

The OLLI INSIDER

April 2026

News for OLLI members at The University of Alabama in Huntsville



SPACE TRAVEL, QUILTS, WEATHER, AVIATION, 'SPRING'

Top: OLLI members experience simulated moon gravity and spacewalking at Space Camp; quilters at Gee's Bend, whose cultural and artistic legacy goes back centuries. Left: Meteorologist Robbie Hood and a NASA crew member prepare for takeoff on a hurricane science flight in a DC-8 (Robbie is the subject of this month's Insider profile). Bottom: Pilots who spoke to Lisa Brunegraff's class on women in aviation; OLLI members don't let a little snow deter them from an outdoor class after spring break. (Photos from Steve Stewart, Chris Stuhlinger, Wikipedia, Robbie Hood, Alison Toney and Alice Searcy)



uah.edu/olli

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HELP WANTED: HIGH-INFORMATION VOTERS

If you don't like who's in there, vote 'em out ...

And when they're gone, we'll sing and dance and shout

Bring some new ones in

And we'll start the show again ...

—Song by Willie Nelson and Buddy Cannon

I'm going out on a limb here and saying that you should vote every time you can, whether or not you vote the way I do.

It's a limb because my statement is based on faith that if every eligible person voted, we would achieve the best outcome more often than not.

We should try to ensure that unqualified people do not vote, but should not throw up unnecessary obstacles.

Election fraud is rare, and even more



rarely does it change the outcome of an election. Let's err on the side of encouraging voting. If the system ain't broke, don't fix it.

But two problems that do need fixing are voter apathy

and low-information voting.

Voting as a percentage of the eligible population was about 64% nationally in the 2024 general election, according to a University of Florida study. But that's still less than two-thirds. (Alabama's rate was just under 59 percent.)

Too many voters don't do their homework about candidates and issues. The people who buy elections — meaning the ones who finance campaigns — love these voters. I once heard a campaign consultant admit that the last thing he wanted was informed voters. Instead, he wanted voters who would fall for his one-sided ads.

We must use factual news sources that present all major perspectives. Good criteria to use in evaluating candidates



These people were among thousands who crossed the Alabama River in Selma on March 8, 2026, remembering violence against voting-rights marchers there in 1965. That violence built momentum for passage of the federal Voting Rights Act a few months later. (Photo by Steve Stewart)

include character, competence, policy and loyalties. "Loyalties" means who pays their way and bends their ears.

Alabama's Republican and Democratic primaries for local, state and national offices will take place in just seven weeks, on May 19. There will be other elections this year, including the general election Nov. 3. If you are not already registered to vote, the deadline is two weeks before each election.

The Alabama secretary of state's voter guide is available on the web:

<https://tinyurl.com/ala-voter-guide>.

The secretary of state also can confirm that you are eligible to vote at this site:

<https://tinyurl.com/eligible-voter>.

I checked; I'm eligible. If you want to cancel out my vote, here's your chance.

Inside *The Insider*: Learning has no age limit and brings connections, Phil Graham reminds us as he writes about cooking. Glen Adams profiles Robbie Hood, who became a meteorologist after a brush with Hurricane Camille.

David Sayre announces a new OLLI trip: to Germany in May 2027. Chris Stuhlinger previews spring semester events, and Betty Koval does the same for April bonus lectures.

Richard Brooks explains how you can

step forward to teach a course. Alison Toney reports on a course about female aviators. Suezy Proctor discusses retaining members.

John Mason relates Plato's visions to the U.S. government. John celebrates the people "in the arena," as Theodore Roosevelt described them. We have information about the five incoming OLLI board members, as well as three scholarship recipients.

Jean Krieger writes for the Artist Studio Member Interest Group about Gee's Bend art. The OLLI Reads MIG will now be meeting monthly, soon discussing Mark Tenhundfeld's new book. The Dine Out MIG ate at Sushime Asian Bistro. We have photos from the new MIG called Mindfulness in Knitting, and from hiking and tai chi MIGs.

Lee Roop remembers his high school campaign manager and speechwriter. She was Deb Barnhart, who became CEO of the U.S. Space & Rocket Center. She died recently.

Clay Williams claims to have seized control of his office after a coup. At least, whoever is now in power allowed him to write this month's column.

Steve Stewart
Editor, The OLLI Insider

The Trailhead



CONNECTIONS ACROSS THE STOVETOP



Phil Graham finds some of his recipes in magazines such as *Eating Well*, *Cooking Light* and *Bon Appetit* (below).

Since Mary and I have been empty nesters, we started a habit of going out to dinner once a week as a “date night.” This evening out also personally benefited Mary because she didn’t have to think about what she needed to fix for dinner.

Due to being afflicted with alpha-gal syndrome from a lone star tick bite and other food allergies, dining out locally became a challenge. As food and service costs continued rising, dining out became increasingly expensive. So, taking out two birds with one stone, my solution was to cook one dinner at home each week.

