

The OLLI INSIDER

January 2026

News for OLLI members at The University of Alabama in Huntsville



HO, HO, HO AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR

Holiday party at Huntsville Botanical Garden (top two photos); a hands-on tour of the College of Nursing; with Clarence Darrow at the site of the 1925 Scopes monkey trial; OLLI team teachers Rebekah Faris (left photo) and Marty Pols (with wife Claudia).

uah.edu/olli

Wilson Hall – Room 105
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From the Editor

LEARNING HERE IS OPTIONAL BUT HARD TO AVOID



A friend was experiencing temporary OLLI fatigue.

"I'm so tired of learning things everywhere I go!" she said, explaining why she was not pursuing a particular OLLI travel opportunity, which offered education as well as adventure.

She made this remark at an OLLI event that was purely social, but where we couldn't help but observe (learn) a few things about the caves and rocks of north Alabama.

I know her condition was temporary because I've seen her, before and since, plunge eagerly into many OLLI activities. All of them involve learning, but — whether you want to learn something or not — there are other rewards, including meeting people during events that are sometimes purely for fun. You meet people who are interesting and curious and often think like you do. We call these people friends.

And one of the thrills of friendship is learning — about them, about common interests, about their different interests, and about how pursuing those interests can bond us.

Many, probably most, OLLI members are retired and have earned the right not to have too many obligations. So don't feel obligated to learn unless learning is also fun. It often is.

Inside *The Insider*: We have columns from two members of the Curriculum Committee, Alison Toney and John Syster, as well as a column about curriculum by Clay Williams, OLLI program manager. They give you tips about courses and other OLLI opportunities.

Writing for the Social Committee, Marilyn Szecholda tells of plans to feed us with free lunches, the annual Souper Bowl, and snacks at the Jan. 9 open house.

Glen Adams profiles Marty Pols and Rebekah Faris, a retired former teacher and a graduate student, respectively, who teamed up to teach for OLLI.

Phil Graham reflects on Dick Van Dyke turning 100 and the concept that, at our ages, time should be an enabler, not a dictator.

Chris Stuhlinger gives details about what his Events Committee is offering during the first part of spring semester, including experiences with art, historic Huntsville, ballet, bald eagles and Space Camp.



Do you come to OLLI for learning or fun — or perhaps for both? (Art by Meta Artificial Intelligence)

Jean Krieger, leader of the Artist Studio Member Interest Group, explains how artists use written statements and/or biographies to introduce themselves to viewers and judges.

Chris Stuhlinger and Steve Jones report on the Hiking & Biking MIG. The OLLI Reads MIG took a field trip to the site of the Scopes monkey trial and is planning a discussion of Harper Lee's books.

In this month's Constitutional Corner, Mark Tenhundfeld discusses the guardrails around presidential power — one of which is voters.

Nancy and Bob Darnall continue reporting on the international sea cruise they took during the fall. This month, they write about shipboard educational lectures, Halloween and Thanksgiving.

David Sayre writes about four domestic and international travel opportunities still available this year — but seats are filling up, so consider your options now. Betty Koval notes that a bonus lecture this month ties in with one of those travel sites.

And don't miss Lee Roop's new year's wishes for Huntsville movers, shakers and drivers.

Steve Stewart
Editor, The OLLI Insider



The Trailhead

‘WHY WASTE YOUR TIME? I DON’T’

Along with this missive, I’m sharing the image from a media post my better three-quarters (i.e., Mary) sent me that captures Dick Van Dyke’s observations regarding “old age.”

On Dec. 13, Dick Van Dyke turned 100 years of age. In my mind’s eye, I continue to see Van Dyke’s physical comedy in his TV sitcom and his athletic cavorting across the widescreen projection of Mary Poppins.

With the newfound independence we strive for at this life stage, time has become a resource we savor. In my prior lifetime, and perhaps for yours, time for me was a cruel master — a real constraint. Shackled to a schedule (usually someone else’s) of deadlines and commitments.

Upon completion of my work life, the most obvious question asked of me and one I asked myself was “What am I going to do with my time?”

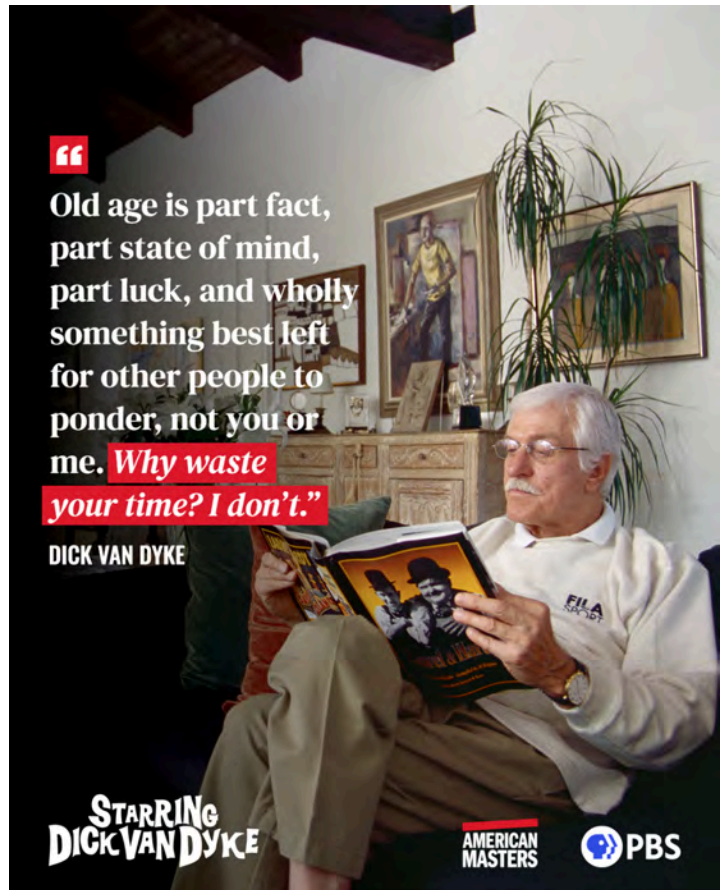
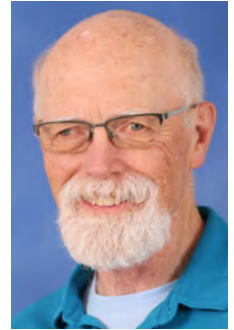
I’m slower on the upbeat than the average Joe, as it took several post-work-life months (Mary would say, “It took years”) for me to realize that I had been asking myself the wrong question. The question I needed to ask, and a question I continue to ask myself, is: “What are my choices?”

My self-revelation, my “Aha!” moment, was that “choice” is the bedrock of independence. The freedom to choose removes time constraints. Obviously, time continues to be important as a resource, but one’s priorities become ... well, one’s priority. Time is rightly oriented as an enabler, not the dictator — a positive rather than a negative.

My article is being written in advance of the PBS special “Starring Dick Van Dyke.” Having no idea what he may advocate as an elder, the distinct impression I have is that Van Dyke will distinguish between longevity and living a healthy longevity. Healthy longevity includes the freedom to make choices. As an elder, my priority is to enhance my independence outside limitations of time.

OLLI courses, activities, travel opportunities and events value the curious, the independent, the proactive. OLLI intentionally delivers an environment for meaningful

“Starring Dick Van Dyke”
premiered Dec. 12 on PBS.



connection with others engaged in healthy, independent living. OLLI at UAH can be a springboard for exercising life choices in a safe, communal setting with others who “get it.”

