place to Linger**

**Libraries are more than books**

Go visit a library just for its architectural beauty. Other libraries are offering more than books. Here are some ideas.

- **Woburn**—beautiful finished hardwood floors.
- **Nahant**—open glass floors, stained-glass windows.
- **Webster**—has brought the outside in with a huge contemporary space with indirect natural light and wise acoustic design.
- **Pepperell**—offering outside nature trails.
- **Boston**—podcast studios, green screen studios, radio studios, Café and even a “cocktail” area.

BY CAROL SMITH

During an Alfa Salon class, I have to admit that initially the topic, “Library Land Project” did not speak to me, wondering what “libraries” and “land” necessarily had to do with each other. Did digitizing and having online capabilities signal a demise of the physical structures of libraries? Greg Preverill-Conti and Adam Zand’s presentation not only educated me about the many types of libraries and their funding sources, it also raised my spirits, demonstrating how libraries are reinventing themselves. Their presentation was a valuable and revealing guide to libraries and information of their donors and supporters, services, and spaces that certain libraries in Massachusetts have created. *Libraries are*



*still a relevant and valuable asset to their community.*

What else can you check out from the library these days? Bicycles, telescopes, iRobot Roomba vacuum cleaners, artwork, games for children, puzzles, and so much more. But libraries still continue to offer quiet spaces, meeting rooms, and study rooms. There are computers and printers. Adam and Greg’s program was presented with enthusiasm, great photos of the varied places and spaces. They demonstrated the many ways in which libraries are alive and well and definitely thriving with all manner of up-to-date offerings.



## Can You Solve These BRAIN TEASERS?

(Answers on page 9)

1. A family lives in a large tower apartment building, 10 floors high. Every day their son takes the elevator from the family's apartment on the 10th floor to the ground floor and goes to school. When he returns in the afternoon, he uses the elevator to get to the fifth floor, and then uses the stairs for the remaining five floors. Why?
2. I do not have any special powers, but I can predict the score of any football game before it begins. How can I do this?



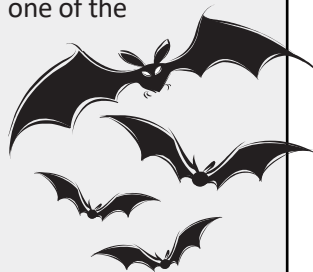
## BAT FACTS

From the Bats of New England Event

### Did you know....?

- Bats often eat up to 1/3 of their body weight in insects each day, although lactating mothers can eat up to 2 or more times their body weight daily?
- Between 10,000 and 20,000 pounds of insects are eaten each night by bats in one of the largest bat colonies in the US?
- Bats are fast. They can fly up to 100 MPH over flat terrain.

Additional information about bat conservation is available at [mass.wildlife@statema.us](mailto:mass.wildlife@statema.us).



## Bats of New England

BY RONI BEAL AND GAIL HOAR

Anyone who attended the Bats of New England presentation by Jennifer Longsdorf of Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife learned that bats are the most under-appreciated and misunderstood mammal on planet Earth. Bats play critical roles in insect control, plant pollination, seed dissemination, and cave ecosystems. Bats are shy and not a threat as portrayed in some movies. According to scientists, the rapid spread of White Nose Syndrome (WNS) since it was discovered in New York in 2006 has caused over 5.7 million bat deaths. Scientists around the world are urgently studying WNS. Ways that humans can help is by honoring cave closures where bats hibernate. By the end of the afternoon, the consensus was that Jennifer had enlightened us with her compelling talk and accompanying photos that clearly explained why bats are a very important component of our ecosystem.



## QiGong

BY ROBERTA FLASHMAN

Jeff Cote summed up the class with giggles, sighs, and nods of agreement from the participants as a look into how the ancient Chinese melding of body, mind, and breath were used to enable the placebo effect. Wouldn't it be great to feel more energetic without the use of energy drinks? Many of the participants professed that they were using the exercises and insights gained through the classes to achieve improved health and well-being. Jeff, who is extremely knowledgeable, covered the ancient practice of QiGong: breath work, meridians, movement sequences, posture, meditation. The classes were a combination of lecture and movement.

