OLLI’s volunteer instructors offer so many engaging, interesting, and sought-after courses. That’s the good news, and it’s really good news. The not-so-good news is that those courses sometimes end up with waiting lists. That can be discouraging for our members, but I’m here with some encouraging words and helpful hints.

1. First of all, if the class you want is full, get on the waiting list. It doesn’t cost a dime, and it helps us know how many are interested in the course.

2. Choose a backup class. If there’s something else you might be interested in, sign up. If we can offer you a seat in your first-choice class, we can just switch you. Easy peasy.

3. Wait for the drops. Each registration day begins at 8 a.m. Every time, we receive the first course drop request by 8:20 a.m. Drops continue through the second week of class, and as soon as we have a drop, we call the next person on the waiting list.

4. The next thing that happens is that Alex Fagan (Program Coordinator for Curriculum) and I look at full classes and determine whether we can swap rooms to allow more people to attend. We also call instructors to see if they would consider admitting more people to their classes. Sometimes this works out, and sometimes it does not. We don’t always have larger rooms available, and sometimes instructors want to keep courses a certain size based on their teaching plans. But, we often can let in at least a few more people.

5. Sometimes, instructors decide to offer a second section of a full course. This happened with three different courses for our spring term, and we are very grateful to those instructors who volunteered to teach an additional section.

6. Sadly, sometimes you never make it off the waiting list. We encourage instructors to repeat courses when possible so that more people can enjoy them in a different OLLI term.

Of course, it’s better if we never reach waiting lists in the first place. Alex is working with the Curriculum Committee chairs to set targets for the number of classes we offer in each subject area. These targets are based on previous demand, including waiting lists. We are also examining under-utilized space and time in our building and hope to offer more courses as a result.

Is the system perfect? Of course not. But, I hope this helps you see that the staff and volunteer leaders are committed to getting as many people into the courses they want as possible.

I’m always happy to hear your ideas or concerns about waiting lists, or anything else. Come by to see me!
“Celebrate Your State Potluck Food Swap” is the best OLLI social event ever!

By Anne Doyle

Once upon a time, an OLLI instructor asked a group of a few hundred students, how many were from SC upstate. Only a few of us raised our hands.

Thus, the kernel of an idea was born: WHAT IF all those people from all those other places brought a favorite regional dish to a potluck to share?

The Social Committee members bought into the idea and offered even more ideas. Heidi found some really cool USA/state-themed napkins online; we decided to make identifying tent cards for the state, chef, and dish names; and OLLI’s resident band, LAST CALL, agreed to play background music! We used red and blue tablecloths over white ones and scattered a few themed decorations around.

The dishes included everything from Pierogis to Picadillo, from Boston Cream Pie and Key Lime Pie and New York Cheesecake to Boiled Peanuts! There was a ton of food and lots and lots of people. They all encouraged us to do this again next year, saying “Best event the social committee has ever offered!"

Nancy Kennedy even decided to share the idea when she attends the National OLLI Conference. The other OLLIs look for successful event ideas that can be offered anywhere with any size OLLI group.

Everything was enjoyed and shared with much love and enthusiasm. Everyone left with a full tummy - actually, some tummies were over-stuffed.

It was a marvelous social and culinary event.

Many thanks to Anne Doyle for developing this 1st ever potluck swap for OLLI. Thanks to Alax Fagan for taking the photos.

There were so many delicious dishes to choose from.
I was never a big Bob Dylan fan. I just never took the time to listen to the words of his songs.

That changed overnight after Elizabeth and I saw “Girl from the North Country” at the Peace Center. The play features many of Dylan’s compositions. Some, such as “Hurricane” and “Like a Rolling Stone,” will lift an audience from their seats. Those and others become a moving and tragic portrait of America’s trial by fire: The Great Depression.

In this production, a community of disparate people are all living on the precipice of despair, as crises of racial and social injustice, mental illness, and financial failure engulf them. Most can’t get work in the 1934 town of Duluth, Minnesota. The gathering place is a boarding house where the owner fails to ward off foreclosure by a bank.

