

The OLLI INSIDER

December 2025

News for OLLI members at The University of Alabama in Huntsville



ROMANCE, DRAMA, SCIENCE, HISTORY

OLLI past presidents Jill Stewart and John Mason get married; class members loosen up to learn about how local theater productions happen; an update on north Alabama's Singing River Trail; physics experiments guided by a UAH professor; profile subject Suezy Proctor with husband Dan; a tour of Helen Keller's birthplace; exploring the 1819 Weeden House.



uah.edu/olli

Wilson Hall – Room 105
256.824.6183
OLLI.info@uah.edu



From the Editor

IF IT (REALLY) AIN'T BROKE, DON'T FIX IT



In the small town where I once lived, the post office closed about 6 p.m. and reopened about 6 the next morning. In the intervening hours lay a loophole for procrastinators like me.

Tax returns had to be postmarked by midnight on April 15. I would often finish my returns in the wee hours of the 16th and drop them into the mail-

box at the post office. Who would know? The postal workers placed an April 15 postmark on mail that was in the box when they arrived the next morning.

Well, a new postmaster came to town and proudly announced that, as a public service, he would station someone at the post office on April 15 to postmark tax returns at midnight. My thought was "Why not leave well enough alone?"

Politicians who want to dodge controversial change sometimes say, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." It's a good thought to have before plunging ahead.

For example, when tempted to argue with somebody, you could ask whether their opinion really does any harm and whether conflict would do more damage than silence. In deciding whether to buy something, you can ask whether you need it or merely want it. If you are a leader, you must know when it's better to impose your own ideas or to accept someone else's judgment.

Of course, some things really are broke and need fixing. Smart people figure out the difference. They also welcome ongoing constructive criticism from friends, spouses, bosses, customers, constituents and critics, and they refine their work accordingly.

These days, I file my taxes electronically and know of no way to fudge on the midnight deadline. The internet is convenient and efficient, but it fixed something that wasn't broke.

Inside The Insider: OLLI builds relationships. Jill Stewart and John Mason, who met at OLLI and served as board presidents, just got married. Glen Adams tells the story.

Glen profiles Suezy Proctor, a relatively new member already active in OLLI leadership. Suezy overcame a challenging childhood.

Phil Graham writes about age stereotypes, as expressed by young people in the movie *Wild in the Streets*, and how our attitudes determine what we make out of our stage in life.



(Image from [Wikimedia Commons](#))

Richard Brooks recognizes discipline chairs and other members of the Curriculum Committee. Clay Williams names some spring courses and promotes online registration. We have pictures and information about "The Play's the Thing," a fall course that focused on community theater.

Preview the spring schedules of bonuses and events in articles from Betty Koval and Chris Stuhlinger, respectively. We have reports from the member interest groups for hiking and biking, dining, and books.

David Sayre announces a new opportunity to travel to Virginia sites where early American history was made. In Nancy and Bob Darnall's second report about spending fall semester at sea, they write about visiting Taiwan, Hong Kong, Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand.

John Mason and Clay Williams urge OLLI members to become candidates for the Board of Directors, and Clay explains why and how to give money to OLLI.

In this month's Constitutional Corner column, John discusses the powers of the U.S. president and Executive Branch. Columnist Lee Roop looks at reasons not to tear down the Madison County Courthouse.

I appreciate everyone who contributes to *The Insider* and puts up with my sometimes-dumb questions and requests. I am also grateful for all you lifelong learners who befriend me, teach me, challenge me, encourage me and inspire me, as well as our UAH support staff. And thank you for reading *The Insider*. Happy holidays, everybody!

Steve Stewart
Editor, The OLLI Insider



The Trailhead

‘FOURTEEN OR FIGHT’



Now, here's a blast from the past!

Who remembers watching the 1968 film *Wild in the Streets*? To enhance the anachronism, I watched this movie back then from the bench seat of a 1963 Ford (three-on-the-column) pickup truck at a local drive-in.

The storyline is about a popular rock star who generates and leads a youth rebellion. The tongue-in-cheek comedy portrays the tribalism of 1960s youth counterculture with a distorted, but effective, message that anyone over the age of 35 should not be trusted.

Specifically, an elder should be retired, institutionalized, or even eliminated as a threat to progress, as well as for being a clear and present danger to the younger generation. The movie emphasizes this point. When the younger generation takes over, the older generation is dosed with LSD and herded into “re-education camps.”

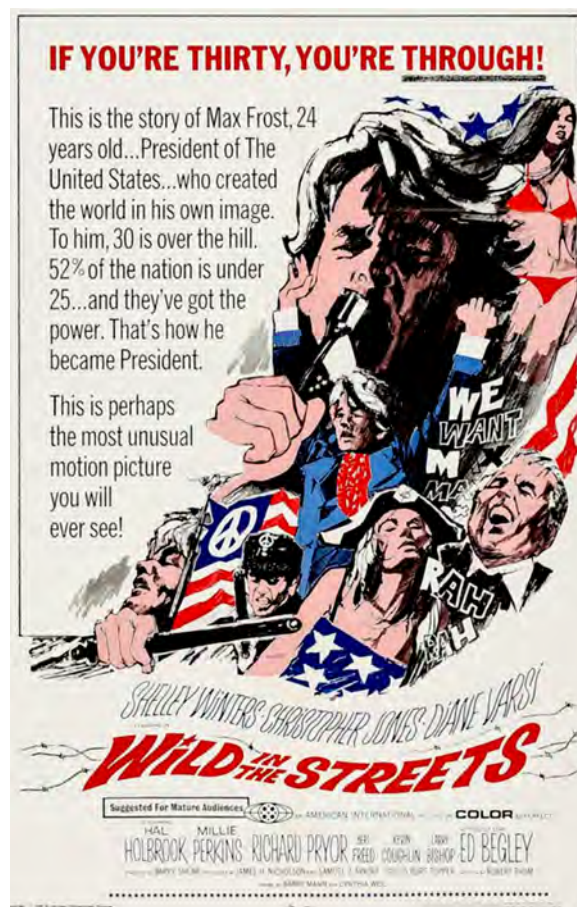
It's ironic that the only crime that forced the “old guard” into these camps was age. Today, we find society strongly encourages retirement only because one reaches the age of 65. From a cynical perspective, it can be argued that *Wild in the Streets* continues to be a successful message at a societal level.

“Fourteen or Fight” is the slogan adopted by the rebellious youth in the movie. Once the youth have taken over the government, Congress changes the voting age to 14. Those who recall the movie may remember the anarchy that the slogan inspired in youth.

The cultural age stereotypes and age beliefs of 60 years ago continue. Unlike stage-of-life terms such as “teens,” “college-aged” or “infants,” there really is no definitive, age-range demarcation for an “older person.” Somehow and at some cosmic transition point, one becomes an “older person.”

Certainly, the military retirement card, the Medicare card and Social Security benefits, as well as senior discounts, are physical reminders of how society cues old age. Societal structures, such as those mentioned, are biased; they neither define *how one chooses to experience* nor describe *how one views* their later years.

My mother, who exuded a positive outlook up to the time she died at age 100, lived by the adage “It's a great life if you don't weaken.”



Participating in OLLI at UAH's events, travel, activities and courses generates and expands positive age beliefs. In conversations with engaged OLLI members, I find that they describe their lives as productive, full of meaning and enriched. OLLI allows room for re-imaging cultural age beliefs from a negative to a positive and more robust viewpoint.

Don't allow the street voices to define who we are or how we should act.

Phil Graham
President, OLLI at UAH Board of Directors

Events Committee

PREVIEW OF SPRING EVENTS



The OLLI Events Committee has compiled a list of 10 events for spring 2026. See the preview list below. Details for each event will be available in the spring Course Guide and on the OLLI website (Special Events tab).

Many thanks to the many OLLI members who attended and supported our events this year. And special appreciation goes to the members of the Events Committee, who continue to have great ideas for a variety of fun and educational events!

Event recaps

Ivy Green/Rattlesnake Saloon, Oct. 24 — OLLI members toured the birthplace of Helen Keller (1880-1968) in Tusculum to learn about her extraordinary life. Afterward, our group enjoyed lunch inside a shallow sandstone cave at the Rattlesnake Saloon. At the saloon, we met an OLLI group from Furman University (Greenville, S.C.), who were on a tour of north Georgia and Alabama.

UAH physics lab experience, Nov. 7 — At least 12 different fun lab experiments helped us learn about several basic physics principles, including lasers and diffraction, the power of magnets, transformers and voltage, standing waves and electromagnetic waves, and static electricity.

The Weeden House Museum and Garden, Nov. 14 — OLLI members were given a tour of the historic Weeden House, built in 1819. The tour included highlights of the architecture, stories of the residents, and original art from Maria Howard Weeden. The house contains period furnishings, hand-carved mantels and a spiral staircase. The grounds include a replica of the kitchen and slave quarters. The garden contains medicinal herbs and flowers that were typical of gardens in the 1800s.

Spring events

Registration for the following events will open in mid-December:

- Friday, Jan. 23 — **Huntsville Museum of Art**, 1:30-3:30 p.m. Cost: \$8. Join a docent-led tour to learn about artwork on exhibit in several galleries.
- Friday, Jan. 30 — **Fourrux Prosthetics**, 10 a.m.-noon and 1-3 p.m. Cost: \$0. Learn about the engineering marvels of modern-day prosthetics.
- Saturday, Jan. 31 — **Alabama Constitution Hall Park**, 10:30 a.m.-noon. Cost: \$11. Travel back in time to 1819 to discover life in Huntsville and how Alabama became a state.