His lectures were more informal than those requiring note-taking, but crammed full of information. Jeff is easily approachable and open to all questions.

## Yoga for Pain Relief— Part I Upper Body

BY RONI BEAL

Ann-Marie LaBollita is the instructor for the Yoga for Pain Relief and she is an inspiration for anyone who enrolls in her yoga class. You may feel tired, stiff, and lacking oomph but after one session of gentle poses for neck, shoulders, hips, and back you will leave the class feeling energetic and refreshed. Most people do not realize how tense they are until they take the time to slow down and concentrate on areas of their body that cause aches and pains. Ann-Marie shares her knowledge so that everyone can take a few minutes at home and relieve their aches and pains with gentle yoga. Namaste.



## Landmark Cases in Constitutional Law: The First Amendment

BY GAIL HOAR

Initially, I thought this course might be a bit dry for me. Was I ever wrong! No one can attend one of Paul Weizer's classes and leave with question marks about the content of that day's lecture. Paul's vast understanding of all the legal nuances contained in our Constitution knows how to broach a subject. Through examples that relate to everyone's experiences at one time or another, Paul focused on the four freedoms contained in the First Amendment: Freedom of Speech, Press, Association, and Religion. Those in attendance were treated to lively discussions such as, "Why is it *legal* to burn a flag and *illegal* to burn a draft card (punishable by prison and a fine) as proclaimed by the Supreme Court?" The question Paul always poses after presenting each conflicting case is, "Did they get this right?" The discussions take off from there. Each of Paul's classes have the same dynamic; each is thought-provoking, interesting and exciting. Give one a try.

## Moby-Dick Will Not Die

BY GAIL HOAR

First-time ALFA instructor, Catherine Hunter, couldn't have presented a more compelling and thought-provoking class, even for those with trepidation and questions about why the tale of Moby-Dick still survives on bookshelves. Catherine broke the discussion into thematic sections, where readers skipped from chapter to chapter either being introduced to all the main characters, the history and process of whaling, the cetology of whales, or even the food consumed on



whaling ships that could be out-to-sea for up to four years at a stretch. Catherine pointed out it's possible to open the book randomly and find gems of wisdom, humor or insight on almost every page if readers let the words flow without haste or expectations. The culminating event took place at the New Bedford

Whaling Museum, where we were treated to lengthy docent-led tours that focused on Melville's story and a visit to the Bethel Chapel. Catherine provided an outstanding class offering in-depth knowledge of this classic novel.

## Creative Writing

BY DEBRA FAUST-CLANCY

Author Anne Gilman knows how to make writing fun and exciting. She has many tricks up her sleeve to get you going. She used games like Storymatic and Vertell's, where you pull a few cards out of a box and incorporate the prompts into your story no matter how strange or peculiar it seems. We would read our writings to the class and get immediate feedback.



Anne gave criticism that was friendly, gentle, and encouraging. She covered lots of ground—limericks, essays, memories, mind-mapping, and possible memoir material. In one class, she had us close our eyes, concentrate on a clear bell tone while she guided our thoughts. The mood shifted in the room and we were overtaken with calmness. This class is highly recommended. Lots of laughs and learning.



## ALFA CREATES

ALFA-bits is welcoming your creative work. Perhaps you have a poem, an excerpt from a book or essay you have written, a painting or drawing, mixed media, a new quilt or wood carving or a website where we can review your work. Please share your talents for the next newsletter by submitting your photo or written work to Nancy Fillip at [hilary0124@gmail.com](mailto:hilary0124@gmail.com). We want to see how talented you all are. Work by you can be submitted anonymously or with a pen name.



ALFAS creating unique flower arrangements.



Carolyn Todd's drawing students, Bob Ruberti, Joanne Londa, and Elaine Page with their still life drawings.