To borrow some words from Dick Van Dyke: Why waste your opportunity to choose? I don’t.

Phil Graham
President, OLLI at UAH Board of Directors

Events Committee



Spring event venues include (from left), top row, Huntsville Museum of Art, Fourroux Prosthetics, Alabama Constitution Hall Park; bottom row, Huntsville Ballet Company, the eagle habitat at Lake Guntersville State Park, and Space Camp.

REGISTER NOW FOR SPRING EVENTS



Welcome to another semester of lifelong learning opportunities provided by OLLI at UAH! In addition to a long list of courses, we will offer a variety of events, tours, and activities for your education and enjoyment.

Listed below are the first six events. Register early! Registration for the remaining four events will open in February.

After a couple of years of unsuccessful attempts, we have finally been able to schedule a Space Camp activity at the U.S. Space & Rocket Center. Space Camp staff have designed this full-day activity exclusively for OLLI members at a special discounted cost.

Please see the details in the description below and note the special two-step registration process.

Events reminders

- You must register to attend each event (and agree to the UAH release/waiver).
- If you register, please attend.
- If you cannot attend, please cancel as soon as possible (contact me or the OLLI staff).

Event recap

UAH College of Nursing tour, Nov. 21 — OLLI members toured the Simulation & Learning Innovation Center to see how nursing students learn basic patient interaction skills. The center uses high-tech manikins that can move their eyes, breathe, produce a heartbeat and pulse, and simulate various other conditions. Our group donned stethoscopes to check vital signs on a pregnant “patient” in labor, a newborn

(continued on the next page)

Events Committee

REGISTER NOW FOR SPRING EVENTS, CONT

baby, and an “elderly” male patient. The center encourages OLLI members to apply for the Standardized Patient program, where members would act as real patients (paid) for nursing students.

Spring events

Registration is now open for the following events:

- 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. After the tour, browse the galleries of your choice.
- Friday, Jan. 30 — **Fourroux Prosthetics**, 10 a.m.-noon and 1-3 p.m. Cost: \$0. Learn about the engineering marvels of modern-day prosthetics. Prosthetics have indeed come a long way in the past 10 years. Choose one of the two tour times.
- 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. See demonstrations of a printing press and a working forge in the blacksmith shop.
- Friday, Feb. 13 — **Huntsville Ballet experience**, 9:30 a.m.-noon. Cost: \$0. Experience ballet dancers during a rehearsal and lecture with the ballet’s artistic director. Attend the evening performance of *Dancer’s Choice* (on your own). Learn more and purchase tickets for Huntsville Ballet performances at tinyurl.com/dancers-choice or huntsvilleballet.org. OLLI 30% discount code: OLQ.
- Saturday, Feb. 14 — **Bald eagle safari at Lake Guntersville State Park**, 9:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. Cost: \$0. Join park naturalist Anna Crow to learn all about bald eagles. We will start with a presentation about the history and conservation of these majestic creatures, then watch for nesting bald eagles in and near the park. We will break for lunch at the park’s lodge (additional cost). Bring your cameras and binoculars.

- Saturday, March 21 — **Space Camp experience at the U.S. Space & Rocket Center**, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Cost: \$100. Spend a full day at Space Camp! Gear up for an unforgettable adventure as you become part of the astronaut crew on a full space flight mission training experience. Then learn what it’s like to walk on the moon with the one-sixth gravity simulator, a “chair” suspended from springs (low impact). Finally, visit the USSRC archives for a presentation about the center’s large collection of space artifacts and documents. We will break up into teams and rotate among the three activities. In between, grab lunch at the Galaxy Grill (additional cost). The staff at USSRC has curated this custom experience for OLLI members at a significant discount and with our demographics in mind (only mild physical activity; completed health forms will be required). OLLI registration deadline is Feb. 20 (Step 1). USSRC deadline to register and pay is March 6 (Step 2); no refunds after this date! If you are afraid of heights and small spaces, you can switch positions or tasks. The weight limit is 260 pounds for the one-sixth gravity chair. Contact me if you have questions or concerns about these activities or physical limitations.

The following is not OLLI-sponsored, but we held a previous event at this show, and several OLLI members are also members of the quilters’ guild:

- Friday and Saturday, Feb. 20-21 — **Heritage Quilters of Huntsville Fanfare Quilt Show 2026**, 10 a.m.- 6 p.m. at the Von Braun Center (East Hall). Cost: \$10. This show features more than 200 quilts on display, vendors, special exhibits, demonstrations and lectures, a judge’s program and more. Details are at tinyurl.com/2026-quilt-show.

Chris Stuhlinger
Events Committee Chair

OLLI MEMBERS CAN HELP UAH STUDY EXERCISE

The UAH Kinesiology Department has three research study opportunities that begin enrollment in January 2026.

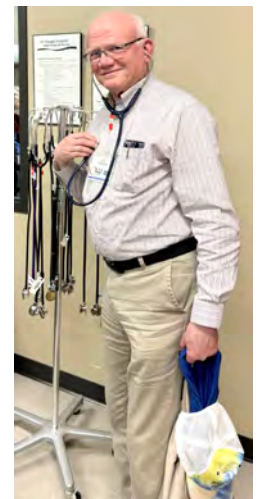
Flyers for these studies will be posted in Wilson Hall, with the research taking place primarily on Wilson’s first floor.

Staff and students will be on hand at OLLI’s Jan. 9 open house near Room 159 to answer questions regarding opportunities for OLLI members to participate in exercise science research.

Events Committee

SIMULATIONS AT THE UAH COLLEGE OF NURSING

A Nov. 21 tour of the Simulation & Learning Innovation Center at UAH's College of Nursing let OLLI members experience some of the same training that students receive on patient interaction. The "patients" in these pictures are manikins.



(Photos by Marsha Langlois and Chris Stuhlinger)

Coming Bonuses

BONUS ON CROATIA; FESTIVAL OF THE CRANES



Hello, OLLI friends!

A new year and term begin! Mark your calendars for 11 a.m. on Jan. 23: Jim Beaupre will share insights from his Croatia trip — previewing our upcoming April group travel.

The Festival of the Cranes runs Jan. 9-11 in Decatur, with crane viewing at Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge and events at downtown venues like Princess Theatre, Carnegie Visual Arts

Center, Alabama Center for the Arts, and Cook Museum. Activities suit all ages, and I'll be volunteering Saturday — hope to see you there!

Find details on the Wheeler Wildlife Refuge Association website (friendsofwheelernwr.org) and VisitDecaturAL.org.

See you in class and at bonus events!

Betty Koval
Bonus Coordinator



A scene from Overseas Adventure Travel's Dalmatian coast brochure for OLLI: the Bay of Kotor in Montenegro. Learn about this part of the world in Jim Beaupre's bonus lecture Jan. 23.

Social Committee

ENJOY SNACKS, AND EVEN LUNCH, IN THE LOUNGE



The Social Committee is looking forward to the coming spring term and seeing everybody at open house on Jan. 9. Refreshments will be served in the lounge, so stop by and meet new friends.

"Leisurely Lunch" will continue during spring term. The Social Committee serves a delicious free weekly lunch in the lounge. Watch for the announcement of day and time in the

eNews. Members enjoyed these lunches last term and look forward to them.

In February, we will continue the "Souper Bowl." Members bring their favorite homemade soups in crockpots. Everyone gets to sample a variety of delicious soups.