Dr. Themis Chronis (left), UAH clinical associate professor of physics and astronomy, leads OLLI's physics lab experience on Nov. 7. OLLI members pictured here are conducting a spectography experiment about light emission and refraction of different elements. See more photos from this and other events on the following pages.
(Photo by Marsha Langlois)

- Friday, Feb. 13 — **Huntsville Ballet experience**, 9:30 a.m.-noon. Cost: \$0. Observe ballet dancers during a rehearsal, along with the ballet's artistic director.
- Saturday, Feb. 14 — **Bald eagle safari**, 9:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. Cost: \$0. Watch for nesting bald eagles in and near Lake Guntersville State Park.
- Saturday, March 21 — **Space Camp experience at the U.S. Space and Rocket Center**, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Cost: \$100. Spend a day in Space Camp, organized specifically for OLLI members at a special discount.

Registration for the following events will open in February:

- Friday, March 27 — **Irish drumming**, 1-3 p.m. Cost: \$10. Learn how to play a traditional Irish frame drum during this hands-on experience.
- Friday, April 17 — **Water treatment plant**, 2-4 p.m. Cost: \$0. Find out what happens to our Huntsville water supply between the source and our taps.
- Saturday, April 18 — **Birding at Chapman Mountain**, 9-10:30 a.m. Cost: \$0. Look for birds at this nature preserve, and learn basic birding techniques.
- Friday, April 24 — **Downtown Rescue Mission**, 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Cost: \$0. Learn how donations and thrift store purchases support the mission's vital community work.

Chris Stuhlinger
Events Committee Chair

Events Committee

KELLER BIRTHPLACE AND THE RATTLESNAKE SALOON

OLLI members' tour of the Tuscumbia birthplace of Helen Keller, called Ivy Green, was followed by lunch at the nearby Rattlesnake Saloon on Oct. 24. Keller (1880-1968) lost her sight and hearing at 19 months, but she became an author, disability rights advocate, political activist and lecturer. The water pump represents Helen's insight at age 6: She connected running water with hand gestures representing the word "water." At the outdoor restaurant, members of OLLI from Furman University in Greenville, South Carolina, were also dining. Some are in the group photo at middle right.

Above it are Betty Koval of OLLI at UAH and Heidi Wright (left), program coordinator on Furman's OLLI staff.

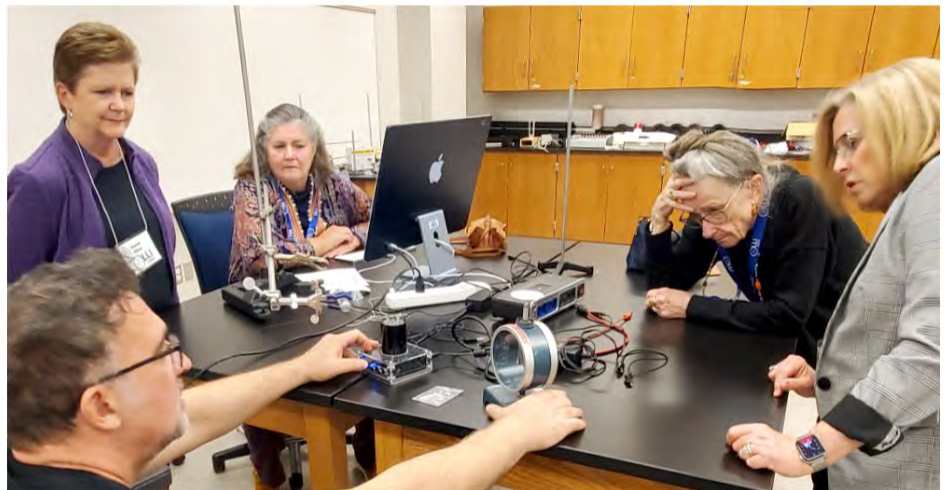
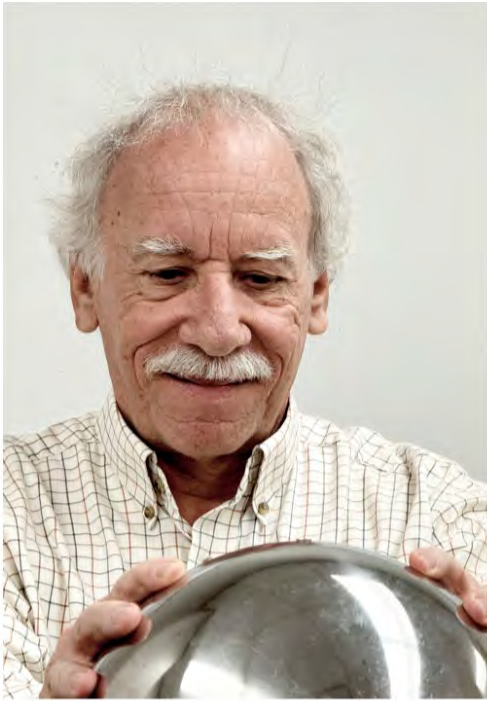


(Photos by Marsha Langlois, Steve Stewart and Chris Stuhlinger)

Events Committee

EXPERIMENTING WITH PHYSICS IN UAH LAB

Chris Stuhlinger's hair was standing up (top left photo) during one of the physics experiments in which OLLI members participated Nov. 7 under the guidance of Dr. Themis Chronis, a UAH associate professor. Subjects included lasers, diffraction, magnets, transformers, voltage, standing waves, electromagnetic waves and static electricity.

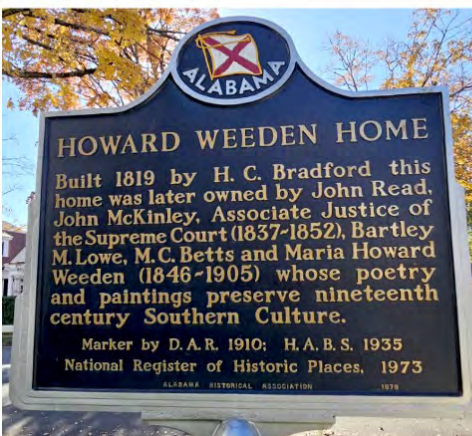
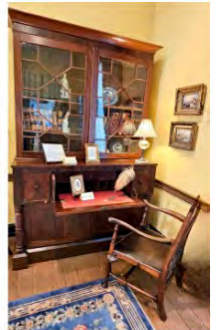


(Photos by Marsha Langlois and Chris Stuhlinger)

Events Committee

A TOUR OF THE HISTORIC WEEDEN HOUSE

OLLI members toured the Weeden House Museum and Garden, 300 Gates Ave. in Huntsville, on Nov. 14. They learned about the house's residents, architecture and art.



(Photos by Patricia Haag and Martha Abt)

OLLI DISCOUNT ON *NUTCRACKER* TICKETS

The 55th annual performance of *The Nutcracker* by Huntsville Ballet Company is scheduled for Dec. 12-14: Friday at 7:30 p.m.; Saturday at 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.; and Sunday at 1 p.m.

All performances will be at the Von Braun Center in the Mark C. Smith Concert Hall. OLLI members can use the code OLQ to receive a discount when ordering tickets.

DISCOUNT TICKETS FOR BTL'S *THE SOUND OF MUSIC*

Discounted tickets for Broadway Theatre League's *The Sound of Music* and two other shows are available to OLLI members.

Tickets are being offered for the *Sound of Music* performance Wednesday, Jan. 28, at 7 p.m. Phone 256-518-6155 and mention OLLI to pay \$68 per ticket.

The same price will be available for *Juliet* on Feb. 27 at 1 p.m. and *Water for Elephants* on May 5 at 7 p.m. OLLI ticketholders for *Juliet* are invited to a reception at noon that day.

All performances are in the Von Braun Center.



The poster for the 2025-2026 season of the Broadway Theatre League features a dark blue background with white lightning bolts. At the top left is the BTL logo, a red circle with 'BTL' in white, above the text 'BROADWAY THEATRE LEAGUE'. To the right of the logo, the text '2025-2026 SEASON' is in large white letters, with 'BROADWAYTHEATRELEAGUE.ORG' below it. In the center, there is a grid of ten musical posters: 'BACK TO THE FUTURE THE MUSICAL', 'shucked', 'HADESTOWN', 'The Sound of Music', 'Juliet', 'Helloooo, Huntsville! Mrs. Doubtfire', 'BEST NEW MUSICAL WATER FOR ELEPHANTS', 'CONCERT', 'GHOST THE LAST OF US', 'RICHARD THOMAS MARK TWAIN TONIGHT!', and 'THE CHOIR OF MAN'. At the bottom, a blue car is shown from a rear perspective, driving towards the viewer. The car's license plate reads 'OUT+TIME'. In the bottom left corner, the text 'WHERE WE'RE GOING,' is written in a white, stylized font. In the bottom right corner, the text 'WE DON'T NEED ROADS' is written in a similar font. The phone number '256-518-6155' is displayed in the bottom right corner.