## Excerpted from *Under the Bili Tree— An African Odyssey*

(an unpublished manuscript seeking a home)

BY GAIL HOAR

I spent 18 months living as an anthropologist in a remote village in the African Country of Chad. It was a life-changing experience. This short selection may give you insight into what I mean.



Learning to speak Tar Barma, the language of the Baguirmi people who populate the small village of Bougoumen in Chad is tough. It's unwritten, tonal, and pitted with nuances that I never completely mastered. It took time before I could converse meaningfully with anyone. Regardless, one woman and I developed a profound relationship. —Gail

### Madam Goto and Madam Etu

Our friendship started when I asked her name. She teasingly replied "Goto" which meant "absolutely finished" or "there is none." I began calling her "Madam Goto" although I later discovered this elegant woman's given name was Ejima. We became accustomed to greeting each other by me asking:

"Madam Goto lolo?" (Madam Is None, are you here?) and she responding,

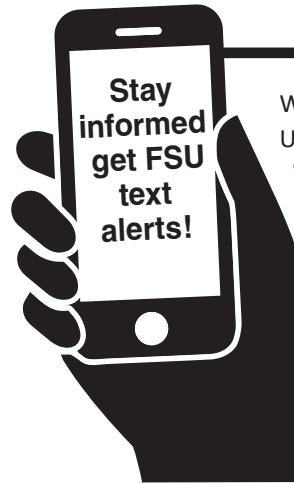
"Ah, Madam Etu, awa." (Ah, Madam Is Some, yes?)

So, to us, our names remained "Madam Nothing" and "Madam Something" for as long as my husband and I lived in Bougoumene. There "Goto" could superficially be applied to nearly every other woman in the village, including Lamina and Isa, the chief's wives, but never with a pejorative or demeaning intent. People in this village had everything they needed with no excess or waste, but there also was no want. Ejima was the one who initiated the comparison, but it was not said in a way that defined who we were. It was merely a statement of superficial observation. Yes, we had far more symbols of wealth in our small hut than Ejima ever could hope to own, but they were not things that defined us as people. They were merely crutches needed for survival until we learned how to adapt to an environment we were struggling to understand. In reality, our roles were reversed. Ejima was the one who knew how to make diamonds out of mud, while I was the one still grabbing at the equivalent of an oxygen-tank to breathe. Although this banter may have reflected some truth about our differing economies as well our own adaptive flaws, it also was uttered with warmth, humor, and bemusement at the simple things that tend to define a person, whether truly relevant or not. And neither Ejima nor I considered these titles relevant. We were equals laughing at a foolish world.





*Quilters sewing away!*



Would you like to receive a text if the University is closed or has a delay? Would you like to be immediately notified if there is an emergency on campus while you are here? Signing up is easy. Just text **"FSUAlert"** to **67283** or **226787**. It's just as easy to stop the messages at any time by texting **"STOP"** to **67283** or **226787**.

## For the Love of Ice Cream

BY NANCY FILLIP

We still had an hour to catch the main ferry that would take us home, across choppy seas. My kids wanted ice cream, I guess there was time; I placed the order, smiling, "five please."

We weren't out the door thirty seconds or less when my daughter's cone splattered the street. Tears pooled in her eyes; my heart broke in half; "Hey, no going down in defeat."

Despite sincere pleas, the clerk shook her head, said again, "It will cost you a dollar." I looked in my wallet, nothing was there, and that's when I started to holler.

"Honey, run to the car and look under the seat; I know there's money hidden there." When she returned, the look on her face let me know there was bad news to share.

"I'm sorry, Mom, so sorry, but there is a problem; the keys are still left on the seat. Not only that, the doors are all locked but I left everything nice and neat."

The ferry horn sounded, and away we all bounded to the parking lot just down the street. The kids screamed, "Mom, you're running too fast. We're wearing flip-flops on our feet."

We got there and saw the windows opened only a crack; I sighed thinking, just my luck. We will all miss the boat, have to wait till tomorrow, all because we needed a buck.

We need a plan now, oh no, what to do, when my eyes spied workers at the dock. Making a dash, bursting into the crowd, I frantically started to talk.