We will also be providing snacks before and after each bonus. You will have plenty of opportunities to share food and fellowship at OLLI this coming term. I'm looking forward to seeing you in classes and at events.

Marilynn Szecholda
Social Committee Chair



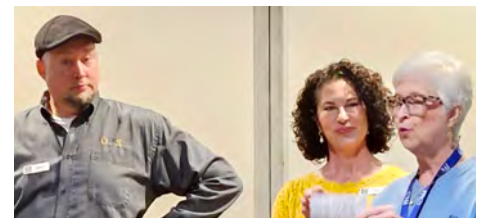
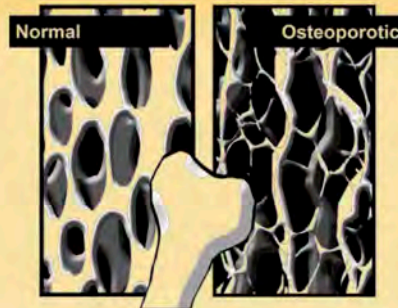
Watch for an announcement of the spring semester schedule for weekly Leisurely Lunches, such as this one during the fall. The food is free, and you can connect with members taking the same courses as you or other courses meeting the same day. (Photo by Justin Clay)

KEEPING BONES HEALTHY, AVOIDING FRACTURES

Brent Pittman and Edie Hermes presented a Nov. 21 bonus lecture — “Make No Bones about It” — on how to protect bones, strengthen them, and avoid fractures through exercise and nutrition. Brent is a certified osteoporosis educator, and Edie is a dietitian and health coach. They work with OsteoStrong Huntsville, which helps people improve bone density, balance, energy and performance while reducing pain and stress. With them in one of the pictures is Roxanne Pennington (right), an OLLI member who also works with OsteoStrong. Brent and Edie will teach an OLLI course called “Bone Up on Your Bone Health” during the spring semester.

What is osteoporosis?

Osteoporosis is disease characterized by loss of bone mass leading to fragile bones that break easily.



Risk factors for osteoporosis

Things you can't change

- Heredity
- Age
- Race
- Body Frame Size
- Medical conditions
- Medications (essential)



Risk factors for osteoporosis

THEULTIMATEBIOHACK
#STRONGME

Things you can change

- Calcium consumption
- Vitamin D intake
- Quit smoking
- Moderate alcohol
- Physical activity
- Posture
- Some medications



(Photos by Patricia Haag; slides from the speakers)

News From UAH

HAPPY NEW YEAR!



Another year has come and gone! It's hard to believe we are in the year 2026. Weren't we just trying to get ready for Y2K?

And with a new year, it is time to crank out those popular new year's resolutions we all know and love. Let's see if OLLI can buck the trend of failed resolutions. Our spring semester should have courses that can help you stay on track to meet your goals in the new year.

If getting fit or simply living a healthier lifestyle is your priority, OLLI has a bundle of courses for you. Get on the dance floor with Line Dancing or Let's Swing Dance. If improving balance, flexibility and strength are goals, then choose from multiple tai chi or yoga courses as well as Brain Dance and Rev it Up. If you want to try a sport, then choose Pickleball for Beginners. Get off your couch with OLLI.

Do you want to do some international travel, or have you simply always wanted to learn a different language? Take Basic French or Basic Spanish Conversation to get started. If you are further along, there is German Stories for Intermediate or Advanced Readers, or Beginning French Reading Continued. Or if you are simply curious about French culture, give A Taste of France a try.

Is your resolution to simply step out of your comfort zone and learn or try something new? How about getting active in a play with Stagecraft at Fantasy Playhouse or Reader's Theater Featuring the Work of Arthur Miller? Want to be a poet or learn poetry? Try either Haiku and Other Japanese Art Forms or The Poetry of William Wordsworth. Want to get artistic and creative? Try Art for the Fun of It! or Art: Let's Try It.

Need a new hobby? Try Absolute Beginning Bridge, Digital Cameras: Exposure a la Manual Mode, or A Personal Guide to Creating a Native Garden.



(Image by [Murali nath](#) from [Pixabay](#))

Or do you simply want to be better prepared with issues as we get older? Then Elder Law, Movin' on to 80, Understanding Financial Planning in Retirement or Fourth Quarter Decisions will be right up your alley.

These are just a sampling of the over 70 courses to choose from this coming semester. Whether it's history, science, hobbies, literature, nature, health or fitness, make your resolutions a reality with OLLI.

And in case you didn't know, registration has already begun. Courses fill up quickly, so do not hesitate to sign up today. Classes start later this month.

And please join us for open house on Friday, Jan. 9, from 9 a.m. to noon in Wilson Hall, where you can see firsthand all that OLLI has to offer.

Reminder: OLLI offices and UAH will be closed in honor of Martin Luther King Jr. on Monday, Jan. 19.

Clay Williams
OLLI at UAH Program Manager

Course Spotlight

It's time to register for spring 2026 courses. You can register here: tinyurl.com/olli-uah-registration!



PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE

1/26 – 3/2 • M • 5:30 – 7:00 p.m. • 6 sessions • In Person • D. Heikes • \$40

What is science? Can we trust what it tells us? The answers to both of these questions are far more complicated than you might think. This course explores what distinguishes science from its competitors, and it considers how scientific claims come to count as knowledge. It even debunks some of the standard assertions of “textbook science.” Upon examination, science may be far less objective, but no less powerful, than we are sometimes led to believe.



PROBABILITY AND ITS APPLICATIONS

1/27 – 3/3 • Tu • 8:30 – 10:00 a.m. • 6 sessions • In Person • J. Delmas • \$40

Probability is a relatively modern branch of mathematics that has a surprisingly wide range of applications, from games of chance to quantum mechanics to artificial intelligence. We'll learn the fundamentals of this branch of math and explore how they are applied to more and more areas of science and modern life.



THE NATURE OF TREES: EASY MAINTENANCE FOR A THRIVING YARD

1/28 – 2/25 • W • 3:15 – 4:45 p.m. • 5 sessions • Online • G. Arseniou • \$40

Learn the essentials of landscape tree care with a focus on keeping your outdoor spaces healthy and beautiful. This course covers proper planting, watering, pruning, and long-term maintenance, while highlighting the vital role trees play in the natural environment. With simple, practical guidance, you'll gain the confidence to nurture trees that thrive season after season, enhancing both your landscape and your connection to nature.



WOMEN IN AVIATION

1/29 – 2/26 • Th • 1:15 – 2:45 p.m. • 5 sessions • In Person • L. Brunegraff • \$40

Move over, Amelia! It's time to shine some light on other amazing women in the history of aviation. This course provides a brief timeline of women in aviation. The goal is to highlight many of the firsts and achievements of women as pilots and other roles in aviation that have been buried or forgotten by time. Women who are part of this list have piloted vehicles, including hot-air balloons, gliders, airplanes, dirigibles and helicopters

Save 20%

*When you register for 4 or more
term courses at once.*

Curriculum Committee

EXPLORE THE ARTS WITH OLLI



OLLI has many opportunities during the spring semester to explore literature, art, theater and music through classes, events and member interest groups.

Courses

Explore **literature** with a survey of William Wordsworth's poetry, a study of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, or sessions in writing haiku.

Join in conversations about great books; listen to authors discuss their books and writing processes. Participate in interactive classes on storytelling and writing your life story.