On the day we saw the play, I talked to an acquaintance who served as a poll worker in the state’s presidential primary. He said he helped 15 people who could not read or write to vote. (The election commission provides headsets to help non-readers navigate the ballot.)

That we have that many illiterate people living today shocked me. They may have been survivors of a generation who raised their families on textile mill wages. They were representative of people who faced challenges daily brought on by poverty and society’s failure to lift all our fellow citizens out of illiteracy and poverty.

The play, Dylan’s songs, and the story about people who can’t read weigh on me as I recall my own family’s stories.

Both my grandfathers were tenant farmers who were given a hand up by Roosevelt-era programs to turn those families into landowners. One of my grandmothers worked in cotton mills for most of her adult life. Earlier generations left the land to take jobs in cotton mills which were springing up across South Carolina in the late 19th century.

Greenville’s prosperity is driven by the generation of farmers and their families who moved into the textile mill villages and made the industrial revolution possible here. They endured economic depression, wars, and low wages at the bottom of the economic ladder. The price of tickets for our seats at the Peace Center would have equaled months of income for my grandparents. But they endured the rigors to ensure our collective future. They taught us to value education, and gave our generation a hand up to well-paying jobs and a comfortable retirement.

I could not help but think of those people who made my life and success possible as I listened to Bob Dylan’s poetic lyrics.

Thank you Jim for this heart-felt and thought-provoking article.
Caroline Jane Davis, a visiting assistant professor in Furman’s Theatre Arts Department, shed some light on that question for me and other lucky OLLI members. This was during the “New Play Development” course last fall. After receiving the OLLI Faculty Enrichment Award for her work with Furman undergraduate students, Ms. Davis decided “to bring some of that work back to the folks who helped make it happen.”

Ms. Davis' initial goal for the course was to provide a taste of what’s involved in developing an original play. However, she said she had to “pivot” when she learned that many of us already had scripts in development.

She pivoted beautifully, providing professional quality resources for script development and publication. In addition, she created a safe space in which we read aloud one another’s works and gave and received feedback. As my classmate Gayle Brown put it, Ms. Davis “made us feel she was in partnership with us.” Jay Roberts also appreciated being “taken seriously.”

Caroline Kpaduwa used course feedback to refine her one-woman show. Bill Burns was inspired to complete two new plays, which he has begun to submit for publication. I have resumed work on a script I started 30 years ago. Fred Mertz has applied the feedback technique we learned to his work with fellow musicians.

Ms. Davis hopes to teach this course at OLLI again but will extend it from a four-week to an eight-week course. None of us were ready for our course to end!

Thank you Kerry for this insight into Caroline Davis’ class. Students were engaged and inspired.
Rocket Boys by Homer Hickam is the book club choice this year at Furman University’s OLLI. It’s also an excellent movie, October Sky.

My wife insisted that I read the book cover-to-cover, which I did. Initially, I thought I was reading a novel and not the life of Homer Hickam, the author. As I got into it, I became more fascinated. Why?

I was 15 when Sputnik launched on October 4, 1957. Hickam’s recollections about growing up in a small town in the ‘50s mirror my own. As a sophomore at a small farm-town high school in SW Michigan, I started a rocket group with four buddies.

We had "access" to a fiberglass plant that made tubing and to my Dad's construction company shop. We made nose cones on the lathe and carefully crafted fiberglass fins. We built a "block-house" on an old trailer to take to our remote launch site on state forest land in the county.

We poured a cement launch pad on forest land. Unfortunately, my older brother, the state park manager, found it. He left a tightly worded “Remove and Desist" note. About 30 years later, I told him who had done it. We both had a great laugh!

Our chemistry teacher told us about potassium nitrate, sulfur, and charcoal (i.e., gunpowder). Because we bought it in large quantities (10# at a time), we had to go to all three of the pharmacies in the county to get enough of each chemical. “You boys aren't making gunpowder, are you?” “No sir, rocket fuel!"

So, a large part of my misspent youth in the ‘50s was trying to advance rocketry to catch the Russians in the space race. We didn't win any prizes or set any altitude records. No, the whole town never showed up to watch a launch ... certainly no girls! None of us became rocket scientists.

I don't know what my dad did with the trailer. I decided to get a B.S. degree in physics & math, simply as a result of Sputnik.