"Please, can you help me? Keys locked in the car; we all need to board the main ferry." They smiled, shook their heads, saying "Sorry, no English" but they were nice and so merry.

I thought I would scream, all because of ice cream, when the police showed up with a wire. He poked and he prodded while we all held our breath; I mean the situation was definitely dire.

Click went the lock, we all shouted for joy, piling into the car very fast. The cars at the ferry were now all secure and the horn tooted one final blast.

I honked my horn wildly, praying they'd wait, driving like Mario Andretti. We rounded the corner, flew on to the ramp, bags flying loose like confetti.

Barely on time, the boat pulled away; we laughed loud, hugging our knees. Problem resolved, on our way home, surging home across choppy seas.



*Margaret Hanley with some abstract pieces.*

Kids' dreams, blood's visions –  
Age now sings strange songs to me.  
Praise life, Praise life, Praise!  
—Harry Semerjian



*Beautifully Painted Cookies by Cyndi Dumais*

**From the Norman Rockwell Museum Trip**

*“Without thinking too much about it in specific terms, I was showing the America I knew and observed to others who might not have noticed.”*

*—Norman Rockwell*



**Learning about an American Icon**

BY MARIE CATON

The day greeted us with bright blue skies and dazzling color as we headed west towards Stockbridge. The first stop was lunch at the historic Red Lion Inn. The group enjoyed meals of hot pot roast or traditional turkey with all the fixings. We explored the Inn and visited their gift shop before boarding the bus for a jaunt over to the Norman Rockwell Museum. We began with an orientation lecture, where an expert gallery guide introduced us to the art and life of Norman Rockwell and the special exhibition, Woodstock to the Moon. Some of the group chose to watch videos that gave more insight into his life and art. There was time to explore the museum and visit Rockwell’s studio located on a picturesque hill behind the museum. The collection of every Post magazine cover that Rockwell illustrated was amazing to see en masse. This proved to be a wonderful trip with friends and learning how remarkable Norman Rockwell really was.



*Our dedicated harmonica students.*

**Aqua Fitness**

BY SHARON DONAHUE

Why would sixteen ALFA members jump in a cool pool? Two words: Amy LeBlanc. Amy has been teaching the Aqua Fitness program for several years. With lots of humor, she encourages everyone to participate in interval training—repeating every movement at four levels. Most exercises involve cardio moves to work the whole body as well as the heart and lungs. For added intensity, we have dumbbells to tone the muscles of the arms. She tells us we are her “Viking warriors” coming into the pool, especially when the weather turns from fall to winter.



**Stone Walls and Geology**

SALLY HENS

The Wachusett Meadow Wildlife Sanctuary with over 25 miles of stone fences was the perfect setting for this course. The last glacier, some 12-14,000 years ago, left behind the stones and boulders for the farmers, indentured servants, and itinerant craftsmen who built these walls from 1750-1850. Joe Choiniere taught us that walls provided boundary lines, contained animals, and provided an organized method to get stones out of the way. Today these walls provide beauty and a visual clue of historic glacier presence. They have the current functions of supporting lichen, moss, and fern growth. They provide spider and insect overwinter nooks and crannies, and nesting and roosting hides for birds. Even mammals use walls for shelter and travel highways, which provides prey for predators. At sanctuary sites, we examined double walls, single walls, and consumption walls. Joe provided geological maps to reveal the rock types for building there. True to his self as a teacher and naturalist, Joe answered questions that arose on field trips concerning vegetation and wildlife.



## The Intersection of Art and Science

BY SHARA OSGOOD

I really enjoyed this newly-offered class by Nancy Phillip. It was well structured, engaging, and accessible. The first week we were given an overview of the subject and there was an in-depth discussion on metallurgy and how artists originally were all about discovery. Did scientists learn from these artists? Our second week was learning about fractals and branching patterns, and how these patterns appear in nature. Nancy gave many visual examples and numerous references for future research. The next classes focused on pointillism. We each had an opportunity to create fractals and pointillism using different mediums. Most of the students were not artists or scientists, yet Nancy made the projects fun and welcoming to all. The last class showed how artists are working together with scientists on many innovations and collaborative projects. It left me wanting to do more research on the topic. This class was informative and well-put together with excellent power-point presentations and hands-on activities.