Coming Bonuses

7 SPRING BONUSES YOU'LL WANT TO ATTEND



Another term has come and gone in the blink of an eye, or so it seems! I want to extend a heartfelt "Thank you!" to everyone who provided names and connections, making our bonus programs possible.

Many people have shared contacts with me through the OLLI office or directly. Often, all it takes is a phone call or an email, and I am grateful for the presenters who are enthusiastic and easy to work with, especially when scheduling bonus events.

In November, we explored topics on birding and bone health. I hope you enjoyed these sessions and gained valuable tips from the presentations.

Here's a sneak peek at what's coming this spring at 11 a.m. on Fridays:

- Jan. 23 — OLLI member Jim Beaupre will share insights from his and Debbie's journey, "**Cruising the Dalmatian Coast.**" This presentation will be especially helpful for OLLI members planning to travel to the area in April.

February — Black History Month — this year features two bonus sessions focusing on the Huntsville and Montgomery areas:

- Feb. 6 — Penny Summers and Ollie Conley, both retired teachers from the Huntsville school system, will present "**Glenwood Cemetery History.**"
- Feb. 20 — Dr. Ramona L. Hyman, local writer, speaker, retired professor of English at Oakwood University, and OLLI member, will present "**The Montgomery Bus Boycott.**" Drawing from her research and writing, Dr. Hyman will offer her perspective on this pivotal event in Alabama's history and the civil rights movement.

The following programs are planned in March, April and May:

- March 20 — Alicia Irmscher will present "**FBI Redstone Update.**" As supervisory management and program analyst for the FBI Redstone employee services team, Alicia brings valuable knowledge about the current transition.
- April 3 — Rebekah Faris, who also co-teaches with Marty Pols, will present "**Operation Paperclip's Forgotten Women — Gender, War, Food and Identity in the Space Age.**" Rebekah's research highlights the women who accompanied their husbands to support Wernher von Braun during the early space race.



Every bonus includes the Social Committee's free food in the OLLI Lounge, 152D Wilson Hall. (Photo by Steve Stewart)

- April 17 — Dennis Madsen will offer insights in "**Huntsville City Planning — Past, Present and Future.**" As the manager of urban and long-range planning for the city of Huntsville, Dennis is uniquely qualified to discuss the city's development.
- May 1 — Robin Soprano, vice president of Space Camp, will present "**Space Camp — Past, Present and Future.**" This session may inspire some of us to consider participating in the adult space camp program!

I realize there is a strong emphasis on topics covering the past, present and future, but I hope you find all the information both useful and entertaining. Please continue to share your ideas for topics you'd like to learn about or believe would interest OLLI members.

We can always look forward to the snacks in the lounge before and after each bonus session. Thank you to the Social Committee members for everything you do.

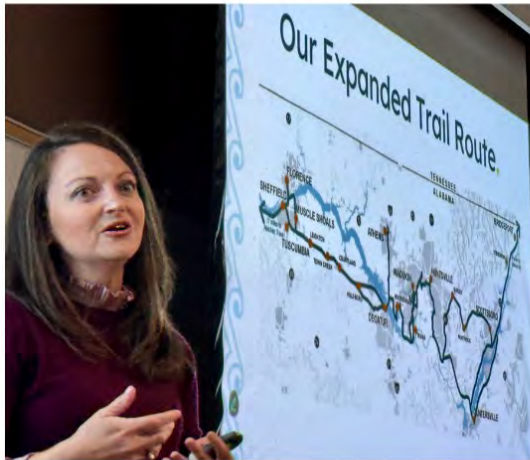
Socializing in the lounge is an important part of helping us stay young in body, mind and spirit. I look forward to seeing you all in the spring for programs in Wilson Hall, Room 168!

Betty Koval
Bonus Coordinator

SINGING ABOUT A 200-MILE NORTH ALABAMA TRAIL

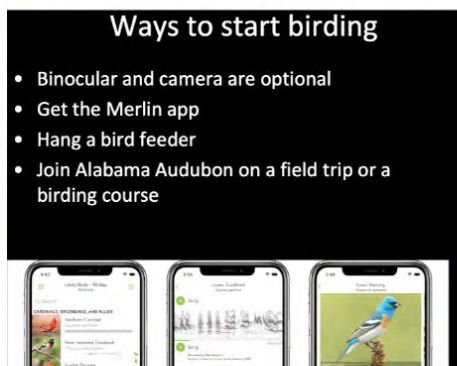
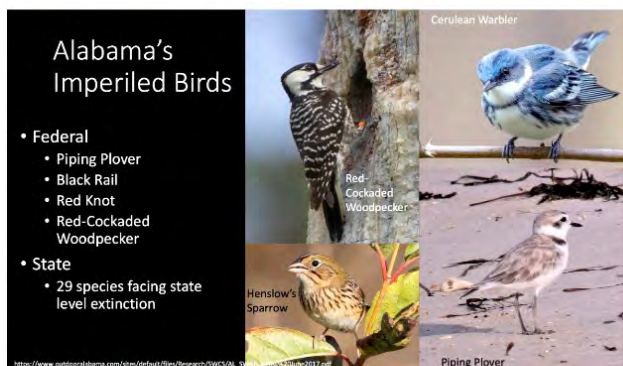
During a bonus on Halloween Day, Oct. 31, Katie Lee, operational coordinator for the Singing River Trail, explained the long-range plan to connect existing paths and create a greenway system of more than 200 miles across north Alabama.

Goals include strengthening regional bonds and creating opportunities for health, wellness, education, economic development, tourism and entrepreneurship.



BIRDS, PEOPLE AND CATS LIVING TOGETHER

"Alabama's Amazing Birdlife: Crafting a Bright Future for Birds and People" was R. Scot Duncan's topic during a bonus Nov. 14. He is executive director of Alabama Audubon. He wrote the books on the screen behind him: *Southern Wonder: Alabama's Surprising Biodiversity* and *Southern Rivers: Restoring America's Freshwater Biodiversity*. He said cats are the No. 2 cause of declines in bird populations. The No.1 cause is habitat loss and degradation.



Member Services Committee

STEP UP TO SERVE ON BOARD OF DIRECTORS

It's that time of year again, and in hopes of instilling some political spirit out there, I think a good rally song (my take on Country Joe McDonald's Vietnam rag) is appropriate here to get us all in the proper mood:

*Well, hello, all my OLLI friends.
Uncle OLLI needs your help again!
He got himself in a heckuva spot.
Of directors he ain't got a lot!
So get off the couch, and lay down
your fears,
And join us as a new volunteer!
'Cause it's one, two, three, what are
we asking for?
We're looking for those who'll lead;
Your help is what we need!
And it's five, six, seven, why don't
you just apply?
Don't miss or let the chance go by.
Whoopee, you just need to try!*

The OLLI Board of Directors is the group of talented individuals on whom the organization counts to bring fresh ideas to the table and influence the direction in which our program continues to grow.

Currently, our board consists of a cadre of about 25 members, each one volunteering to serve for a minimum of three years with the option of a second three-year term if desired. The terms are staggered. That means that every year, vacancies will arise, and members need to be replaced. That constant influx of new people with new ideas is what keeps the program fresh.

For the academic year beginning in the summer of 2026, we will need up to four new members to keep the team

UNCLE OLLI WANTS YOU



... to join the Board of Directors!

(Uncle OLLI looks a lot like
John Mason)

healthy and functioning. We do that through your volunteerism!

And how do you apply? Well, here's the schedule.

The spring term, beginning in February 2026, marks the start of the election cycle, with the goal being to seat the new board in May. To accomplish that, the first requests for volunteers will arrive on the OLLI website and in the weekly eNews on Friday, Jan. 30, 2026. (Another article like this one will appear in *The Insider* on Feb. 1, re-emphasizing the timeline.)

Nominations will remain open from close of business Jan. 30 to close of business Friday, Feb. 20. Once the nominations period closes, the OLLI staff will create an online ballot and post it on all our media platforms beginning Monday, March 2, and closing at the close of business Friday, March 27. These ballots will list the qualifications and photos of all the candidates for your consideration.

You will be asked to cast your vote for up to four members. The votes will be then tabulated and the results forwarded to me by the close of business on Tuesday, March 31.

I will notify the winners of their selection, and invite them to attend the next Board of Directors meeting scheduled for April 10. They will assume their duties at the May 8 board meeting, vote for officers, and schedule the date for board training.

We look forward to a great selection of new volunteers to lead us into the new year! If you have some ideas on how you'd like to see our program grow, then you're exactly the person we're looking for. Volunteer!

And don't forget that the annual Philip Flowers Memorial Photo Contest is up and running. This year's subject is **NIGHTLIGHTS**: exploring both the literal and abstract interpretations of light after dark. You can submit your photos now at olliphotocontest@uah.edu. The deadline is March 31.

John Mason
Member Services Committee Chair

News From UAH

WHAT DOES OLLI MEAN TO YOU?



One of the joys of my job is being able to witness OLLI members participate in the OLLI program. As I walk the halls, set up classes and perform other duties, I get to observe members enjoy their activities and various forms of interaction.

It is so rewarding to overhear these conversations. I hear students tell instructors their class was their favorite or that it really changed their perspective on a subject or even

changed their lives.

