

LIFELONG LEARNING INSTITUTE VASSAR COLLEGE

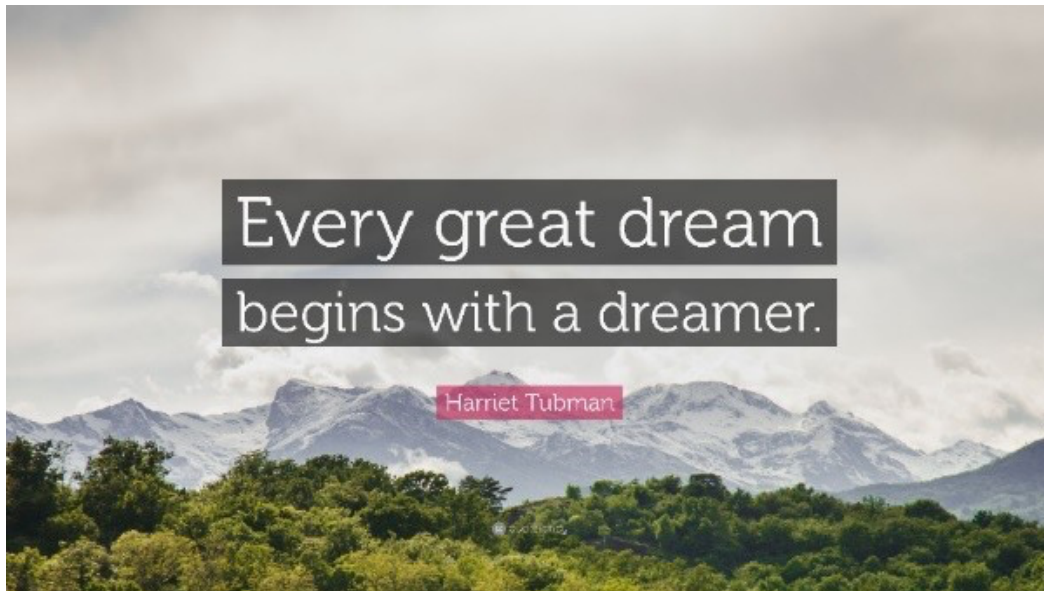


Newsletter
Issue 8 July 2022

VASSAR COLLEGE LIFELONG LEARNING INSTITUTE

Newsletter Issue 8, July 2022

Jo Hausam, editor



--Harriet Tubman

Mihai Grunfeld was a dreamer with a dream.

Eight years ago he had an idea: create a learning institute at Vassar College for those 55 years and older. He recruited and collaborated with colleagues. Voila! The Lifelong Learning Institute at Vassar College now celebrates its **5th anniversary!**

Anniversary milestones prompt reflections. This issue of the VC LLI newsletter looks back on the organization's early years, with reminiscences from pioneer members. It celebrates all that we are doing now, with praise and thanks from students. And it looks forward. As the roster of volunteer-leaders evolves, membership grows, course subjects expand, and teaching methods (in-person and virtual) are revised, we all face change.

Whether at our organization's local level or on a world-wide climate-crisis level, it might be helpful to consider what we've learned from Darwinism:

*It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent,
but the one most responsive to change.*

-- Leon C. Megginson, in an article in the *Southwestern Social Science Quarterly* (1963),
clarifying his perspective on Darwinism.
<https://quoteinvestigator.com/tag/leon-c-megginson/>

Reflections from Founder and Chair Mihai Grunfeld on the 5th Anniversary of Vassar College Lifelong Learning Institute

The Vassar College Lifelong Learning Institute started in the spring of 2018, five years ago, with 130 members, offering 20 courses. We were proud and scared to have created this new adult learning institute. Will it be successful? Will it last? Will it be good? Yes, yes, and yes. We are five years down the road, larger, better, having survived two years on Zoom, and now happily looking forward to returning to our classes in the fall. On campus! Most of the classes will be in person, and some on Zoom. We have learned from the last two years. Who would have thought that some people would want to continue on Zoom?