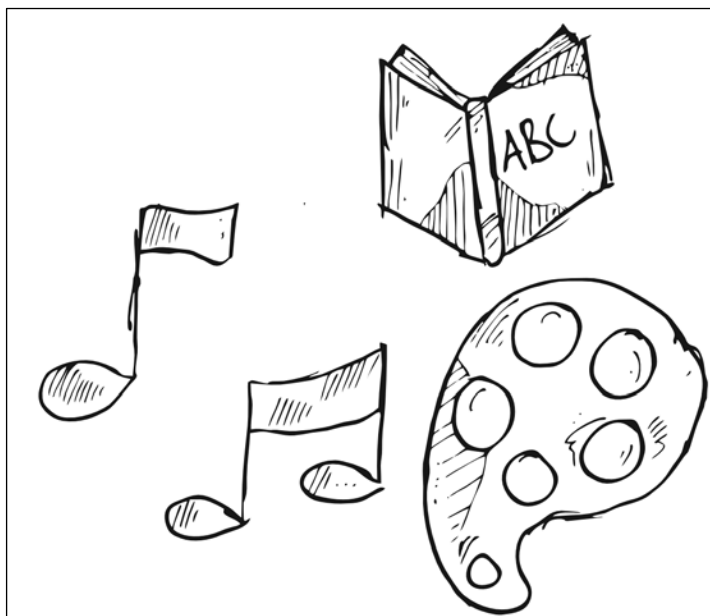
Explore **art** in a class on color, or art movements from 1900 to the 1980s. Discover well-known authors who also express themselves visually through the arts. Have fun with hands-on art classes in digital photography, Art for the Fun of It! and Art, Let's Try It!

Explore **theater** with two new offerings from Fantasy Playhouse Children's Theatre and Academy, including a stagecraft class and a reader's theater course featuring the work of Arthur Miller. In the stagecraft class, students will get hands-on experience in theater scene-building and painting the set for *Winnie the Pooh*.

Explore **music** with OLLI Shares courses via Zoom from Auburn University on the origins of American folk and root music, and from the University of Alabama on 250 years of American music and identity. Attend a class at UAH on the solo musical careers of the Beatles after they made their last joint appearance.

Events: Explore the arts in Huntsville

Register for several fun experiences organized by the Events Committee. Enjoy a docent-led Highlights tour on Jan. 23 at the Huntsville Museum of Art. Experience a rehearsal Feb. 13 at the Huntsville Ballet studio, prior to the opening night performance of *Dancer's Choice*. Phillip Otto, artistic director of the ballet, will lead a discussion and Q&A. Learn how to play a reel on the bodhran in a hands-on experience March 27 with Andy Krespe from the Irish Drum Center.



OLLI offers multiple opportunities to enjoy the arts, including courses, events and member interest groups. (Illustration adapted from [jozefm84](#)'s work at [pixabay.com](#).)

The Broadway Theatre League is offering discounted tickets to OLLI members for *Juliet* on Feb. 27 at 1. OLLI ticket holders are invited to a reception at noon prior to the performance. Discounted tickets can also be purchased for *The Sound of Music* on Jan. 28 at 7 p.m., and *Water for Elephants* on May 5 at 7 p.m. Phone 256-518-6155 and mention OLLI to receive a discount.

Member interest groups with a focus on the arts

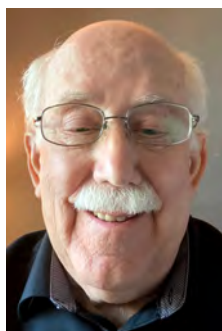
OLLI Reads meets every other month in Wilson Hall to explore and discuss a variety of literature. The next meeting is Jan. 14 at noon to discuss Harper Lee's *Go Set a Watchman* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The titles and authors of selected books are announced in *The OLLI Insider*.

Artist Studio: Gather and create with other OLLI artists, participate in art instructional and demonstration classes, and attend art-related trips. Stop by the Artist Studio table at Open House and sign up for weekly emails and updates.

Alison Toney
Arts & Letters Chair
Curriculum Committee

Curriculum Committee

HISTORY OFFERS LESSONS RELEVANT TODAY



My family gave me a gift that didn't come in beautiful Christmas wrap and was never tied with a bow.

My father and my grandfather were advocates for studying history. Both had bookshelves filled with details of the events during previous periods of human activity.

My father collected ancient Greek and Roman coins and researched the lives of the emperors and leaders whose images were stamped into the various metals used for official currency 2,000 years ago (and older). He delighted in passing around some of those coins in the sanctuary as he was preaching when the Scripture lesson of the day was the parable of the lost coin, or the owner of the vineyard who paid his workers one denarius whether they worked a full day or only a few hours. I must admit it helped me to feel a little bit more like I was there listening to Jesus as I held the coin in my hand.

My grandfather on my mother's side was more of a Civil War buff — not surprisingly because a number of his ancestors fought in the Civil War and he was born only about 25 years after it ended. His pristine copy of Sandburg's *Lincoln* was added to my library in due course.

Both my father and grandfather also spent a lot of time studying the historical writings of the Jews and the early Christians in the Bible, since they were both ministers in the Congregational Church. There was no doubt in either of them that the history of the Old and New testaments, the Roman and Greek empires, the Civil War and the Second World War were relevant to their own times. They knew that the lessons of history were and are important to all people.

I am a member of the history, civic and political science subcommittee of the Curriculum Committee for OLLI, which means I know more about the courses that are sprung from teachers who want to teach these subjects. I am excited about the offerings that I know about coming this semester.

The course lists for this winter and spring are now published and should be in your hands. Check out the listings in the areas of history, civics and political science. They can be important to you in 2026 as we live through what many perceive to be a turbulent time.

One of the offered courses is a look at the Tonkin Gulf incident that served as one of the justifications for our involvement in Vietnam. Will there be a military action based on "drug boats" in our near future? What did Vietnam teach us?



Studying ancient coins and other historical artifacts can help you understand how people thought and acted in the past.

(Image by [Thanasis Papazacharias](#) from [Pixabay](#))

Another course follows the Atlanta Campaign of 1864. Sherman's March to the Sea cut a 60-mile-wide slash across Georgia, leaving a former breadbasket for the Confederacy in a rather barren state. Did that just hasten the end of the Civil War, or is there more that we can learn from that time?

One of our newer members will teach a course on American Indians. What might we learn about the relationships between our government and the tribes that were native to the land that our immigrant ancestors wished to farm for themselves? The sculptures of Mount Rushmore are almost sacred to me, but to the Native Americans the mountain was one of their most sacred, and the four faces carved into the mountain were of men who didn't have a particularly good track record with regard to their treatment of the tribes who made treaties with us. (This is putting it mildly.)

The rights of women are a part of two courses, Women in Aviation and The Politics of Change. My grandfather lived through a part of the push for women's right to vote. Though he and I never talked about the topic (he died when I was 5), I have no doubt that he was stridently in favor of giving his wife and all woman the right to vote. He cared about people. Yet the issues about women being in the military or being equal in any pursuit still cause arguments in many circles. When will we elect a female president? Change is always too slow for some and too fast for others.

One further note: The course on the history of Afghanistan promises an interesting set of sessions. It follows a first course in the fall that looked at the history of Afghanistan

(continued on the next page)

Curriculum Committee

HISTORY OFFERS LESSONS, CONT

from about 40,000 years ago up to the mid-1700s. That first course showed the participants the continual flow of change in the nationalities and religions of the region. Over and over, new migrations brought change.

The new course will look at the history of more current times, as the British, the Soviets and we Americans have tried to bend the country to different ways of thinking and believing.

However, you do not need to have been in that first class to appreciate and understand the more recent history.