Equally important is simply seeing the fellowship between members. I have seen the bonds of friendship be formed and members help each other through tough times. Just hearing members ask each other where they want to eat lunch today affirms that OLLI helps bring people together. I know it is a cliché, but OLLI is truly a family.

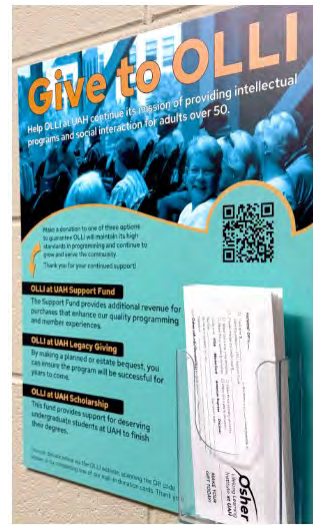
I am so proud to be a part of a program that provides these interactions and allows our age group to live a fulfilling life. Many of you simply attend a class or two or maybe participate in a member interest group and that is it, and that is fine. But there are many for whom OLLI has become a major part of their lives. They take lots of classes each semester, regularly attend Friday bonuses, and participate in numerous field trips and special programs.

For many, it has transformed their retirement years. I have even heard someone say OLLI basically saved their life.

So, this leads me to a very important question: What does OLLI mean to you? If OLLI is very important to you and a crucial part of your life, then I would say there are two things you ought to do.

One is to get more involved and become a board member. Board nominations take place in early 2026, and now is the time to step up to the plate and help shape OLLI for years to come.

Second, please consider giving to the OLLI Support Fund. Our regular revenue stream from membership and course fees plus our endowment from the Osher Foundation takes



You can find information about donating to OLLI in Wilson Hall, such as outside Room 212 (left) and on the video monitor in the first-floor hallway. Or you can go to tinyurl.com/olli-uah-donate.

care of a lot of our normal daily expenses. We use our Support Fund to make special purchases to enhance the OLLI experience. In the past, we have used this account to purchase items such as new chairs and video equipment, new signage, new registration software, and the new bench outside Wilson Hall.

The Support Fund also serves as a “rainy day” fund, as it has kept OLLI going during difficult times, such as the recent pandemic.

So, we ask you to please donate today. There are envelopes and donation cards scattered throughout Wilson Hall, or you can simply go to tinyurl.com/olli-uah-donate and donate online.

If you ever have any questions about the Support Fund or anything else, don't hesitate to drop by my office.

Please be aware that OLLI offices will be closed for the winter holidays from Dec. 24, 2025, through Jan. 2, 2026. Offices reopen on Monday, Jan. 5. We hope everyone has a fabulous holiday season and a happy new year!

Clay Williams
OLLI at UAH Program Manager

 OLLI at UAH Support Fund Help us nurture and grow OLLI at UAH while keeping our organization sustainable for generations to come. The Support Fund allows OLLI at UAH to offer members courses, field trips, travel opportunities, and social engagement. GIVE TO THE OLLI AT UAH SUPPORT FUND >	 OLLI at UAH Scholarship The OLLI at UAH Scholarship Fund provides support for deserving UAH undergraduate students. The scholarship assists in covering the cost of higher education to include tuition, books, housing, and other related fees. GIVE TO THE OLLI AT UAH SCHOLARSHIP FUND >	 OLLI at UAH Legacy Giving Leaving a legacy for lifelong learning is a meaningful way to help ensure the longevity of OLLI at UAH. By making a planned or estate bequest, you can ensure the program members care deeply about will be around through the ages. GIVE TO THE OLLI AT UAH LEGACY GIVING FUND >
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Curriculum Committee

BEHIND-THE-SCENES CURRICULUM WORKERS



A bountiful harvest is no accident. It's the result of careful planning and planting, with dedicated cultivation and labor. Only then can an abundant crop be enjoyed.

In the same way, your OLLI Curriculum Committee undertakes the planning, planting, cultivation and labor that lead to each new semester of course offerings. The following are the "farmers" who work behind the scenes to provide you the spring semester class schedule.

Discipline chairs:

1. Arts and literature — Alison Toney
2. Finance and economics — Mark Tenhundfeld
3. Health and fitness — Lynda Tenhundfeld

4. History, civics and political science — Birgit N. Stensby and John Syster
5. Hobbies and leisure — Suezy Proctor
6. Languages — Sue Farbman
7. Nature and the environment — Steve Jones
8. Psychology, philosophy, sociology and theology — Bill Confer
9. Science, technology, engineering and mathematics — Bob Carroll
10. Bonuses — Betty Koval and Lisa Brunegraff

Other committee members: Allen Butler, Barbara Hitchings, Candi Holcomb, Karin Confer, Linda McAllister, Miriam Nixon, Marsha Langlois, Philip Graham, Peter Finzel, Rolf Goebel, Rick Heeth, Steve Stewart and Vickie Goodness

Join me in expressing appreciation to



Members of the Curriculum Committee help generate teaching ideas and put everything together.
(Art by Peggy_Marco via pixabay.com)

the members of this committee. Their dedication continues to yield stimulating topics and outstanding instructors for our life-affirming community.

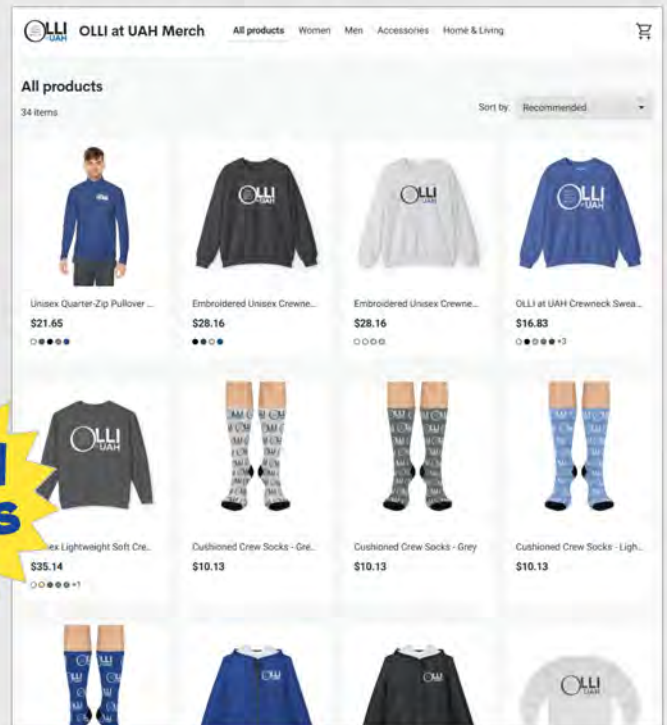
Richard Brooks
Vice President for Curriculum
OLLI at UAH Board of Directors

GET YOUR OLLI MERCH

You can look sharp and represent OLLI at the same time!



NEW ITEMS



Curriculum Committee

GET READY FOR SPRING 2026 COURSES

By Clay Williams
OLLI at UAH Program Manager

Staff is busy preparing for the coming spring semester. We will feature a wonderful selection of courses, along with great events and bonuses.

In regard to courses, there are plenty of traditional favorites, such as Fire-side Chat with Authors, Rumble Strips Ahead, Fourth-quarter Decisions, wine and beer classes, and yoga and tai chi.

This semester features plenty of new courses as well, including North American Indians, Artificial Intelligence, A Taste of France, Probability and its Applications, Stagecraft at Fantasy Playhouse, Philosophy of Science, Digital Cameras, and Weather Wut?

As in the past, we are also happy to present several Alabama Shares OLLI courses from Auburn University and The University of Alabama.

We will offer courses in various formats, including in-person, online, and a hybrid of the two. This semester, we will have several courses that are located off campus in Huntsville itself. As we always say, there will be something for everyone.

The spring 2026 Course Guide will be ready in December.

COURSE REGISTRATION

How to Register for OLLI at UAH Courses

An active OLLI membership is required to register for OLLI courses.

[Become an OLLI at UAH member.](#)



ONLINE



PHONE

256.824.6010



IN PERSON

103 WILSON HALL

OLLI AT UAH COURSE REGISTRATION

Ready to register for your favorite courses? Sign in to your online account using the button below.

[SIGN IN >](#)

OLLI offers three ways to register for courses at tinyurl.com/olli-signup. If you haven't used online registration previously, try it out.

As registration approaches, we strive to get more members to use our new registration software. We are offering two more training sessions for members to attend either in person or online so they can access their accounts and register themselves for all the exciting courses and events.

The dates are:

- Tuesday, Dec. 2, at 10 a.m. in 152 Wilson Hall or online via tinyurl.com/zoom-120225.
- Thursday, Dec. 4 at 2 p.m. in 152 Wilson Hall or online via tinyurl.com/zoom-120425.

As a special incentive for people to register themselves using the online system, we will open online registration on Wednesday, Dec. 10, at 9 a.m. All other registration opens Wednesday, Dec. 17, at 9 a.m.

Go ahead and mark your calendars for Friday, Jan. 9, for our spring open house as we officially kick off the semester. The event is in Wilson Hall and runs from 9 a.m. to noon.

Courses on campus start the week of Jan. 26 and run through May 1. Spring break is the week of March 9-13; UAH and OLLI will be closed — no classes or events that week.



UAH can help you select a gift for OLLI that perfectly suits your family's circumstances.