These five years people often compared us to Bard LLI or Marist CLS, pointing out the direction to grow. “We are still new,” I would answer. “We just started. They have fifteen, twenty years ahead of us.” Well, we have reached our first important milestone. Carlie was replaced by Paul and Sudhir, Lucy was replaced by Rose and then by Sybil, Joanne was replaced by Maribeth. Denise moved on and Larry will soon find a replacement. I was joined by Neila Radin as Vice-Chair and hopefully, I will also move on soon. All the executive team is moving on. We still don’t have enough volunteers, so if you read these line, please know that we really, really need you. And changes are happening. We are growing. And volunteers will come.

Who would believe that five years would go by so fast? It was only yesterday that I proposed an LLI to the Dean of the Faculty, not entirely sure of the list of everything we needed to figure out, like finding presenters, students, classrooms, an office, learning to do registration, set up a budget, a computer program, support our presenters technically, create a hospitality room, a website, a catalog, a newsletter, hire an Administrative Assistant, hire students to support us, work with Vassar Security to organize the general parking and shuttle, organize our end of the year cocktail party, etc., etc..

Five years is a real milestone. To be happy and celebrate. We will celebrate. In person. We are a community that lasted and, by now, I am sure will go on. I would like to raise a glass of champagne to us all.

L’chaim.

MEMORIES OF THE EARLY DAYS OF VCLLI

From **Larry Miller**

When Nancy and I signed up for the initial semester of Vassar LLI, I didn't think about volunteering because I didn't know it was a volunteer organization. But one of the existing Executive Committee members saw my name and suggested that I would make a good Treasurer. Mihai then contacted me, described the job and invited me in for an interview. After the interview with Mihai and Lucy Johnson, I said Yes.

As Treasurer, I needed to learn WORKDAY (the accounting system Vassar uses), who the contacts were in the Accounting Dept. I needed to know and how to produce the required reports. After a few lessons with the WORKDAY support group, I was off and running. I also had to know how to sign up the vendors that we use for some activities and how to submit their invoices to Accounting for reimbursement.

In the early days, the Executive Committee was just 5 people and would meet in empty classrooms in Blodgett Hall. Then later we would meet in some homes of Executive Committee members. Then in 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic arrived, and we had to go to Zoom for meetings.

It has been a wonderful 5 years and I have gotten to work with some amazing Vassar LLI pioneers over those 5 years. I also have gotten to attend many wonderful courses with great presenters as a member of Vassar LLI.

From **Betty Olsen**

I was excited to get in on the ground floor, as I knew that Marist CLS had had a long waiting list for years, and, as a Vassar graduate, I was glad to see my school finally launching a similar program.

I met with Mihai and indicated my interest in serving on the curriculum committee. While I did join that committee and am still serving on it, Mihai drafted me for the bylaws committee, which turned out to be just him and me. My strength is in editing/proofreading. I also have been involved in reaching out to potential presenters and in tabulating and discussing the results of participants' course evaluations.

STUDENT COMMENTARY

Michaela Pohl's Talk: "Putin's War in Ukraine"

by Sarah Kennedy

On May, 4, 2022, we returned to Blodgett Hall on the Vassar campus for our first in-person event since we began remote learning in 2020. We invited members of the Marist College Center for Lifetime Learning, and presented the event simultaneously in a webinar. There were approximately 20-25 people who attended in person, and 80 who watched the webinar.

Professor Michaela Pohl's talk was entitled "Putin's War in Ukraine". Professor Pohl is an Associate Professor of History and has been at Vassar since 1999. She recently taught a course called "Russia, Ukraine, and the Steppe". She is currently working on a graphic memoir entitled *The Accusation: A German Childhood*.



Michaela shared that she had spent time researching in Russia and Chechnya, but stopped going there when two women she knew personally were killed by assassins. One was a famous journalist, the other a human rights activist.

Pohl's deep knowledge about Putin's rise to power and past aggression in the region came through clearly during her talk. In addition to speaking to Putin's narcissistic tendencies, and past patterns of behavior, she also provided a long historical view on conflicts in the region, ethnic struggles, and border changes. She assessed the current situation in Ukraine, and shared her perspective on how unlikely it is that Putin will work to find a peaceful resolution to this war.

She did not sugarcoat a thing. Her presentation shed light on the historic roots of this unfolding tragedy, and was helpful to those of us trying to understand this complex situation.