The instructors of OLLI at UAH are rather an amazing and wonderful lot. They expand our minds, challenge us to try new things, answer our wonderings, and keep us talking to each other. We are very fortunate to have such talented people among us!

Sign up for courses, and if you already have, consider adding a few more.

John Syster
For the Curriculum Committee



The poster for the Broadway Theatre League 2025-2026 Season features a vibrant blue background with white lightning bolts. At the top left is the BTL logo, a sunburst with 'BTL' inside, above the text 'BROADWAY THEATRE LEAGUE'. The top center displays '2025-2026 SEASON' in large white letters, with 'BROADWAYTHEATRELEAGUE.ORG' below it. A grid of ten musical posters is arranged in two rows of five. The bottom of the poster shows the rear of a blue car with 'OUTRAGE' on the license plate. The bottom left has the text 'WHERE WE'RE GOING,' and the bottom right has '256-518-6155' and 'WE DON'T NEED ROADS'.

BROADWAY THEATRE LEAGUE

2025-2026 SEASON
BROADWAYTHEATRELEAGUE.ORG

BACK TO FUTURE THE MUSICAL

shucked
THE TURTLEDOVE-WINNING MUSICAL COMEDY

HADESTOWN

SOUND OF MUSIC
ROBERT & HAMMERSTEIN'S
LINDSEY'S CHOICE

Juilet
THERE'S LIFE AFTER ROMEO
THE OFF BROADWAY MUSICAL

Helloooo, Huntsville!
Mrs. Doubtfire
The New Musical Comedy

BEST NEW MUSICAL
WATER FOR ELEPHANTS
A NEW MUSICAL

PlayStation
THE CONCERT
GHOST, THE LAST OF US, GOD OF WAR, HORIZON
AUTOBOT, JOURNEY, UNCHARTED
BLOODHONEY

RICHARD THOMAS
MARK TWAIN TONIGHT!
BY HAL HOLMES

THE CHOIR OF MAN

WHERE WE'RE GOING,

256-518-6155
WE DON'T NEED ROADS

Constitutional Corner

ON GUARDRAILS AND GUARDIANS

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



By Mark Tenhundfeld

“Knock, knock. Who’s there? Veto. Veto who? Veto all the stuff Congress passed, because the Constitution says I can!”

That, um, comic gem comes courtesy of an artificial intelligence program called Gemini 3 in response to my request for a joke about a president’s constitutional authority.

Yeah ... well, I guess maybe presidential powers just aren’t inherently funny. In fact, they can be downright scary if abused. Happily, there are lots of guardrails to protect the country from the really bad stuff. This article looks at some of the most important ones.

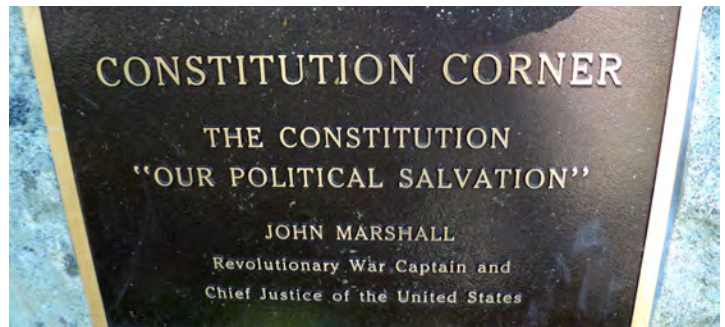
John Mason was right when he wrote in his excellent *Insider* article last month that our nation’s “founders knew what they were doing.” After creating the office of president, they vested it with “the executive Power,” adding that the president “shall take Care that the Laws be faithfully executed.”

While the “vesting” and “take care” clauses may seem ambiguous, remember who the founders expected to be the first president: George Washington. Maybe it’s reasonable not to quibble about the details when you’re tailoring an office to the strengths and needs of the OG.

But even Washington had to place the law above his individual interests. He, along with every president since, had to “solemnly swear (or affirm)” before taking office that he would “to the best of [his] Ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States.”

And therein lies the first guardrail. It is received wisdom that America is a nation of laws, not men. If you’re looking for a good first principle on which to build a representative democracy, that’ll do. Richard Nixon got it spectacularly wrong when he said to David Frost during an interview in 1977 — three years *after* Nixon left office in disgrace! — that “when the president does it, it’s not illegal.” Sorry, Mr. President; you don’t get to dictate what’s legal.

But that holds true only as long as the second guardrail — the judicial system — does its job. In our nation of laws, the



A marker at the United States Military Academy in West Point, New York. (Photo by Bill Coughlin from [The Historical Marker Database](#))

courts have the final say over whether a statute or administrative action is constitutional, thanks in part to John Marshall’s ruling in *Marbury v. Madison* (1803). If the courts are inappropriately deferential to a president, or if a president is allowed to ignore court rulings, tyranny awaits.

The first two guardrails can’t hold if a third — the military’s allegiance to the Constitution, not to any individual — fails. A president who is able to warp military resources to deny Americans their constitutional rights presents an existential threat to the world’s longest experiment in self-governance. We all can take great comfort from the fact that every service member takes an oath to support and defend the Constitution against all enemies, foreign and domestic.

If the first three guardrails remain, then a fourth — Congress — can play an important role in curbing a president’s tyrannical instincts. The executive branch gets much of its authority from laws passed by Congress; what Congress giveth, Congress can taketh away. But again, that guardrail is meaningful only if Congress is willing and able to stand up to a president intent on disrupting the balance of power envisioned by the founders.

But perhaps the most important guardrail is a president’s character. The presidency is an office of awesome powers. It takes a person of considerable character to resist the temptations that those powers present. If the guardians of democracy — that is, you and me and every other American — consistently make Faustian bargains at the polls and ignore what should be disqualifying flaws in a candidate, we can’t expect the guardrails to hold forever.

Tone at the top matters. So, too, with guardrails. It’s your job and mine to help keep them there.

People of OLLI

LOVE OF HISTORY BROUGHT RETIRED TEACHER, GRAD STUDENT TOGETHER AS OLLI INSTRUCTORS

By Glen Adams

Marty Pols and Rebekah Faris make up possibly OLLI's most unusual teaching duo.

Marty has spent his life studying and teaching history and is now happily retired. Rebekah's love of history has inspired her to return to college in her 30s while raising three children and substituting teaching to help support her dream.

Together they have taught "America's Rise to Power" and just finished "Progressivism and Populism." They are the subjects of this month's *Insider* profile.

Marty is about as authentic a New York City boy as you can meet. He grew up on the west side of Manhattan a block from Broadway and just a few blocks more from Central Park. His father and grandfather had built from the ground up the largest grocery chain on Long Island and were some of the first grocers to consolidate the checkout process. His sports growing up were stickball, punchball and sewer ball, and, of course, rooting for the Yankees.

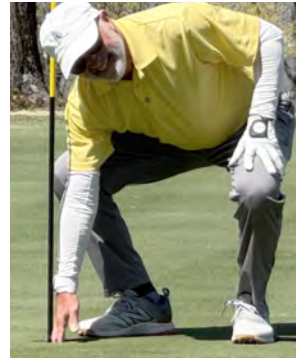
Marty went to a private school all 12 years and then moved on to New York's Adelphi University. He played on the baseball, golf and bowling teams (he bowled two 300 games), but most importantly began his studies in history.

"History was the one subject I was really interested in," said Marty. "I had an excellent high school history teacher who guided me in that direction."