### Brain Teaser Answers (Page 5)

1. Because he cannot reach the buttons higher than five.
2. Well, the score before any football game is always zero to zero!

### Book and TED talk Suggestion from the Current Economic Issues Class

- Of the suggested reading list, I recommend *Economics The Uses's Guide* (2014) by Ha-Joon Chang.
- A humorous TED talk was used to illustrate the perception and consequences of inequality in the behavior of two capuchin monkeys (google "ted talks monkey cucumber".)
- NETFLIX suggestion from the class, *The Intersection of Art and Science*
- *Secrets of the Dead – Leonardo: The Man who Saved Science*

### Current Economic Issues

BY ROSS HUNTER

Professor Adem Elveren's course was both lively and timely because he chose topics that are very much at the center of our national and international news. The content was tailored for participants who did not have a background in economics; occasional videos were used to define economic concepts. Some topics covered included Trade War with China and The Economics of Military Spending. Professor Elveren was able to spark and facilitate discussion. One aim was to assess the impact of these issues on social welfare. As opposing points of view were expressed, he provided an academic perspective and avoided a contentious political atmosphere. 2019 was a significant year for Professor Elveren professionally and personally. He was promoted to Associate Professor, published two books and he became a United States citizen in April. Congratulations on these accomplishments!

## Food for Thought Lecture

BY GAIL HOAR

Ellis White Auditorium filled early waiting for Professor Ben Railton, known for his rapid-fire, thought-provoking lectures. He was scheduled to introduce his new book, *We the People: The 500 Year Battle Over Who is American*. He did not disappoint. The book is divided into eight case studies of groups of non-Anglo people who had once been considered "the other" in this country, who later gained acceptance into an inclusive melting pot. He limited his talk to three of these groups, delving into early inhabitants of the Americas and their interactions with Spanish conquistadors,

enslaved Afro-Americans, and the years of Japanese internment during World War II. Each group had initially been excluded and not considered Americans. But each group also later became included, integral part of our American heritage. He also took time to mention several of the individuals who helped bring acceptance and inclusion as Americans to their people, such as the legal challenges brought by Fred Korematsu and Mitsuye Endo during the 1940's. In addition, he touched on the long Muslim American history dating back as early as the Revolutionary War.

## Cell Culture

BY RONDA GOLDEN

Professor John Ryan's cell culture class was extremely interesting, very well presented, and included explanatory slides and additional readings. He began our course by explaining what a cell is and the different kinds of cells that exist. To make it even more interesting, he discussed parallels to astronauts in space with how cells function. We learned how the polio vaccine was developed and learned that Professor Ryan had met Dr. Salk. In addition, he taught us what cell cultures are, what they look like, how they are prepared, and what equipment is used. It is interesting to note that cultures are being used for artificial skin, vaccines, hormones, and drugs to aid our bodies to become healthy. Our thanks to John Ryan for a well-prepared course and meaningful insights into cells.



## HOP A BUS TO ALFA CLASSES

Concerns about parking or transportation shouldn't dissuade potential ALFA students from signing up for classes.

Seniors who live in Fitchburg can call the Fitchburg Senior Center at (978) 829-1790 to register for MART Transportation Services. After the Senior Center relays information to MART, you can call the MART to schedule transportation to and from your ALFA classes.

See the MART website [www.mrta.us/services/coa-service](http://www.mrta.us/services/coa-service) for information about service to communities beyond Fitchburg.

If you are driving, there is always ample, free parking at the Wallace Civic Center. The University provides free campus shuttles, serviced by MART. It is easy to use and gets you from your car to your destination without much walking. Two shuttles run on a continuous loop, which usually means there is one every 10 minutes.