Innovations in Opera, Past and Present

by **Marilyn Price**

I was so engaged and stimulated by the course Chuck Mishan gave on **Opera as Politics**. I heard and saw new and innovative approaches in the world of current opera, as well as some earlier approaches, especially by black composers. I learned so much about how some composers treat our own time in opera, with themes which are important to us now. I was exposed to the music and ideas of men and women with whom I was totally unfamiliar, and the whole experience gave me more insight into the lives and struggles of people whose sexual identity may differ from that of the main stream. I am grateful for this enriching experience.

Good History, Living History

by **Millicent Cox**

I have been a member of LLI since the beginning!! I will continue too! Now the course I appreciated the most was **When Women Won the Vote** because it connected us, ie., Vassar, our own campus, to the National Women's Movement, illustrating the hard work and political timing in changing both nation and international attitudes toward women and the vote! The 21st Century is here and the intelligent exchange among adults is just outstanding. This course should continue to be offered. All my courses were excellent. Thank you!!

Smoke and Mirrors

by **Maureen Rant**

Having just completed the science sampler course, I have a new appreciation for how truly amazing science can be. At times it is hard to tell the difference between science and science fiction. Take the James Webb Space Telescope, for example. This powerful telescope will allow us to view objects so far away that by the time the images reach us, the stars and galaxies we are viewing may not even exist. In effect, we will see the past. We will see things as they were, not as they are. I do not pretend to understand how all

this works, but I do know that the telescope consists of many hexagonal mirrors (and some other stuff, but the mirrors are most important).

I want one of those James Webb Telescope mirrors for my bathroom. I want it to be user friendly; I want it to be kind; I want it to show me how I looked a long time ago. In short, I want it to lie to me. Until I am able to get such a mirror, I may have to improvise. I got the idea from the acknowledgement of misrepresentation on my car's side view mirror: "Objects in mirror are closer than they appear." My bathroom mirror now reads: "Faces in mirror are younger and better looking than they appear."

A Look at Great Art / A Chance to Practice Spanish

by **Molly Shanley**

The spring of 2022 welcomed the first course offering in a language other than English, "El Muralismo Mexicano," taught by Mihai Grunfeld. It was Mihai's vision and organizational work that led to the establishment of the Lifelong Learning Institute, and his innovative spirit brought this course, taught in Spanish, to LLI students.

On each of four Fridays class members examined one of Mexico's great muralists of the 20th century: Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and José Orozco, concluding with a session on the continuation of the muralist tradition in the present day. Mihai created a website with excellent images of the works we examined along with abundant background information.

It was a pleasure to have this opportunity to look at great art, learn from Mihai's store of knowledge, and practice Spanish all at the same time. I imagine that courses in other languages would find eager students; as for me, I would eagerly enroll in a continuation of this deeply interesting and engaging course or in another course in Spanish.

Thank You to All

by **Rose Benvenuto**

All the courses I have attended were informative, instructors were well prepared, and my knowledge has been increased in those areas.

Thank you to all who worked so diligently to make learning easier.

The pandemic could not deter our desire to become better educated.

Pickleball Fun

Photo by Vicky Weinblatt



Something for Everyone

by Betsy Kincaide

How is it possible for anyone not to want to appreciate and enjoy the wonderful variety of classes offered! There's something for everyone.

Hope for In-Person Classes

by Pam VanDeWater

I hope there will be in person classes in the fall. I've kept up my membership, but do not like zooming.

COMMITTEE CHAIR CHANGES



Joanne Valeo has worn many hats in her service to LLI. For five years she worked tirelessly and patiently as Secretary of the Executive Committee. Besides taking notes at meetings, she handled a myriad of tasks, like helping Paul Stoddard with orientation, monitoring enrollment, responding to members' questions, setting up Zoom links, entering data onto spreadsheets, ETC! She was also Coordinator of Class Managers until spring 2022.

She'll be stepping down as Secretary, but will remain on-board as **Information Coordinator**, LLI's *point person*, someone who will address members' questions and concerns via email.

Many, many thanks to Joanne for her important role in getting VC LLI off to a good start and keeping it running!