Most importantly, in his sophomore year Marty met his future wife, Claudia.

"She was in fashion school and lived in the Barbizon Hotel for Women," said Marty. "I saw her every day for a year."

They married in 1972 while Marty was in graduate school. Marty earned a B.A. in history and later a master's in secondary education in social studies.



Rebekah Faris (left) and children Ivey, Ruthie and Silas. At right are Marty and Claudia Pols, Marty's fourth hole-in-one earlier this year, and Marty and Claudia with all their children and grandchildren except the youngest one.

Marty began his teaching career at a Long Island middle school. Later that year, they decided to move to Racine, Wisconsin, Claudia's hometown. He spent eight years teaching history at the Prairie School. Their son Aaron was born in 1979 and their son Alex in 1982.

They soon decided business might better support them than teaching. Marty did video analysis for factories, helping them solve production problems. But his real love was teaching, so Marty decided to return to a teaching career. That is how he ended up in Huntsville at Randolph School in 1982. Randolph was interested in Marty's experience in independent schools.

"I was the chairman of the History Department, taught history and

economics," said Marty. "I was also the head coach of the soccer and tennis teams, plus I ran a tennis program."

Daughter Meredith came along in 1984. With a growing family, Marty and Claudia decided a career change was in order. So in 1987 Marty transitioned into a career in the financial service industry.

A year later he went to the brokerage firm Shearson Lehman, which is now part of Morgan Stanley. In 2000 he joined Merrill Lynch.

"I advised people on short- and long-term financial planning and helped with financing businesses and homes," said Marty. "We did well."

The last three years of his career,

(continued on the next page)

People of OLLI

LOVE OF HISTORY, CONT

Marty was listed in *Barron's* magazine as one of the top 1,000 brokers in the United States.

In 2019 Marty retired (son Alex took over his business). He had already joined OLLI in 2018, and after a few years decided to return to teaching.

"I always loved teaching, and I missed it," said Marty. "OLLI gave me an opportunity to learn and pass along my enthusiasm for history. Every course I taught has been prepared from scratch."

Marty's first two courses were "Evolution of the Presidency" and "Best and Worst Presidents." By the time he was preparing "America's Rise to Power," he decided he could use help from a history graduate student who knew PowerPoint. Enter Rebekah.

Rebekah was and is working on a master's in history at UAH. She grew up in Huntsville, the daughter of an Army contractor. She was home-schooled and encouraged by her fundamentalist family to focus on becoming a wife and mother. After a year at a Christian college in Florida and another at Calhoun Community College, she married and focused on raising her three children, Ivey, Ruthie and Silas. But, like Marty, she was fascinated by history.

"I have always had a love for history," she said. "I always thought I could have lived in an era long before — maybe the 1920s. It wasn't until I went back to college after my kids had started public school that I realized just how much I loved history, not only as an interest, but as a discipline."

While juggling raising a family and substitute teaching, Rebekah has pursued her studies and found time to co-teach the two courses with Marty. But unfortunately for OLLI, Rebekah has had to step away from OLLI because she recently became a full-time English teacher at Mae Jemison High School. We will see her again, though, April 3 when she presents a Friday bonus on "Operation Paperclip's Forgotten Women: Gender, War, Food and Identity in the Space Age."

What has OLLI meant to Marty and Rebekah?

"OLLI has been a terrific outlet for me," said Marty. "It gets me together with people with similar interests. It has helped me develop friendships and provided a low-pressure academic experience and enjoyable learning environment. And you have to make the courses you teach fun and interesting. I always worry: Will the class enjoy this?"

"OLLI is very special to me as someone who grew up with limited access to diverse knowledge sources," said Rebekah. "I chose to go back to college in my 30s and pursue my education, so continued education is very important to me. It is encouraging to see so many older people eager to continue learning and growing. I hope to be a lifelong learner as well."

Certain *Insider* readers will be most impressed that as a golfer, Marty has had four holes-in-one and twice shot a 68.

Thank you, Marty and Rebekah, for all you have done and will do for OLLI.

**Be there,
and invite friends!**
OLLI's
OPEN HOUSE
for spring semester
Friday, Jan. 9
9 a.m. to noon
Wilson Hall



OLLI's fall semester open house in August 2025. (Photo by Patricia Haag)

This is your opportunity to learn about courses, bonus lectures, member interest groups, events and tours, social activities, travel, and other adventures. It's open to the public — a great time to meet teachers, register for courses, obtain parking permits, and see friends. You can renew your membership if it's that time; nonmembers can join OLLI for just \$40 a year. Snacks will be served. Admission is free!

People of OLLI

EDUCATIONAL LECTURES, THANKSGIVING AT SEA

This is the third article about the Darnalls' travels during the fall. Previous articles were published in November and December.

By Nancy and Bob Darnall

As Nancy writes this, Bob sits at a bridge table in The Chef's Table restaurant. Team Trivia starts in 45 minutes.

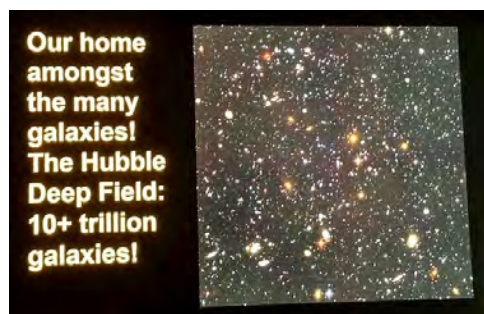
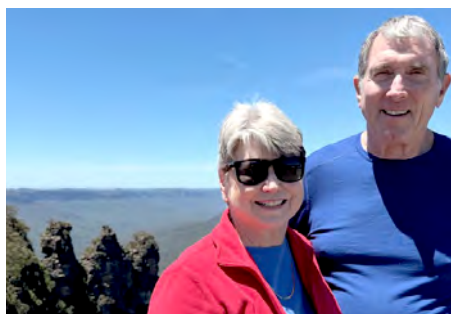
Yes, we have a sea day. For anyone's future plans, the autumn in the United States may not be the ideal time to head to the Pacific. Thus far, we have dodged a hurricane, perhaps three cyclones, and three ports due to high winds.

As always, we packed our carry-on bags with our documents, our medications, and our cloaks of flexibility. Each category is critical. We also have a technical issue with our ship, which has slowed our pace as we traverse the coast of Australia, in and out of Bass Strait, and across the Tasman Sea. Specialized technicians and tools boarded in Melbourne and should have the issue resolved in the next few days.

The next few days, hmm. It seems in some ways we just began this journey, and the end looms so close now. Not that we do not want to come home; we do. The final few days pass so quickly compared to the early days when the journey was ahead of us.

We continue to attend the lectures; our resident historian Geoff Peters has been with us for at least two legs of this cruise. He is amazing. He knows his slides and his material, has a sense of humor, and displays naked emotion when speaking of his Australian and New Zealand brothers and sisters while teaching us about the plight of the Aborigines and the Battle of Gallipoli in Turkey during World War I.

We met our third astronomer at Sydney; all of them brought such knowledge and enthusiasm to their presentations. While Bob maintains a



Bob and Nancy Darnall at the Three Sisters sandstone rock formation near Sydney, Australia; some of the lecture slides from their cruise.

lifelong interest in astronomy, Nancy thanks Ken Rex, Bob Carroll, and astronauts Jan Davis and Bob Stewart for their roles in her knowledge of cosmology, space history, and the possibilities yet undiscovered in our universe. Not that Nancy knows a lot, but she does have baseline understanding that enhances the lectures.