Get your complimentary guide:
Leave Your Legacy with One of These Ways to Give.

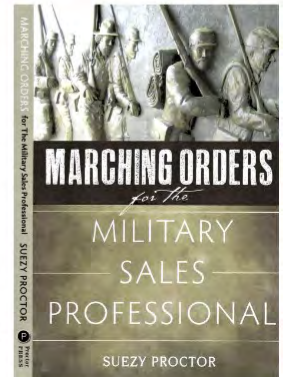
Contact tammy.eskridge@uah.edu to learn more.

People of OLLI

SETBACKS DID NOT STOP SUEZY PROCTOR: 'I KNEW HOW TO WORK' AND PRESSED ON



Suezy and Dan Proctor; fun with Rite in the Rain; fishing scrap-book photos of grandmother Eleanor (left) and Suezy; Suezy's sales handbook.



By Glen Adams

Suezy Proctor has already made a significant contribution in the short time she has belonged to OLLI. Since joining last January, she has become the chair of Hobbies & Leisure for the Curriculum Committee, submitted proposals for courses on storytelling and North American Indians (they will be offered in the spring semester), and helped organize a tour of the National Speleological Association headquarters. Suezy is the subject of this month's *Insider* profile.

People who know Suezy as a positive, energetic person will find it difficult to believe she had a childhood right out of Charles Dickens. Let her tell the story:

"My father left my mother when I was 2, my older brother was 4, and my younger brother was born six months later. My dad never paid child support. My mother worked several jobs to make ends meet. She became an alcoholic. When my younger brother was

born, she could not work and take care of all three of us. She dropped off my older brother, Ronnie, and me at an orphanage north of Seattle.

"It was a hideous place with many forms of cruelty, physical and psychological. While there, I learned that work was my salvation. If I could somehow do any work that the adults did not want to do, I was spared for the moment."

Ten years later, the state of Washington closed all the orphanages after they were charged with serious neglect and abuses. There were no foster homes. Some children had people to go to. Suezy and her brother did not.

"One day, we walked away and never looked back," said Suezy. "I was 12 and Ronnie 14. He went his way; I went mine. We had no idea where we were or where to go. We had to split up. Boys were not exempt from abuses and became abusers. I told him I couldn't stay with him. I was older then

than I am today.

"I just kept walking south, keeping the Olympic Mountains and Puget Sound in sight. Days later I found myself in Seattle's Pioneer Square, at that time the city's skid row. It was inhabited by derelicts, alcoholics, drug addicts, outlaws and homeless Indians. I was homeless there until I turned 18. I didn't look like a girl. Because of poor nutrition, I did not develop for my age. I chopped my hair real short to look like a boy.

"I survived because I knew how to work and wasn't afraid of any job. I hung out at the back doors of bars, soup kitchens and restaurants after they closed. I would go in and clean and do food prep, sometimes for just a meal. The cabbies knew me, and in bad weather they would let me ride around until they got a fare. I would clean taxis for a meal. Many terrifying things happened in Pioneer Square.

(continued on the next page)

People of OLLI

SUEZY PROCTOR, CONT

"One day I was so sad, so scared, so unloved. A wave of despair floated over me. Suddenly it started to rain very hard. I scrambled to find shelter. One of the soup kitchens was open, and I dashed in and found a table next to a window. The noise was deafening — the rain hammered the windows. I was overwhelmed with a sense of aloneness and fear that pierced me deeply. It triggered a flood of tears that caught me off guard.

"I noticed a newspaper on an empty table, grabbed it and started flipping pages — anything to keep my mind occupied. My eyes scanned every page for anything that looked like a sign. I didn't know what it would look like, but I was unexplainably compelled. Then I turned another page and there it was: 'PRESS ON.' The words crowned the top of the page in big, bold type. I certainly needed to press on ... I made it through so much in the last few weeks that I decided I *must* have something to live for, so I *must* press on."

From this low point, Suezy's life started to improve. A police captain helped locate Suezy's mother and gave Suezy bus fare to the town her mother lived in. Her mother and stepfather did not want her living in their home, so Suezy set up living quarters in the barn. With the help of a program to help her catch up in school, she managed to graduate from high school at age 20.

Music and theater became Suezy's passions. She sang with jazz bands and orchestras. She appeared in plays such as *The Music Man* and *Little Shop of*

Horrors. She wrote a play about her grandmother, who was an award-winning Arthur Murray dance instructor and a published writer. The play won a state contest and was produced.

And then there was fishing! Suezy fished almost every day for 20 years. In exchange for filing reports on the fish species and habitat for each fish she caught, she got free fishing licenses. She even wrote two small books on fishing whoppers that were photocopied by Washington Fish & Wildlife and handed out to fishermen. This fueled her side job as fishing guide.

It was these fish reports that led to Suezy's career. The reports were written on paper that was water resistant and made by Rite in the Rain, makers of all-weather paper and pens. Suezy developed a military product line for them and worked until 2012 as an employee and then another six years as a contractor.

She had met Fort Lewis commander Lt. Gen. Edward Soriano previously, and he counseled her about her new job: "Go to where they are, and they will come to you." Suezy followed his advice in the following years religiously — some years she was on the road 48 weeks attending military conventions, visiting noncommissioned officer academies and anywhere else that might be interested in Rite in the Rain products.

She even wrote a book, *Marching Orders for the Military Sales Professional*, a handbook on sales at trade shows and to military associations. Companies ordered bulk copies for their employees,

and trade show organizers bought it in bulk for their corporate sponsors.

Even now Suezy remains close to the military sales representatives and retired military she met over the years. They call themselves Road Warriors, and they Zoom together monthly.

One Road Warrior was Dan Proctor, who was in the Army Reserve when they met. They celebrated their 30th wedding anniversary in November. Dan for years worked for Allstate Insurance and now is an award-winning salesman for Landers McLarty Nissan and Mercedes car dealerships.

In the midst of this activity, Suezy found time to join Toastmasters. In her 30 years with them, she held various positions, including as an international director.

Suezy eventually tired of all the travel and work and decided to retire while still able to pursue other interests. They left Washington state to escape the traffic, and Dan chose Huntsville and Alabama from the list of 12 states Suezy was willing to move to. They moved here in 2015.

What has OLLI meant to Suezy in this first year? "Pretty much everything," she said. "Since I don't travel very much anymore, I travel the world vicariously via OLLI."

Thanks, Suezy, for all you have done and will do for OLLI.

TWICKENHAM TOUR WILL BE DEC. 13

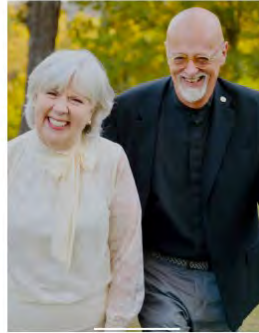
The Twickenham Spirit of Christmas Past Homes and Luminary Tour will take place Saturday, Dec. 13, from 5 to 9 p.m.

It's an opportunity to stroll through the luminary-lit streets of historic Twickenham and tour the Weeden House Museum, private residences and churches dressed up for the holidays. Refreshments and music will be included. OLLI members recently toured the Weeden House Museum and Garden.

Tickets are available at four businesses, and they will be on sale the night of the tour at the Weeden House and at each of the homes on tour. Tickets are \$20 each for adults and \$5 for children 12 and under — cash, local check or PayPal only.

More Information is available at weedenhousemuseum.com/twickenham-tour-of-homes.

People of OLLI



Jill Stewart and John Mason's wedding took place at the home of the Revs. Kelly and Dale Clem, who officiated. At right, the newlyweds are in Les Andelys, France, near the ruins of a fortress of Richard the Lionheart.

'WHO KNEW?' THEY MET IN AN OLLI ZOOM CLASS, BOTH SERVED AS PRESIDENT, AND GOT MARRIED

By Glen Adams

At sunset on Oct. 23, past OLLI Presidents Jill Stewart (2021-23) and John Mason (2023-25) wed on the back deck at the home of officiants and OLLI members Revs. Dale and Kelly Clem.

They departed the next day to honeymoon on a river cruise in France.

They had planned on a shipboard wedding during the nine-day cruise, but complications led them to marry here and then leave the next day for their trip.

They met through OLLI.

"I first knew John when I enrolled in one of his Zoom classes during Covid," said Jill. "But I didn't really 'get to know him' until we were serving on the OLLI board together, constantly in meetings, having conversations in the volunteer office or the lounge.

"We became good friends. But I'll admit I was pleasantly surprised by his invitation for a date on St. Patrick's Day 2023. Things grew steadily from there."

This is John's version:

"By spending time learning about each other, we became friends. Then, slowly, and thanks to the gentle prodding of some mutual friends, we began to date.

"Who knew? Who knew that possibilities are always where one least expects to find them? And who knew that while we may not be expecting of anything, simply remaining receptive to possibilities can open up new and wondrous relationships? Who knew?"

"Now we've become an inseparable team: I expound deeply and thoughtfully on solving the problems of the world, and she listens patiently before reminding me that I have not a clue and that I should stop yelling at the TV! It's that kind of teamwork — relationship — that was made possible by being members of a wonderful extended family, and by never giving up.

"I will never forget that advice, for inside my wedding ring — much as in my heart and in my brain — is forever engraved that Latin phrase '*Qui scivit?*' — who knew? Indeed."