## Indian Ocean Curry Cuisine

BY JOYCE HINCKLEY

Everybody eats but not everyone dines. Dining is when you get to savor meals because you understand the culture and connections that helped create them. It is understanding that ingredients and techniques travel and change and are claimed by many different people in many different places. It is knowing that sharing meals is a way to create and preserve community. ALFA's *Dining to Learn: Indian Ocean Curry Cuisines* went on a journey to discover how and why curry connects the food of East Africa, Malaysia, and South India. Everyone tried samosa, various flat breads, and dishes called curry. Conversations focused on what was ordered, what was liked or disliked, and what might be tried in the future. Favorite experiences



were shared such as the charm of a server at Fatima's Café in Worcester and the beautiful presentation of the dohsa at Udupi in Shrewsbury. After lunch we shopped and stocked up on ingredients at an Indian supermarket. This is a food class that embodies ALFA—a creation of a group who enhance mutual learning experiences. The real magic is what the students share with each other.

## When the West was Wild: American Western Movies

BY CATHERINE HUNTER

The Western was the most popular Hollywood genre from the early 20th century to the 1960s, and many classic Westerns promoted the myth of settlers taming the West. Ed Cronin began the course with the first Western ever, "The Great Train Robbery" followed by a silent movie filmed in New Jersey, and John Ford's first sound Western "Stagecoach" set in Monument Valley, Arizona. Subsequently, we viewed two outstanding classics "My Darling Clementine," and "High Noon" where the town Marshall (Gary Cooper) is torn between his sense of duty and love for his new bride (Grace Kelly's debut) when he must face a gang of killers alone. The film is appreciated today as an allegory about McCarthyism of the 1950s. Enthusiastic class discussion considered the development of complex themes, the artistic impact of black-and-white versus color, the use of sound effects and music, props as symbols, and cinematography. Participants were uniformly critical of the violence in Westerns of the 21st century.



## Chinese Brush Painting

BY NANCY FILLIP

The first thing we loved about Mei Leung was her humble excitement that so many people were interested in this course. With enthusiasm, authenticity and a truck-load of knowledge, Mei Leung opened up our world about a beautiful and ancient form of painting. We began painting strokes on Xuan paper with special brushes. Signatures on Chinese paintings are made with a special tool called a chop and Mei gave us the Chinese characters to create our own signature. Every class started with a warm-up session, followed by a demonstration. We had plenty of time to practice strokes that were light, heavy, fast, slow, wet and dry, yielding different results. Soon we were painting cats, flowers, birds and trees, all with one stroke at a time. The technique was hard but with Mei’s patience and smiling encouragement, we persevered. Thanks to Mei for such an inspiring class.

## Water: A Geologist Viewpoint

BY BETTY GELINAS

Given by Dr. Robert Champlin, we were enlightened as to the importance of water on our planet. Oceans contain the greatest amount of water while rivers contain the least. He points out that water is a universal solvent, a fact that makes it most critical to us on earth. We were shown a PBS video depicting how our climate is threatening to sink cities including New York, Miami, San Francisco, Tokyo, London, and Venice. Dr. Champlin’s wide experience exploring geomorphic features, coupled with his thorough understanding of the three agents of erosion, (water, wind, and glaciers), gave us an appreciation of the strategic importance of water on our planet. Coastal erosion, sea level rise, destruction of coral reefs, and viruses resulting from increasing rain put billions of people in danger. Class was very informative.



### DO YOU HAVE AN IDEA FOR A CLASS?

We welcome your suggestions for ways to make ALFA even more responsive to your interests. If you have ideas for a new course or special event—we want to hear them!

**WOULD YOU LIKE TO TEACH A CLASS?** Do you have a special interest or field of expertise? Would you like to share your knowledge with engaged lifelong learners?