June Orr, our art and culture guest lecturer, rejoined us after a short hiatus at home in Sydney. Prue Ahrens filled the slot from Bangkok to Sydney and brought us modern views on the artistry and craft of Indonesia and Australia with particular emphasis on batiks and Aboriginal arts.

And Harry Allen, an archaeologist and heritage specialist, brings his particular views to a wide range of topics relevant to the ports and countries we visit. He injects a sense of amazement and awe into his lectures.

A partial list of lectures includes:

- History of Australia — From Dreaming to 1851
- History of Australia — From 1851 to the Present

- History of Thailand
- Australian Women Artists
- Pilotage of the Great Barrier Reef (by Capt. Chris Ashley, GBR pilot)
- The World's Greatest Living Adventurer
- The Man Who Named Australia
- Mars — Exploring the Red Planet
- Contemporary Australian Art
- Exploring the Cosmos — The History of Astronomy
- Ancient Australia — More than Kangaroos
- The Dawn of Time — the Aboriginal Journey to Australia
- The Lost Franklin Expedition
- The Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence

We have spent Halloween and Thanksgiving aboard the ship. Different passengers handed out gift bags of local candies to crew and other passengers on Halloween. Viking cooked a version of a traditional meal for Thanksgiving: turkey, stuffing and cranberry sauce, with a choice of side dishes and optional pumpkin pie. Twelve of us Americans sat around a big table with pretty typical

(continued on the next page)

Travel Committee

DALMATIA, VIRGINIA, SOUTH AFRICA, NEW MEXICO



OLLI trips to Dalmatia and colonial Virginia are not quite sold out. Spots also are available for South Africa and New Mexico.

- 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.

- 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 at tinyurl.com/olli-triangle-26. Road Scholar has put 10 doubles (five rooms) and three singles on reserve. This is nearly all the remaining space. If you want to get enrolled from the reserves, please call Road Scholar toll free at (800) 322-5315 by Jan. 5, and reference Program No. 22991 and Reserve No. 20785121.
- 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 Johannes-



OLLI's trip to colonial Virginia is set for May 17-22.

(Photo by JamesDeMers, via pixabay.com)

burg, 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 curiosity fade! Contact David Sayre, other members of the Travel Committee, or coordinators for the trips at olli.info@uah.edu. All who wander are not lost!

David Sayre
Travel Committee Chair

LECTURES AND THANKSGIVING AT SEA, CONT

Thanksgiving conversation: what we were thankful for, our usual Thanksgiving meal, and how traditional dishes vary geographically within the U.S.

Just like home, Viking started decorating the ship for Christmas the same day. Each day it seems they add more. I'm waiting for the gingerbread houses. The dessert team bakes them and then decorates.

We soon will figure out what goes home; chances are we

now own more stuff than came with us. We did use up the cough meds, the Sudafed, and other consumable items.

When you read this, we will be home.

If *The Insider* has room, we'll make one more report about this trip and the success of our semester at sea.

Your faithful correspondents,
Nancy and Bob

Member Interest Groups



Walk through Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge on Jan. 17, and see the migrating birds that stop there every year.



JOIN SPRING HIKING & BIKING MIG ACTIVITIES

As we begin our third year of MIG nature walks, hikes and bike rides, we again encourage OLLI members to join the MIG and participate in our activities. The greater Huntsville area has wonderful greenways and trails to explore — great opportunities for discovering all that nature offers, and a chance to meet with fellow OLLI members.

About 130 members are currently on the Hiking & Biking Member Interest Group list, and they all receive the email notices announcing activities. Only a small percentage of the MIG members participate regularly. We want to see more of you attend. If you have ideas for new venues, or suggestions for increasing participation in our activities, please let us know.

We have one MIG activity scheduled for mid-January. The remaining spring activities, which continue in March, will be detailed in the February newsletter. Mark your calendars and make plans to join us!

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: tinyurl.com/hike-bike-mig

Next MIG activity

- Saturday, Jan. 17 — **Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge**, Decatur (nature walk), 10 a.m.-noon. Stroll

through the visitors center to learn about the refuge and its wildlife. Then view the annual gathering of wintering waterfowl, thousands of sandhill cranes, and rare whooping cranes. Various blinds allow visitors to get a closer view of the birds. Afterward, enjoy a short walk on the nearby Atkeson Cypress Trail and boardwalk.

March and April MIG activities

- Sunday, March 8 — **Blevins Gap Nature Preserve** (hike), 1:30 to 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 Alligator Rock and 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 — **Wade Mountain Nature Preserve** (nature hike), 10 a.m.-noon. Hike the Devil's Racetrack trail through the woods, then turn uphill to see limestone glades and enjoy views from the power line right-of-way.

See you on the trail!

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

Member Interest Groups

CRITICAL DOCUMENTS FOR ARTISTS

As part of an exhibit submission, an artist sometimes provides either an artist biography or an artist statement. You might also use these articles for solo gallery proposals, grant applications, magazine publications and social media. If you write these documents for social media, you may load the documents with keywords.

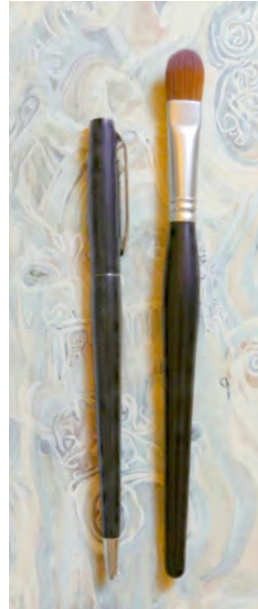
The purpose of an **artist statement** is to provide a personal explanation of your art so you can connect to viewers. This subjective synopsis explains your creative process: inspirations and intentions for the image.

Write the document in the first-person perspective (I, me). Because the focus is on the art, describe only your artwork. Use a tone that is personal and simple language.

The content should include the artistic process: Specifically mention the substrate, medium, special techniques, or colors that reflect the meaning of the picture. The text could involve concepts such as themes explored or personal motivation — whatever you want viewers to understand or feel. The artist statement of one to three paragraphs should briefly engage your audience — not be a flowery dissertation.

The purpose of an **artist biography** is to provide a factual summary of your

Sometimes an artist must be a writer as well as the creator of other content. (Illustration by Meta Artificial Intelligence)



artistic career: education, training, teaching and achievements. The objective synopsis explains the story of you as an artist.

Write the document in the third-person perspective (he, she). Because the focus is on the artist, describe only your artistic background. Use a tone that is professional and simple language.

The content should include your current location and your birthplace (if it influenced your artwork). Briefly state the type of artist you are (photographer, painter, sculptor) and your medium. You should concisely

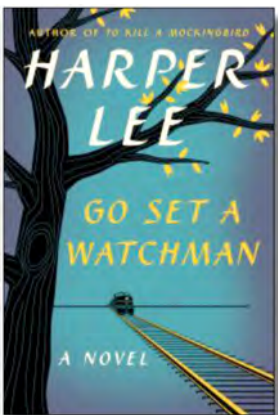
and accurately list your achievements: exhibitions, awards, grants or residencies.

The content may also state where you academically trained (or self-taught) and whether you were always an artist. Do you belong to any art organization, do you teach classes or workshops, or do you write about art in any publications? The artist biography of one to three paragraphs should concisely explain your artistic life — not be a personal history.