Michigan Amateur Rocket Society (MARS)

Thank you Doug for this timely story and for sharing a part of your youth with OLLI readers!

Ah, the 1950s. It seems like another century!
Recently Jo Vargo joined our staff as the new custodian at the Herring Center.

Jo grew up in a small town in Pennsylvania. She came to Greenville in the 80s as a student at Bob Jones University and never left this area.

She is married and has two grown children. In July she and her husband will celebrate 25 years of marriage.

Jo was a preschool teacher for twelve years and still teaches Sunday School to three-year-olds at Summit View Baptist Church. Her hobbies include reading and sewing. She is an excellent seamstress.

She and her husband enjoy following their son and his wife and their show horses.

Two years ago, Jo started taking piano lessons and enjoyed the challenge. She has become accomplished enough to play at their church on Sundays.

Be sure to greet Jo when you see her. She is here M-F 2:30 - 11 pm.

Welcome, Jo. This is a big house to keep up with. We appreciate you!

Thank you Suzie Eihl for this introduction to Jo Vargo. We really do appreciate her!
The Mah Jongg Special Interest Group (SIG) meets on
Wednesday afternoons in the lobby of the Herring Center. We play American-style Mah Jongg from 1:30 – 4:00 in the afternoon.

If you are an experienced player, please join us. You can contact Karen Wenstrup at:
karenwenstrup@hotmail.com
with any questions.

Recently, I had the pleasure of interviewing the founding members of the Last Call band, which is made up of four talented OLLI members. They are all accomplished singers and guitar players who have been playing together for about 8 months.

They all met in the guitar SIG at OLLI and formed the band as a means of relaxation, camaraderie, and the pure joy of singing and playing together as a group. They each have their own specialties but they harmonize and play well together.

All the members are energetic and love bantering between songs. You can tell they are thoroughly enjoying themselves.

The band members all agree that playing in retirement centers brings them the most satisfaction.

Seeing the elderly residents light up, tap their canes, sing, or just move to the music is immensely rewarding, especially when they play popular tunes from the 60s.

Before leaving our session, I was fortunate to be serenaded to a couple of my favorite songs by Elvis and the Bee Gees. It was a delight.

For more information or to book this fun group, contact George Getty at gcgetty@hotmail.com.

The Mah Jongg class at the Woodlands begins on Wednesday, March 20, 2024. American-style Mah Jongg will be taught.

According to the National Mah Jongg League (www.nationalmahjonggleague.org), Mah Jongg is a “rummy-like game.” The game is played with tiles instead of cards. It originated in China and was introduced to the United States in 1920.

Thank you Susan Sanders for informing membership about the Mah Jongg class and SIG.
Learning New Tricks
By Lynda Fredsell

Aging is an extraordinary process where you become the person you always should have been.

- David Bowie

It’s weird being the same age as old people. I never thought I’d be an octogenarian, but here I am at 86 and counting. No longer am I trying to save the world, although you could say I’m still a mover and a shaker – I’m still moving and I do shake from time to time.

I love it when my sons come to town to assess me: Is she still able to walk and talk and drive without running over someone? Indeed! I still have most of my marbles, and I haven’t hit anyone yet! But truth be told, I have changed ever so slightly. My strong sense of order no longer dictates my life. If the dishes in the kitchen cabinet are not in perfect order – so what?

The other day I was leafing through one of my favorite catalogs and ran across a funny t-shirt that made me laugh out loud. It said,

Irony: The opposite of wrinkly

….which got me wondering, What happened to my old iron and ironing board?

Then I remembered. After months of agonizing over my unironed clothes piling up in the laundry room, I had a come-to-Jesus moment. I could either spend the rest of my life chained to the ironing board, or I could embrace the wrinkles and be free, free at last. Taking a leap of faith, I sold my ironing board on ebay for $30. A local antique dealer was thrilled to get my vintage GE iron.

It seems the older I get, the younger I think. I’m beginning to sound just like my children who often tell me, wrinkles are in!

Who said you can’t teach an old gal new tricks?

Thank you Lynda for this amusing look into aging and family perceptions. At 86, you are still an energizer bunny.