And John offers this advice to OLLI members: "It becomes very easy for people of our age to begin to believe that being alone for the remainder of our days is acceptable. Well, it's not! And that's the beauty of our OLLI family: It allows us to experience opportunities, whether for the mind or for the heart and spirit."

Jill adds: "We have so much gratitude for OLLI — without it we never would have met."

All of OLLI wishes years of happiness to the two of you.

People of OLLI

A SEMESTER AT SEA: 5 PORT STOPS IN ASIA

This is the second article about the Darnalls' travels this fall. The first was published in November.

By Nancy and Bob Darnall

Greetings from the Pacific! We saw that fall has arrived and some cold nights invaded Huntsville. We still miss our family, friends and classmates, but we enjoy the new friends and the enormously friendly crew aboard the Viking Orion.

Our second 30 days or so have involved much more touring and fewer sea days. Much of our inter-port travel has been at night.

Taiwan

We never imagined setting foot on this island. What a day!

Ports in Japan and Taiwan caught our attention and contributed to our embarkation on this particular cruise, which is a repositioning cruise to move the *Orion* from Alaska to New Zealand for the summer season in the South Pacific. Taipei stands as one of the most technologically advanced cities in the world.

While leading Taiwanese industries include electronics, communications, real estate and construction, agriculture yields up to three crops per year. Arable land is only about one quarter of the island, but cultivation is intense: rice, sugar cane and produce.

Gen. Chiang Kai-shek dominates the modern history of the former island of Formosa. The National Chiang Kai-shek Memorial reflects all the cultures. Overlooking Liberty Square, the shiny blue octagonal roof sits atop stark white walls. Traditional Chinese culture associates abundance and good fortune with the number 8. Two sets of 89 white stairs leading to the entrance represent Chiang's age at the time of his death. Elevators are also available. Inside are the official automobiles, a re-creation of his presidential office, and a large statue of the man himself.

Hong Kong

This "Special Administrative Region" of China advertises "One Country, Two Systems." No one expects that to continue beyond 2047, which is when China will complete its vision for Hong Kong. The city has changed substantially since the handover from the British to the Chinese in 1997.

Through the Museum of History of Hong Kong, local children and thousands of visitors learn how China brought HK from "chaos to governance." A special exhibit tells the necessity of intense national security enforcement to keep seditionist and secessionist elements under control. Involvement in either crime results in a life prison sentence. Propaganda rules this museum.



Hong Kong viewed from the Darnalls' veranda; Sik Sik Yuen Wong Tai Sin Temple in Hong Kong, where students pray for academic success; Bob and Nancy in Taiwan; feeding elephants at Koh, Thailand; fresh-fish market in Preah Sihanoukville, Lek Muoy, Cambodia; basket boats of The Coconut Village in Cam Thanh, Hoi An, Vietnam.

Both in Hong Kong and in Taiwan, our guides refer to their homeland and China as separate countries. Among the most expensive cities in the world, HK has over 2 million people living in government-subsidized apartments. For a living space of less than 1,000 square feet, the price starts around US\$4 million to buy and several thousand dollars to rent; few exist at that bottom-level price.

Amid the towering skyscrapers, condominium complexes and apartment buildings, this city features multiple temples and shrines. Buddhism, Hinduism and Christianity are commonly and sometimes simultaneously the local religions.

Vietnam

Ha Long Bay, near Hanoi, is a geological wonder of limestone mountains dotting the sea. We spent both days here on the water in local boats.

(continued on the next page)

People of OLLI

A SEMESTER AT SEA: 5 PORT STOPS IN ASIA, CONT

While the Communist Party rules politics in a one-party system, the economy leans heavily on capitalism. Hard-working and entrepreneurially inspired, the Vietnamese we met didn't mention any problem with the two systems working together. I heard Homer Hickam say, upon his return to Vietnam for a book tour, that "we may have won that war." Evidence says perhaps.

Here we rode in basket boats through the canals of a water coconut village. Google both basket boats and water coconut. Very different.

We also visited several other ports here, including spending three days in Ho Chi Minh City. The numbers of people and scooters were overwhelming. The advice to cross a street is to pick a spot and start walking. Slowly. Traffic does slow for you, but rarely stops. It worked.

Cambodia

This is a very poor country still recovering from the atrocities of Pol Pot and the civil war that followed. Education can be a dream. Because of the scarcity of teachers, education is not mandatory, although it is free except for uniforms, books and supplies.

One of our guides was inspired to go to university when an older boy returned to the community wearing a nice shirt and owned a very nice cellphone. He told young Raymond that the key was education. Our guide became a chemistry teacher.

Thailand

Here, activities are curtailed due to mourning for the queen mother. In respect, we wore black, white, subdued colors and/or orange or yellow.

Hot! The temperatures increase with each port now. Just like home, though, it's the humidity. Traffic was lighter, but still very busy. From ship to city was about 2.5 hours; the second day we opted for Pattaya and the Sanctuary of Truth.

While Bangkok bustles as a modern metropolis, according to our guide, Pattaya is Thailand's "Sin City." Marijuana shops, "happy ending" massage parlors, and bars dominate sections of the small downtown. Nothing opens before 11 except tourist sites, and many businesses close at midnight. A gorgeous beach adjoins the property of the five-star hotel that hosted Jackie Kennedy years ago. Local macaques drink water and sodas from local residents just off the grounds of the hotel.

Aside from the travel notes, we wanted to share that our life on the ship works for us. Of course, we have options for way too much food and beverage, but we do try to have a plan. On port days we may walk up to 15,000 steps; on the ship maybe 5,000. The bed and linens are quite comfortable.

And we hope to introduce you to some of our new friends we have invited to visit us in Huntsville in the coming years.

See you in January.



A NEW PLACE TO SIT, WORK AND SOCIALIZE

Debbie West (left) and Jane McBride sit on the new outdoor bench beside the lobby entrance of Wilson Hall, under a roof. OLLI members' donations paid for the 6-foot metal bench, installed in October. It honors lifelong learners, including present, past and deceased OLLI members. (Photos by Steve Stewart)

Travel Committee

LEARN COLONIAL HISTORY AT VIRGINIA SITES



We just added a travel opportunity:

- **Historic Triangle Sampler: Williamsburg, Jamestown and Yorktown** — May 17-22, 2026. Come and celebrate our country's 250th anniversary. Discover the best of Williamsburg, Jamestown and the Yorktown battlefield as Virginia's colonial history is brought to life by reenactors and at living-history museums, with lots of time to explore on our own. Here's the

ultimate experience for history buffs. Take field trips with local experts. Look out over the James River from a 17th-century church in historic Jamestown, and imagine the settlers from the first permanent English colony. We have up to 12 spots available. Activity level: Keep the pace — walking up to two miles on varied terrain, boarding a motor coach and standing for long periods of time. The point of contact is Lisa Brunegraff. Look for details soon at tinyurl.com/olli-travel.



Hear from local experts about colonial America during OLLI's trip to Williamsburg, Jamestown and Yorktown in May 2026.

(Photo by JamesDeMers, via pixabay.com)

Also in 2026:

- Two staterooms recently became available for the **cruise along the Dalmatian coast** — April 24-May 11, 2026. Steve Goodman is leading this wonderful trip, which will include Croatia (Zadar, Zagreb, Plitvice Lakes, Split, Dubrovnik), Montenegro (Kotor), Albania (Saranda, Butrint), and Greece (Corfu, Delphi, Athens). This trip is with Overseas Adventure Travel (part of Grand Circle Travel), with whom we have had great experiences previously. Details are at tinyurl.com/olli-dalmatia-greece2026.
- **Explore South Africa** — Aug. 21-Sept. 3, 2026. Join us for another exciting Nanda Journeys adventure as our OLLI travelers learn about the local history, culture and wildlife conservation efforts in and near Johannesburg, George and Cape Town. Visit Soweto, the Cradle of Humankind, Cradle Nature Preserve, Pilanesberg National Park, the Garden Route, Table Mountain and more. Mingle with the locals and participate in several safaris. For a detailed itinerary and registration information, contact Chris Stuhlinger or visit tinyurl.com/olli-south-africa-2026.
- **The Best of New Mexico: Santa Fe, Taos and Albuquerque** — Nov. 9-16, 2026. Explore the best that New Mexico has to offer: the cosmopolitan heart of Albuquerque, the state's largest city; the Old World charm of Santa Fe; and the frontier spirit of Taos. From history and culture to cuisine and the arts, compare and contrast these unique cities and see how they evolved into the jewels they are today. To express an interest or request information, contact Jane McBride or go to tinyurl.com/olli-nm-2026.

Never let your curiosity fade! Contact David Sayre, other members of the OLLI Travel Committee, or coordinators for the various trips at olli.info@uah.edu.

All who wander are not lost!

David Sayre
Travel Committee Chair

Member Interest Groups

PREVIEW OF SPRING HIKING, BIKING ACTIVITIES

Our second year of MIG nature walks, hikes and bike rides has come to a close, and now our thoughts turn to the holiday season. Many thanks to all OLLI members who have joined this MIG and participated in our activities!

Below is a list of MIG activities planned for spring semester. Mark your calendars, and make plans to get outdoors, enjoy nature, and mingle with fellow MIG members.