A writer could omit or separate the following items from the artist biography or artist statement. First, if you have a Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest or website, locate the URLs alongside your “Contact Information.” If you have curatorial quotes or jurors’ opinions about your art, place this information in a “Testimonial Section.” Detailed and lengthy information about exhibitions and training should be in the “Artist CV/Résumé.”

In conclusion, both documents are critical for presenting an artist’s work and background to viewers. However, each summary serves a distinct purpose, and they are written differently.

Jean Krieger
Leader, Artist Studio
Member Interest Group



MIG TO DISCUSS HARPER LEE'S WRITINGS

The OLLI Reads Member Interest Group will meet Wednesday, Jan. 14, at noon in Wilson Hall to discuss *Go Set a Watchman* — the second novel published by Harper Lee of Monroeville, although it was written before her more famous *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Mockingbird was published in 1960, and *Go Set a Watchman* in 2015. Lee died in 2016 at age 89.

The latter book depicts an older Atticus Finch

than the one in *Mockingbird* — a man whom his now-grown daughter, Scout, finds less admirable.

The MIG discussion will include mentions of *Mockingbird* and *The Land of Sweet Forever: Stories and Essays*, her book published Oct. 21, 2025.

All OLLI members are invited to attend the book MIG's meetings, participate in discussion and recommend books to read.

Member Interest Groups

WHERE IT HAPPENED: THE SCOPES MONKEY TRIAL

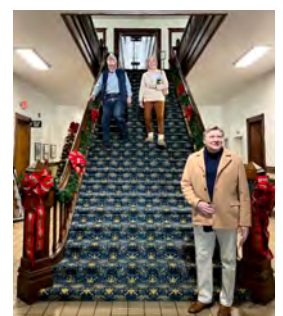
By Glen Adams

The OLLI Reads MIG traveled Dec. 4 to Dayton, Tennessee, for an in-person experience with the Scopes monkey trial.

The trial, which pitted two famous lawyers — William Jennings Bryan (left statue) and Clarence Darrow (right statue) — against each other, was about the legality of teaching evolution in Tennessee schools. This year marks the 100th anniversary of the trial.

A hardy group of OLLI members made the 2½-hour drive to tour the actual courthouse where the trial took place. An excellent museum devoted to the trial is housed in the basement of the courthouse, and the courtroom continues to be used and is little changed from a century ago.

The group finished off the day with a stop at Top of the Rock Restaurant in Kimball, Tennessee. The restaurant sits on top of a mountain and affords a magnificent view of the Tennessee River Valley.



(Photos from Glen Adams and Jane McBride)

FROLICKING AT OLLI'S 2025 HOLIDAY PARTY

OLLI's annual holiday party, Dec. 10 at Huntsville Botanical Garden, featured food, socializing, and dancing to the music of DJ Ted Cannon while scenes of 2025 OLLI adventures flashed on a screen.



(2 pages of photos by Marsha Langlois and Justin Clay)

PARTY TIME: OLLI MEMBERS WIND UP THE OLD YEAR



(2 pages of photos by Marsha Langlois and Justin Clay)

Huntsville Then and Now

HELPFUL NEW-YEAR WISHES FOR HUNTSVILLE FOLKS



By Lee Roop

The time has come to turn our eyes from 2025's reality to 2026's what-if. That means time to share our wishes for this area's leaders in the coming year. We'll start in Huntsville, the center of it all.

For Huntsville Mayor Tommy Battle:

A guided, off-record tour of Nashville with local leaders. News that the Music

City's metro is more than 2 million and Huntsville's metro population nearly 500,000 and growing every day means Nashville has been where Huntsville may be going. The metro areas of both are wildly different, with Nashville out of sight in terms of people. For now. Is Nashville what we want to be? How do we prepare for growth, which is coming without a doubt?

For Madison County Chairman Mac McCutcheon: A metronome. He is the manager of the second largest county in Alabama, which is growing fast, but with less taxing power than a child playing store. The metronome might help him maintain a rhythm as the challenges mount.

For all local leaders: Free helicopter access so they can look down on rush hour. Seeing the traffic hellscape below makes better advocates for better roads.

For the Madison County (state) legislative delegation:

Classes in hypnosis allowing members to advance floor votes on legislation that can help us citizens — while the citizens are still alive. If you can't reason with Montgomery, put it under your power with hypnosis and make them love their neighbors to the north.

For Parkway Place Mall management and security: A three-week free vacation to any undisclosed resort or cruise after Jan. 1, 2026. Thanks for the Christmas work. That's more people than I've seen anywhere since Elvis was in the building, or at least it seems like that when I drive by.

For local Huntsville brewers: Continued courage and profit after bold moves like putting chocolate in beer brewed here. A crazy idea, even evil, some would say. Gateway



Let's give local officials free helicopter rides over traffic jams to help them come up with ideas to improve roads. (Art by Meta Artificial Intelligence)

beer, anyone? But trying it puts at least one local brewer in the middle of a national trend.

For Huntsville drivers: More chances to be "on television" and pay for the fame in fines. Maybe having local police cameras helping regulate traffic infractions could help with the crazy driving I see a lot of these days. Insert old man rant.

For U.S. Space Command: Breaking ground on its new Huntsville headquarters soon. We can invite Colorado to join the opening party.

What's that? They won't come? Aww.

In Memoriam

FIGHTING DEMENTIA IN MEMORY OF BOB RICCI



This photo was made while Bob Ricci was an executive driver for the Missile Defense Agency.

The late Bob Ricci enjoyed OLLI for several reasons, and his wife, Gail, sent a message to OLLI members that called for support of the fight against dementia.

"Bob so enjoyed his involvement in OLLI, not only the classes, but the time he spent volunteering in the office and, especially, the camaraderie he shared with you," Gail said in an email from Panama City Beach, Florida.

"As some of you knew, my husband of nearly 39 years, Bob Ricci, had been struggling with dementia since early 2020," she wrote. "This past June, I decided to buy a house in the same Florida neighborhood as Bob's oldest daughter and her husband so they could help me with Bob's care.

"A few weeks before our scheduled move,

Bob was admitted to Huntsville Hospital with pneumonia, leaving him unable to walk or feed himself. I had to leave him there until he was well enough to be transferred by ambulance to a skilled nursing and rehabilitation facility near our new home. He initially showed signs of improvement after a week of rehab, but several more occurrences of pneumonia set him back further each time. On Oct. 30, I regretfully had him admitted to long-term care with hospice and, while I was visiting on Nov. 8, he passed away."

In Bob's honor, Gail participated in a walk to end Alzheimer's and other dementia. She said 7.2 million Americans suffer from "these relentless diseases." She recommended donations to the Alzheimer's Association and set up a fundraising page at tinyurl.com/alzheimers-ricci.

The Last Word

★ ODE TO KATHRYN, OLLI'S ELF OF CHEER

In the halls of OLLI, where learning and laughter meet,
There shines an elf named Kathryn,
whose smile is pure and sweet.
With twinkle in her eyes and kindness in her hands,
She sprinkles joy and goodness across our merry bands.

Her treats arrive like magic, a gift from heart to heart,
Cookies, candies, little treasures — a culinary art.
Each bite brings warmth and comfort,
each taste a gentle cheer,

A reminder that together, we're happiest right here.

As classes pause for winter, till January's end,
We'll miss her shining presence, our elf and dearest friend.
Yet memories of her kindness will carry us along
Till we gather once again, with Kathryn's smile so strong.
So here's to our Elf of OLLI, whose gifts are joy and light.
Kathryn, you remind us: Community makes life bright.



Kathryn Syster

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.