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



## Arm Chair Service Projects

CLASS COLLABORATIVE

- Very enlightening and informative. A real treat. Thank you for all you do.
- These presentations were such a rich experience. The people presenting were so interesting and gave us a wonderful insight.
- I love these arm chair presentations. The folks presenting are so knowledgeable and passionate about what they do or did.
- What a nice change to hear of the “good” people are doing instead of the depressing things happening in the world.
- The woman, Krishnabai, what a fascinating concept she is involved in. Too bad the school is closing.
- All these presentations make me want to do “more” in the world.

## MEET YOUR EXECUTIVE BOARD

**PRESIDENT** ..... Joyce Ayadi Hinckley  
**VICE-PRESIDENT** ..... Nancy Y. Fillip  
**SECRETARY** ..... Joanne Huse  
**TREASURER** ..... Elaine Page

## Guided Meditation

LINDA KENNEDY

Honor yourself. You are responsible for your own happiness. Meditation lets you deal with your life. Guided meditation is a self-learning experience. Instructors Sushmita Basu and Arllen Acevedo began each class with a discussion on universal laws, thinking in the positive, loving yourself and living in the now. The last half hour of each class was in meditation, the highlight of my day. I felt renewed and energized for the rest of the day.



## Subconscious Painting

BY NANCY FILLIP

During this class, Arllen Acevedo told us to relax, let our minds go and just let the paint do the work. Almost meditatively, we added any kind of paint to wet paper and let it flow, allowing colors to burst forth and create an abstract design that could be interpreted any which way you want. Artists discussed what they were feeling when they painted when we shared our work. As Arllen said, “Let the magic happen.”

## GET INVOLVED IN LITERACY

Early literacy is the cornerstone of future success for children. The earlier we start reading to them, the more likely they are to be healthy, happy, and successful adults. And so several local communities have banded together to start an early literacy initiative—the only one like it in the country—that allows you to conveniently use your mobile phone to read “on the go” with children. It is called Footsteps 2 Brilliance.

The participating communities/schools are: Fitchburg, Leominster, Gardner, Lunenburg, Townsend, Ashby, Winchendon, Pepperell, Athol, Royalton, Ayer, Shirley, Clinton, and the Narragansett Public Schools.

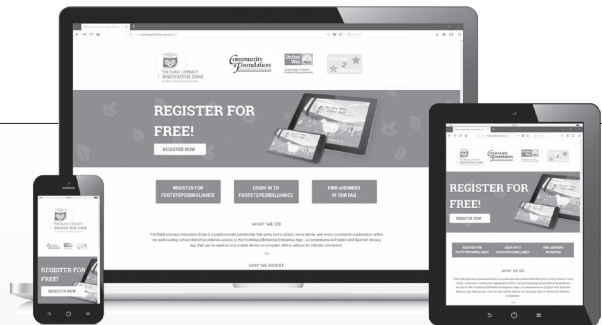
How can you help? Download the Footsteps 2 Brilliance app on your smart phone, tablet, or home computer by visiting [www.footsteps2brilliance.com/iz](http://www.footsteps2brilliance.com/iz). The app can also be downloaded in English or Spanish.



## Exploring Graphic Novels

LINDA KENNEDY

At first glance Exploring Graphic Novels brings forth the idea of kids and young adults reading the comic books of our youth. Not so. Dr. Katherine Covino-Poutasse delved into the genre with enthusiasm and encouragement to participate in all parts of discussion about the novels. The books selected ranged from two books located in the older part on the children’s room in the library, one from young adult area and two from adult section. The class discussions involved the visual appreciation of the art, evaluating the novel and the appropriateness of each novel to the audience. We talked about the bridge between the visual and the text and how it supported all readers. I have adopted a new respect for the graphic novel after taking this class.



Many of our ALFAs have grandchildren, nieces and nephews, young neighbors, and may even be full-time caregivers for young children. Research shows that as little as 15 minutes of daily exposure to reading can result in a significant improvement in the literacy of a young child.

Please pass this information along to anyone in your “circle of love” who might benefit from signing up for the program. Fitchburg State University is a proud partner for this important regional initiative, and I know that our ALFA community will do all that it can to support the effort.