To join the Hiking & Biking MIG and receive details about coming activities, sign up at the link below and agree to the blanket release/waiver form. You must have a valid OLLI membership to join the MIG and participate in MIG activities.

Join the MIG: forms.gle/6M5BoaWX9Z4TLugE9

Spring preview

- Saturday, Jan. 17 — **Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center** (nature walk), 10 a.m.-noon. View the annual gathering of thousands of sandhill cranes, along with rare whooping cranes. Then enjoy a short walk on the nearby boardwalk and trail.
- Sunday, March 8 — **Blevins Gap Nature Preserve** (hike), 1:30-3:30 p.m. Bring your hiking poles to reach the ridgetop and enjoy vast views of the valley below.
- Saturday, March 28 — **Rainbow Mountain Nature Preserve** (hike), 10 a.m.- noon. Hike the Rainbolt Trail to the top of Rainbow Mountain and see Balance Rock.
- Sunday, April 12 — **Big Cove Creek/Flint River Greenways** (nature walk/bike ride), 1:30-3:30 p.m. Take a leisurely walk along the Flint River, or ride your bike on the greenways.
- Saturday, April 25 — **Pisgah Gorge** or **local greenway** (to be determined), 10 a.m.-noon.

See you on the trail!

Chris Stuhlinger and Steve Jones
Co-Leaders, Hiking & Biking MIG



CHEERFUL DINING EXPERIENCE

The Dine Out Member Interest Group enjoyed a meal Nov. 13 at Cheers Sport Bar & Grill at 4729 University Drive NW.
(Photo from Sandra Dabrowski)

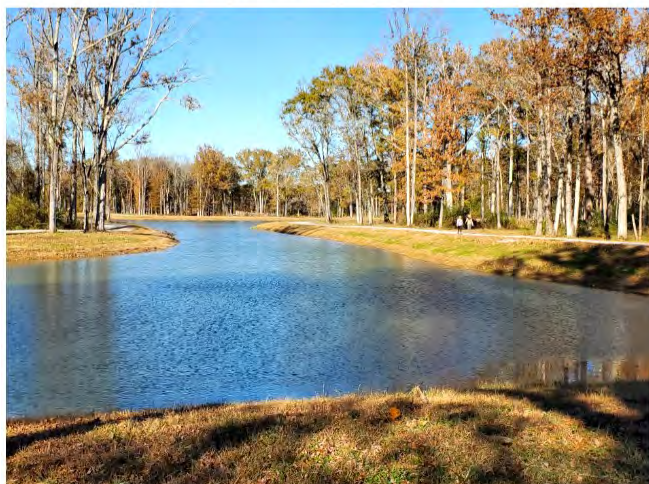
Member Interest Groups

HIKING & BIKING MIG WALKS THE WOODS IN NOVEMBER INDIAN CREEK GREENWAY, NOV. 8



(Photos by Steve Jones, Randy Boyette and Charlotte Cain)

ELGIE'S WALK GREENWAY, NOV. 16

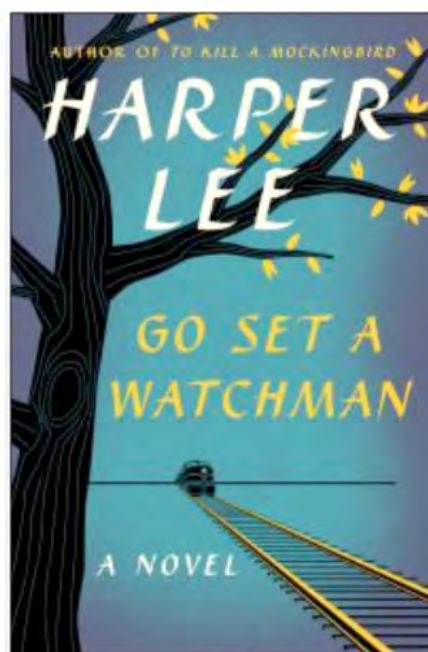


(Photos by Chris Stuhlinger)

Member Interest Groups

MARTIN LUTHER KING, HARPER LEE, SCOPES TRIAL

The OLLI Reads Member Interest Group discussed *King: A Life* — Jonathan Eig's biography of Martin Luther King Jr. — on Nov. 12. At the next meeting on Jan. 14, the topic will be Harper Lee's *Go Set a Watchman*, with mentions of her other books, *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Land of Sweet Forever: Stories and Essays*. All OLLI members are invited. Starting time is noon in Wilson Hall. Also, the MIG is sponsoring a day trip to Dayton, Tennessee, on Dec. 4 to visit the courthouse where the Scopes monkey trial took place in 1925. The courthouse contains a museum about the trial. The group will carpool to Dayton and meet at 11 a.m. Traveling back, they will eat lunch at Top of the Rock restaurant in Kimball, Tennessee. If you want to attend or need more information, contact Glen Adams through olli.info@uah.edu. Mention whether you can drive passengers.



(Photos by Glen Adams)

Huntsville Then and Now

COURTHOUSE IS HISTORIC, EVEN IF NOT PRETTY



By Lee Roop

A friend's recent Substack column has me thinking about the Madison County Courthouse. That building may deserve more than the speculated wrecking ball.

Vicki VanValkenburgh makes a case for saving and reinventing "the architectural punching bag of downtown Huntsville." (Her column is at

tinyurl.com/hsv-courthouse.)

She certainly gets the punching bag part right. I personally have long called the courthouse the world's biggest eight-track tape for its shape. It wasn't a compliment.

In the mid-1960s, the courthouse replaced the 1914 Greek Revival Southern courthouse where you'd expect to see Atticus sitting on the steps explaining life to Scout. Or, in a more disturbing reality, watch Black citizens drinking from a separate water fountain.

As Huntsville burst at the seams with people coming to support the space program, the old courthouse became too small. Leaders at the time chose an architectural design called international style, which featured non-ornamental, rectangular structures rooted in the modern age. With its metal cladding and sleek lines, I can imagine the leaders thought it perfectly reflected this space-faring city. Some loved the symbolism. Many loathed it.

VanValkenburgh admits she "long abused the courthouse for its ungainly size." As a child, she called it "the brown blob" and said you couldn't answer the phone on the square "as it could very well be a prisoner calling from the County Jail on the top two floors ..."

Now, almost 60 years after it opened, there are whispers that it might come down. The county has already moved much courthouse business to a new building on North Memorial Parkway. The Madison County Service Center has ample parking and efficiently designed processes for renewing car tags, drivers' licenses and such. The county jail and some judges moved to Wheeler Avenue quite a while ago. Rumors are that the county wants to build a new place for some trials and other operations.

I've even heard talk of turning the existing site into a park. You can make a case for that. Hanging out downtown is our pastime these days (and nights), and more places to sit, talk, eat and drink is a great idea.

Why not bring down the old courthouse and let the kids run in the grass?



The current Madison County Courthouse replaced its predecessor in the mid-1960s. (Photo by Steve Stewart)

Well, for one, it's now a historic building that does reflect an important time and place in our city. It meant something then, and it still does. Back in the '60s and '70s, we were in the bad habit of tearing down the old in the spirit of "urban renewal." We regret many of those decisions now.

Vicki is arguing we don't need to make that mistake again. She is a skilled photographer, and she's spent a lot of time exploring the courthouse. She has captured great images that have certainly given me something to think about.

"That thing is cool," she admitted. "And not just kind of cool — it's seriously cool."

She lists possible uses, including events and dining, space to enjoy and acquire art, places to learn. Floors upstairs could be refitted for apartments. Maybe. She admits that wouldn't be easy. And for all the useful reasons to keep it, she says the most important is "it is tied to our history and identity in a way that's hard to overstate."

I had never thought of those possibilities. It's interesting to consider.

One more note before we go: The courthouse sits on some of Huntsville's historic caves. Creating and installing the structures to secure the 10-story building was itself an engineering feat worth honoring.

Fight for a building that looks like an old eight-track tape? Sounds like a Huntsville thing to me.

Thanks, Vicki.

Constitutional Corner

HOW THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH GETS ITS POWER

This is the fourth of monthly “Constitutional Corner” columns, written alternately by John Mason and Mark Tenhundfeld.



By John Mason

When the founding fathers met in Philadelphia during the summer of 1787, they were well aware that the Articles of Confederation — in effect, the country’s first constitution — was an abject failure. It provided for no courts, no executive branch, no power to tax, and no power to enforce any laws. They understood that a

tighter form of strong central government was the key to building a successful republic.

As people are inherently flawed, there had to be a system of checks and balances because, as James Madison famously wrote in *The Federalist* No. 51, “A dependence on the people is, no doubt, the primary control on the government; but experience has taught mankind the necessity of auxiliary precautions.” *The Federalist* No. 10 defined those “auxiliary precautions” as “the republican remedy for the diseases most incident to republican government.” Those “diseases” came in essentially two forms: democratic tyranny and democratic ineptitude.

And so in *The Federalist* Nos. 47 and 51, Madison laid out the scheme of separation of powers: that by vesting specific powers in the branches of government, any singular designs for power could be frustrated while at the same time creating a system that incentivized collaboration and cooperation. This was accomplished through vesting clauses — provisions in the Constitution that granted specific powers to each of the three branches of the federal government. The three main vesting clauses are found in Articles I, II and III, which respectively vest legislative power in Congress, executive power in the president, and judicial power in the federal courts.