Denise LaForge, our Administrative Assistant, has left us. When Mihai announced her departure, he wrote, "She was an excellent worker, so we will miss her." Denise, we greatly appreciate your years with LLI and we wish you well in your new endeavors.

A search is underway for her replacement.



Neila Radin is our new **Vice Chair**, who will assist Mihai in overseeing the program.

Neila has been a member of LLI since its inception. She enjoys learning about new things, and has found the LLI classes to be very rewarding, interesting and fun.

She and her husband split their time between their apartment in New York and weekend home in Clinton Corners (although, she was very grateful to have been able to spend all of 2021 and part of 2022 hiding from Covid full time in Clinton Corners).

Neila retired from JPMorgan Chase in 2019, where she was Associate General Counsel and General Counsel for Corporate Law. She was the company's lead internal lawyer for all merger and acquisition activity (starting with the merger of Manufacturers Hanover and Chemical Bank--do you remember them??---to, and including, the last major merger of JP MorganChase and BankOne). In addition, as the most senior lawyer responsible for all of the firm's securities and corporate activities, she was the legal advisor to the firm's Chief Financial Officer and Chief Operating Officer and responsible for all of the company's SEC filings, dealings with securities regulators, advising on corporate governance issues, and overseeing its capital raising activities. Currently, she is a director of Salisbury Bancorp, a publicly-traded banking organization with branches in Connecticut, New York and Massachusetts.

As the new Vice Chair of Vassar LLI, she is looking forward to helping Mihai and the rest of the Executive Committee and General Council in overseeing the program. LLI could not operate without all the hard work and efforts of its volunteers, and one of her responsibilities will be to help make the jobs of volunteers easier, and find ways to encourage their participation.

When not working on LLI matters, Neila also keeps busy with board work for Workforce Professionals Training Institute, a New York non-profit whose mission is to create a more employable workforce for the economy of the future. **And**, she plays with her two grandchildren.



Maribeth King transitions from Class Manager Coordinator to **Recording Secretary**.

Here she tells us about her life and LLI involvement.

As I prepared for retirement, I was interested in meeting new people and expanding life experiences. I can't remember exactly how I happened upon Vassar's LLI but I joined as my retirement date approached. The first semester I was still working which presented a number of challenges, after that it was clear sailing. I served as a Class Manager which prompted further engagement in the LLI program. Reaching out to Joanne Valeo, she offered me the opportunity to assist her with coordinating the Class Managers. The first semester we had 54 classes! I was able to utilize the skill set from my professional life and this served as a great transition from work life to retirement life. I will always be grateful to Joanne for her guidance, encouragement and delightful manner as she "taught me the ropes". Eighteen months later, I have just now assumed her role of Recording Secretary, again with Joanne as my shepherd.

From beekeeping to gardening to reviewing legal cases the classes have been varied but all interesting and informative with outstanding and accomplished presenters. Again with Joanne's encouragement, I developed a 4 week course on healthcare and dipped my toe in the presenter's ring this past semester. The course was well received with thoughtful discussion that always took us over the allotted time - which I took as a positive indicator of success. Perhaps future courses are in the "cooker".

Originally from Michigan, my husband, Dan and I, moved to Highland Mills in 1989 (near Woodbury Commons) after a brief stint in Brooklyn. There we raised our 4 children all of whom are now gainfully employed - thank God! I have been a registered nurse for 46 years, the past 32 years of which I was a nursing administrator at the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center - a tremendous institution for which I am so honored to have served for so long. It is a special place where no one wants to be, we help each patient and their loved ones along their journey wherever that may lead.

We moved to Milton, NY as our retirement date approached, finding an absolutely stunning home on three acres overlooking the Hudson River. We felt like we hit the jackpot and indeed we did! We are so fortunate to have been embraced by a warm and

welcoming community. I now serve as a Trustee of the Sarah Hull Hallock Library and am an active member of the Marlborough Democratic Committee. It's all just enough to keep me mentally stimulated and engaged - learning all manner of new things completely unrelated to my previous experiences in healthcare.