## Plant-Based Vegan Cooking

MAXINE PINCOTT

Louisa Dell Amico promised to give us a class where we would learn to cook some delicious vegan food. She delivered. Each week, teams of students made various vegan dishes running the gamut from a delicious kale-potato soup to lasagna. Louisa also made a carrot cake with delicious icing. To enhance the entire experience, Louisa also brought in commercially prepared vegan food products such as tempeh bacon that can be found in local supermarkets. To make us familiar with this lifestyle, Louisa had various handouts, such as a “Guide to Vegan Living.” We learned that cleaning products with a bunny in parenthesis on the back means no animal testing. Louisa dispelled the myth that being vegan can be unhealthy and difficult. Making and tasting this style of cooking enriched my palate and the five weeks of learning just flew by.

## Woodwind Ensemble

BY STEVEN PINCOTT AND PAULA LURIA

What happens when five clarinetists and two flutists, most of whom haven’t played their instruments for years, get together? I’ll tell you. Many of us hadn’t played in a long time but thought it might be fun to relive something we had enjoyed earlier in life. Judging by how fast the time went by, we all really enjoyed it. The atmosphere was non-judgmental with the emphasis on helping each other bring back lost skills. Mistakes were made by all ..... so what! Nancy Phillip, our leader, was enthusiastic and encouraging and definitely inspired everyone to keep on playing. We began with some easy music and then moved forward with some classical pieces and had fun with some music from different movies. The more we practiced the better we got. It was a small but dedicated group and we appreciated Nancy trying to pull this all together.

## America in the Roaring Twenties

BY LINDA KENNEDY

Dr. Katherine Jewell presented an overall view of the “Roaring Twenties” in America about information, immigration, politics, culture, social life, and business. From philandering Warren Harding to silent Cal Coolidge, the discussion revolved around changes occurring in this decade. Entertainment practices were changing with the introduction of vaudeville, to silent movies and talkies. The country was changing from a production-based economy to a consumer-based economy. The assembly line helped lower costs making goods more accessible to the general population. Electricity was now more available to the general public. The focus on advertising went from describing the product to showing the benefits to the individual. The “Roaring Twenties” was a time of great change in American society.



## Drawing

BARBARA EISENZOPF

I have enjoyed taking Carolyn Todd’s drawing class and learning so many new techniques. Carolyn provides handouts which she uses to demonstrate essential drawing methods laced with art history information. Upon arriving at class, a still life display is set up for the class to practice the drawing lesson for that day. We have homework each week and the class critiques all our drawings, which I found to be very helpful. The Gray Studio adjacent to the Fitchburg Art Museum is the perfect place to conduct art class with skylight windows, plenty of space, and easy access to the building. In addition to learning new skills, I made new friends and had three hours each week of creative fun!

### ALFA—What’s It All About?

Adult Learning in the Fitchburg Area (ALFA) 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 90 minutes one day a week for 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 FSU, 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. Enrollments in the two spring sessions totaled more than 600, and all seats on ALFA day trips were filled. A course brochure on winter-spring courses and registration will be available soon. For other information, or to be added to ALFA’s mailing list, contact the ALFA office in Fitchburg State’s McKay Campus Building C, (978) 665-3706.

### ALFA WEATHER POLICY

When Fitchburg State University cancels classes or has a delayed opening, no ALFA classes will be held that day. The policy applies to all ALFA classes, both on the Fitchburg State campus and at satellite locations such as the Fitchburg Art Museum and Wachusett Meadow Wildlife Sanctuary in Princeton.

### SPRING CALENDAR

ALFA classes in the Spring of 2020 run from Jan. 27 through May 1. In the calendar below, Session 1 class dates are in YELLOW blocks, Session 2 dates in GREEN. Snow Days in Pink, Health Fair in Purple

	SU	M	TU	W	TH	F	SA
<b>JAN</b>	26	27	28	29	30	31	1
<b>FEB</b>	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
<b>MARCH</b>	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	31	1	2	3	4
<b>APRIL</b>	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
<b>MAY</b>	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
	10	11	12	13	14	15	16