What do they say? Well, Article I, Section 1 says, “All legislative Powers herein granted shall be vested in a Congress of the United States ...” Basically, it says that the power to govern belongs to the people’s legislature.

Article III, Section 1 declares, “The judicial Power of the United States, shall be vested in one supreme Court, and in such inferior Courts as the Congress may ... establish.”) Very clearly, all judicial authority is within the purview of those courts.

Executive powers are vested in Article II, Section 1, and they are short and simple. The executive vesting clause (Section 1) says federal executive power is vested in the president, and Section 3 then requires the president to “take Care that the Laws be faithfully executed.”

President Donald Trump has signed the most first-day executive orders of recent presidents.

First-day executive orders by previous ten presidents, 1969–2025

President	Number of executive orders	Inauguration Day
Donald J. Trump	26	January 20, 2025
Joseph R. Biden, Jr.	9	January 20, 2021
Donald J. Trump	1	January 20, 2017
Barack Obama	2	January 21, 2009
George W. Bush	0	January 20, 2001
William J. Clinton	1	January 20, 1993
George H.W. Bush	0	January 20, 1989
Ronald Reagan	0	January 20, 1981
Jimmy Carter	0	January 20, 1977
Gerald R. Ford	0	August 9, 1974
Richard Nixon	0	January 20, 1969

Federal Register data available through January 16, 2025. Executive Order data as of January 20, 2025 from [whitehouse.gov](https://www.whitehouse.gov).

Source: Federal Register

USA FACTS



Article II of the Constitution gives the president executive powers. (Chart by USA Facts, via [Wikimedia Commons](https://www.wikimedia.com); Constitution image from [National Park Service](https://www.nps.gov))

Pretty simple, right? Not so fast, my friends!

Now, the implication is that those powers are outside of the authorities delegated to Congress, and the judiciary maintains the role of defining what those authorities are. And therein arises the gray.

(continued on the next page)

Constitutional Corner

HOW THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH GETS ITS POWER, CONT

As a general matter, the Supreme Court has recognized that the Constitution vests the president not only with the authorities expressly delineated therein, but also with certain implied authorities.

So, given the requirement to execute the laws of the land in a less-than-perfectly defined legal environment, how does the Executive Branch determine the best means of enforcing the law? The use of executive orders.

The case of *Youngstown Sheet and Tube Co. v. Sawyer* (1952) helped clarify. The Supreme Court decision by Justice Hugo Black determined that the president has two primary sources of power to issue directives and executive orders. It also “refutes the idea” that the President was intended “to be a lawmaker.” Congress retained that function. Black further proposed that “The President’s power, if any, to issue the order must stem either from an act of Congress or from the Constitution itself.” The implication there was that Congress could also grant additional powers to the president by statute, including the use of executive orders — a powerful tool consisting of written policy directives issued by the president with much of the same power as federal law. Those orders have become a force majeure in modern governance.

However, such orders are not explicitly defined in the Constitution and rest on historical practice, executive interpretations and court decisions. And executive orders cannot override constitutional rights or federal laws. So why, then, do they carry so much weight, and how do they work?

Well, the savvy Executive Branch determines the policies they wish to follow, and then issues executive orders to define the path they wish to take. According to the Congressional Research Service, “Although the U.S. Constitution does not address executive orders and no statute grants the president the general power to issue them, [the] authority to issue such orders is accepted as an inherent aspect of presidential power.” But what happens when they conflict with Congress?

In *Youngstown*, Justice Robert Jackson’s concurring opinion stated a three-part test for analyzing conflicts between presidential and congressional powers. Jackson said the president’s powers are at their height when he has the direct or implied authorization from Congress to act; at their middle ground — the “Zone of Twilight,” as he put it — when both Congress and the president may have “concurrent authority”; and at their “lowest ebb” when a president acts against the expressed wishes of Congress.

These potential conflicts can be resolved. Congress can pass new laws to override executive orders, but only for those enacted “pursuant to powers delegated to the President” by Congress. That means that Congress cannot directly modify or revoke an executive order that was issued pursuant to powers granted exclusively to the president by the Constitution.

And the courts? Occasionally the courts have weighed in to decide cases where presidential executive orders are challenged, but as a rule, they tend to uphold the president’s prerogative to act, even against congressional legislation.

Thus, a president willing to take it can assume almost unlimited discretion in the way laws are enforced. The sanctity and continuation of our republic requires that the other two branches reel those powers in when they overreach. Madison recognized the danger when Congress and/or the Judiciary refused to act:

“The accumulation of all powers, legislative, executive, and judiciary, in the same hands, whether of one, a few, or many, and whether hereditary, self-appointed, or elective, may justly be pronounced the very definition of tyranny,” Madison wrote in *The Federalist* No. 47.

The founders knew what they were doing.

COFFEE CONNECTION TO RESUME IN JANUARY

OLLI board President Phil Graham’s Coffee Connection — a casual opportunity to connect with him in the lounge and share ideas — has been canceled for December but will resume in the spring semester.

The cancellation is because of holidays. The new schedule, starting early in 2026, will be announced.



Some of the class members for “The Play’s the Thing” get into dramatic mode. They met in Wilson Hall, as well as attending rehearsals and performances and dining together.



Local actors (left to right) Shannon Coy, Jennifer Post, Amy Pugh Patel and Jeff White took part in a panel discussion.



Melissa “Birdie” Jones spoke about lighting and stage combat.



Stephanie Hyatt explained costuming.



Local directors Elaine Hubbard, Mike Chappell, Sam Marsh and Robyn Mitchell discussed their work. Behind them are the class teachers, Dannye Drake and Cam Scales.

CLASS TAKES A CLOSE LOOK AT COMMUNITY THEATER

In the fall semester OLLI course “The Play’s the Thing,” the complicated workings of community theater in Huntsville were explored.

Cam Scales and Dannye Drake taught the course Sept. 15-Nov. 3 in partnership with Theatre Huntsville.

The class observed an early “blocking” rehearsal of *The Wickhams: Christmas at Pemberley*, as well as one of the last rehearsals before the show opened Nov. 14. They attended a performance and then met for dinner and discussion. Additionally, some observed an audition for Theatre Huntsville’s coming production of *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

The following representatives from various aspects of play production within Huntsville’s thriving community theaters discussed with the class their various jobs:

Mark Eccleston, set design and construction; Leslie Gates (executive director of Theatre Huntsville), community theater in general and Theatre Huntsville in particular; Al Gilbert, sound; Julia Ramsey, properties; Sharon Griffin, set dressing; Liz Scott, stage management; Elaine Hubbard, directing; Robyn Mitchell, directing; Mike Chappell, directing; Sam Marsh, directing; Jeff White, acting; Amy Pugh Patel, acting; Shannon Coy, acting; Jennifer Post, acting; Stephanie Hyatt, costuming; and Melissa “Birdie” Jones, lighting and stage combat.

Cam and Dannye expressed appreciation to Gates, Mitchell, and the *Wickhams* cast and crew for sharing their knowledge and experience. “It has been an extremely pleasant, positive and helpful experience,” Cam said.

Text by Dannye Drake and Cam Scales
Photos by Sue Chatham and Cam Scales

OLLI Life

EXPRESSING APPRECIATION TO OLLI'S TEACHERS

During OLLI's Teacher Appreciation Day on Nov. 7 at Trinity United Methodist Church, OLLI course instructors were recognized and given coffee mugs bearing the latest OLLI logo. Luana's Wahines provided entertainment.



(Photos by Steve Stewart)

The Last Word



Al Kilby

MEET AL THE HELPFUL PILGRIM, OUR THANKSGIVING DYNAMO!

Whether it's setting up tables or making coffee, Al's your go-to guy. With a heart full of gratitude and a knack for making things run smoothly, he turns every gathering into a celebration of community and care.

AL THE PILGRIM, STALWART AND SPRY

In buckled shoes and feathered hat,
Al strides in — no time to chat!
With apron tied and sleeves rolled high,

He's stacking chairs and baking pie.
He's first to greet, the last to leave,
He's always there to serve the bunch.
No task too small, no chore too great,
He's setting up the thankful plate.
With hearty laugh and humble grace
He brings a smile to every face.
So when the feast begins to call,
We tip our hats to Pilgrim Al —
The heart behind our harvest cheer,
Who makes Thanksgiving shine each year.



ELF SPOTLIGHT: ALISON, THE CHRISTMAS ELF!

Just when you thought the Thanksgiving Elf had packed up his pilgrim hat, another magical figure has emerged — spreading cheer, organizing joy, and keeping OLLI twinkling through the season.

Meet Alison, our radiant Christmas Elf! She was recently seen thanking Al the Thanksgiving Elf for his November heroics, proving that even elves believe in teamwork. But Alison doesn't stop there — she's been spotted facilitating

classes, orchestrating special events, and greeting everyone with a smile that could melt a snowman.

Her mission? To make sure OLLI sparkles with holiday spirit from now through the final jingle of December. If you see her in action, offer a warm "Ho ho hello!" and maybe a peppermint or two.

Thank you, Alison, for making OLLI merry and bright!



Alison Toney

Help The Insider identify and recognize OLLI Elves — people who quietly keep things cozy and tidy for the rest of us. If you have a nominee, email OLLInewsletter@uah.edu.