Some years ago, several of my staff taught me to knit.....I took to it like a fish to water. My knitting buddy classifies me as an intermediate beginner - still haven't made a sweater yet but have recently mastered brioche knitting. We go two or three times/year on a knitting trip which has taken us to Texas, Vermont, New Hampshire and a four day knitting sail along the coast of Maine. Now I am lucky to live near Rhinebeck for the annual Sheep and Wool Festival held each October. With the warm weather, my attention falls to gardening - flowers not vegetables. It's been a lot of hard work to wrestle some of the beds free of weeds but it is coming along. I've attached a few pictures of the handiwork.



Columbine



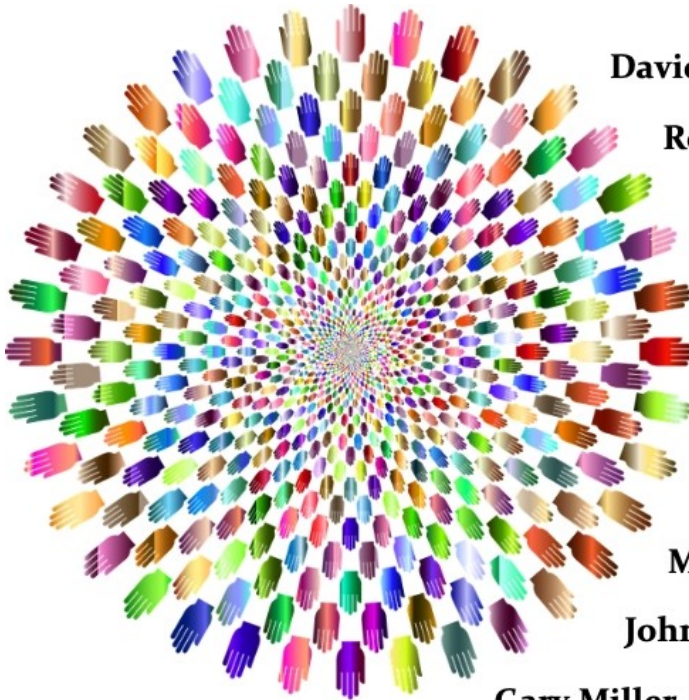
Back Garden

I have been an avid reader for my whole life with a predilection for historical novels and mysteries. As one ages, body maintenance becomes a priority, so I am now integrating meditation and yoga into my daily activities-- retirement affords the time to do this.

It's a full life and I am a bit surprised that I really don't miss my work life, the people definitely, but no longer have the hours-long commutes, worries, pressures and deadlines. I can truly say that Vassar's LLI has been a godsend. It provides a venue to contribute, engage, learn, and grow! What could be better!

PRESENTERS - SPRING 2022

Thanks to our presenters for volunteering and giving our organization the most precious thing you will ever own - your time and talent.



David Bloom

Rob Cohen

Dave Conover

Sybil DelGaudio

Anita Fina Kiewra

Gail Goodman|

Mihai Grunfeld

Maribeth King

John McGiff

Gary Miller

Chuck

Denise Mru:W,

Sandra

Marilyn Price

Arnold

Ethel Sheffer

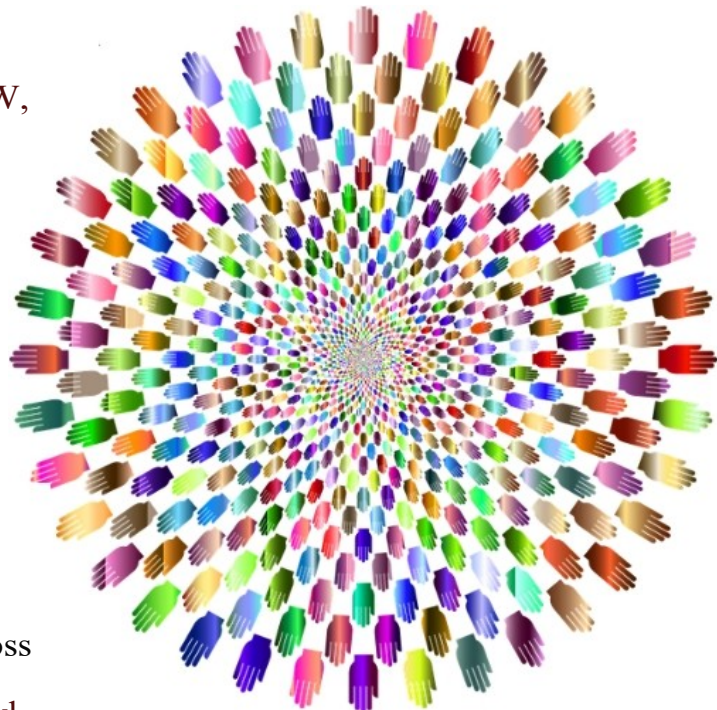
Mickey

Robert Stevens

Vicky

MJ Wyatt-Ross

Ross Tumwl



Marilyn Price – Artist & Presenter Non-pareil

In May, when I contacted Marilyn Price for an interview, she had just completed teaching *Pioneers in Abstraction* for Vassar LLI, but was still teaching an in-person class, *Drawing from Observation*, at Marist CLS (Center for Lifetime Study) until the end of month. Although she'd been involved in the Marist program for many years, she immediately joined the Vassar program at its inception.



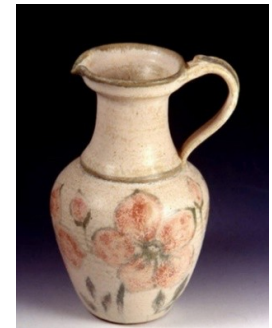
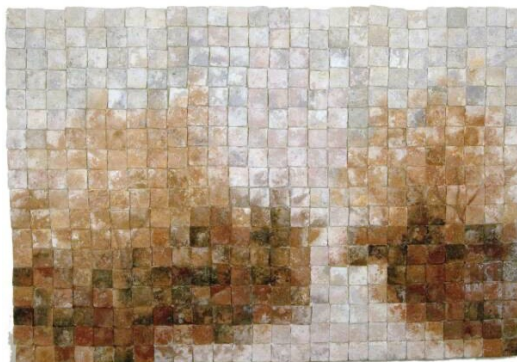
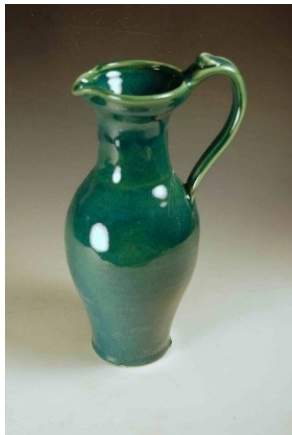
When not teaching, Marilyn creates art in her studio in Lagrangeville. After many years as an arts administrator and a painter in New York City, she now focuses on ceramics.

In her work she tries to blur the distinction between painting and ceramics. On her website (<https://www.marilynpriceceramics.com>) she writes: “Frequently in my stoneware landscapes, I conceive of the clay slabs as a canvas. I believe I bring a painter’s eye to my work, thus blending the two disciplines.”

Many aspects of working in clay intrigue me, especially those dealing with form, color and texture. I try new shapes and finishes in pieces which are functional and hopefully esthetically pleasing as well. My work on the potter's wheel is always a pleasure for me.”

She says she has been inspired by the natural beauty of the Hudson Valley, where she has lived since 1994.

Here are some examples of Marilyn's creations.



Some of her wall art pieces are made by pressing damp tiles into powdered colored porcelain, fired to stoneware, and then arranged into compositions.

I was a student in Marilyn's *Pioneers in Abstraction* class this past spring. It is pure joy to learn from her. Her research is extensive. Her own excitement is contagious. She, herself, kept exclaiming, "I have learned so much!" And we did too!

[One local fact gleaned from the class: **Did you know** that the famous architect and furniture designer, Marcel Breuer, who championed modernism in the U.S., designed the Ferry House on the Vassar Campus, as well as a home in the Town of Poughkeepsie, where

our fellow LLI students, Arthur and Margery Groton, lived (“curated” according to Arthur) for many years. It is listed on the National Historical Register.]

CLASS MANAGERS -- Spring 2022

*Volunteers don't get paid,
not because they're worthless, but because they're priceless.*

--Sherry Anderson

Thanks to our volunteer Class Managers who

Connect with the presenters, **Contact** students, & **Coordinate** procedures.

We thank you with a rainbow of smiles.



Katy Anson David Bloom

Linda Bouchey Valerie Carlisle

Theresa Catapane Anita Jones Kathleen Crampton

Rosealice D'Avanzo Bill Davies Judy Elkin

Margery Groton Mihai Grunfeld Laurie Hedlund

Linda Heitmann Barbara Horgan Muriel Horowitz

Lucy Johnson Krishna Kancherla Maribeth King Ed Kinkade

Regina Klein Patti Nadel James O'Brien Merrilee Osterhoudt

Thomas Tiliouras Marian Pompa Rachel Reisman Judy Roenick Tim Ryan

Celia Serotsky Johanna Tomik Johnna Touma Patricia Wineapple



LOOKING FORWARD

Virtual Art Show...

Can you lend a hand?

by **Rob Cohen**

This is a call to action for LLI members. We all look forward to the sense of community that the Vassar LLI program provides and are bouncing back from COVID and evolving as a community to be more resilient. We've managed to resume most LLI activities and to preserve the safe, friendly, and supportive environment that is Vassar LLI.

Something many of us miss is the ability to share and enjoy works of art created by fellow members. Before diving into details about this call to action, I'd like to share how I became involved and **why I value the Vassar LLI program.**

In 2017, a fellow beekeeper and friend, Jim O'Brien, introduced me to Vassar LLI. Jim invited me to help him teach a course about beekeeping. I was hesitant at first, but decided to give it a try, because it seemed logical to share our knowledge of beekeeping with those interested in bees.

During my first couple VLLI classes, I met a few people and began to see the VLLI program from a different perspective. Participants share common academic curiosity, but in addition, LLI offers a sense of community that is becoming rare these days. I value the VLLI community as much as I enjoy the classes and continue to participate both as a student and an instructor.

Fast forward to 2021, Mihai Grunfeld asked if I would consider helping to create a Virtual Art Show because COVID was making it difficult to host in person events. I attended a few committee meetings but we did not come up with a workable plan for collecting, curating, and publishing the artwork in an attractive easy to access virtual format. The discussion of the VLLI Art Show helped me see the merit of using the creativity of VLLI participants to strengthen the fabric of our community making us more resilient to the COVID challenge and other challenges. Being an inclusive community that can use technology effectively provides more opportunities for social interaction in addition to the face-to-face time we enjoy.

Unfortunately we do not have a solution (YET), but I still feel the idea of a Virtual Art Show has merit and I'm asking for your help in these areas :

1. Artists - Willing to share photos of your work.
2. Any LLI Member -
 1. If you enjoy working with digital photos we could use a couple volunteers to work with photos (submitted by members) to curate them and prepare them for display.
 2. If you enjoy writing and have a knack for policy definition we could use a hand writing a description of the Art Show and explaining the submission process and any rules for submissions.
 3. If you enjoy tinkering with technology we could use a hand evaluating options for evolving the Art Show into a program that would be easily maintained by volunteers and easy to access.

If you see yourself a good fit for any of the above activities please email me at (rob.cohen@gmail.com) and I'll loop you into the process in whatever capacity that works for you.

I am thankful to past and present Vassar LLI leadership and its many volunteers for the remarkable program and community that we share.

For a complete list of committees and volunteer opportunities, see our website <https://pages.vassar.edu/lifelonglearning>.

Click on [Volunteer](#).

Mark Your Calendars



July 7-18	Re-registration of current members
July 23-Aug 5	New members purchase membership
Aug 29-Sept 9	Registration for classes
September 16	Orientation for presenters, class managers, members
September 20	First day of Tuesday Zoom classes
September 23	First day of Friday in-person classes
September 20-29	Add/Drop classes
September 30	General Membership Meeting and Welcome Back Party (time & place TBA)
November 11	Last Day of classes

Upcoming Courses



As of this printing, specific courses for Fall 2022 have not yet been approved, thus there is no sneak preview in this issue. No doubt they will continue to be broad in subject matter, like the Library of Congress catalog. (Remember the old card catalog! All those drawers—all those cards!) As Betsy Kincaide wrote: “There is something for everyone!”



Thanks to ALL who contributed to the newsletter.

Special thanks to **Marty Zlotkin** for the cover and layout design;
to **Sudhir Desai**, who faithfully sends out my requests;
and to **Mihai Grunfeld** for his steadfast encouragement.

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