Other than the time that my sourdough biscuits came out of the oven as NHL hockey pucks and the dinner where my standard poodle looked at the dinner plate, shook his head and walked away from the table, the dinners (for the most part) have been ... edible (you’ll have to verify this with Mary) and some have been downright delicious.

Post-work life has delivered me the freedom to return to the kitchen. In doing so, I’ve rediscovered the fun of cooking. My go-to resources are the recipes I find in *Eating Well*, *Cooking Light* and *Bon Appetit*. (If I have one recipe that I can brag about, it’s my lean turkey meatloaf. It’s all in the glaze!)

The other benefit I receive is the additional connection point I

share with three of our four sons. They each enjoy cooking for their families when their schedules allow, and we take the time to share recipes, compare cooking tips and congratulate one another for a successful meal presentation. For our youngest son living in Nashville, we spend time together, either in Nashville or Huntsville, once a month by cooking and sitting down to enjoy the meal we prepared.

Let me close with a self-observation. There is no age limit to learning or relearning an activity or subject matter. What started out for me as a favor for my better three-quarters has expanded to something just as exciting — family connection.

OLLI at UAH delivers so many learning channels for us to plug into. By our intentional actions to open our minds, talents and capabilities, we can enjoy the deep level of sharing by strengthening our connections with others.

**Phil Graham
President
OLLI at UAH
Board of Directors**



COFFEE CONNECTION CONTINUES

Newcomers and all OLLI members are invited to join Board President Phil Graham over a hot or cold beverage in the OLLI Lounge (152D Wilson Hall). This event started in the fall. Hours for spring semester are:

- **Monday**, 10 to 11:30 a.m.
- **Tuesday**, 8 to 8:30 and 10:30 to 11 (or visit Phil in the volunteer office, 151 Wilson Hall, between 11 and 1).
- **Wednesday**, 1 to 2 p.m.

Events Committee



Events in April will include birding at Chapman Mountain, touring a Huntsville water treatment plant, and touring a rescue mission and shopping its thrift store. (Some photos are from the venues.)



WATER SUPPLY, BIRDING, COMMUNITY SUPPORT



We have three more events remaining for the spring semester — all in April.

Find out about the sources of Huntsville's drinking water and how the water is treated before it arrives at your tap. Visit a local Land Trust nature preserve to learn some tips for bird watching. Tour the Downtown Rescue Mission to learn how their activities help meet community needs.

Event recap

Space Camp at the U.S. Space & Rocket Center, March 21 — OLLI's Space Campers broke into three groups to participate in five Space Camp activities. Campers assumed various roles in Mission Control to direct the Space Shuttle Discovery through an entire flight. Instructions were given to International Space Station astronauts for conducting onboard experiments as space walkers repaired solar panels. Group members tried out the one-sixth-gravity simulator, hopping across a simulated moonscape.

We inspected boots from a Mercury spacesuit, July 1969 entries from Wernher von Braun's personal calendar, and packaged space food. A showing in the Intuitive Planetarium of "Our Place in Space" reminded us of how tiny Earth is in the universe. A "breakout box" activity required campers to find written clues in an auditorium to open a locked box containing space-related stickers. However, two of the groups working together discovered that "OLLI, we have a problem" — they could not solve the combination before time ran out.

Coming events

- Friday, April 17 — **South Parkway Water Treatment Plant, 2-4 p.m.** Cost: \$0. Find out what happens to Huntsville water between the source and our taps. We will visit one of Huntsville Utilities' largest water treatment plants (48 million gallons per day capacity). The Huntsville water system was established in 1823 and is the oldest west of the Appalachians. Our water comes mainly from the Tennessee River, but there are three wells. The South Parkway plant processes river water.
- Saturday, April 18 — **Birding at Chapman Mountain Nature Preserve, 9-10:30 a.m.** Cost: \$0. Join Tim Gels (Land Trust of North Alabama) at the Education Pavilion to learn about slow birding: the art and science of enjoying common birds in your own backyard. Tim will also share tips for basic techniques, tools and resources for birding. We will try to spot resident and spring migratory birds while walking a trail.
- Friday, April 24 — **Downtown Rescue Mission, 10 a.m.-2 p.m.** Cost: \$0. Tour the Downtown Rescue Mission main campus in Huntsville, where we'll see firsthand how your donations and thrift store purchases directly support their vital work in the community. A complimentary lunch will be provided. Then we will travel to their thrift store in Madison for an opportunity to shop for great bargains (a coupon will be provided for all participants). All attendees will meet at the UAH Wilson Hall parking lot and then travel by van and one carpool vehicle to the main campus and thrift store. (This event was full at press time.)

Chris Stuhlinger
Events Committee Chair

Events Committee

SPACE CAMP: LEAPING, LEARNING, COLLABORATING

For details about this March 21 event, see Chris Stuhlinger's column on Page 4. More photos are on Page 6.



THROUGH THESE DOORS
ENTER THE WORLD'S FUTURE
ASTRONAUTS, SCIENTISTS AND ENGINEERS.



(Photos by Chris Stuhlinger and Steve Stewart)

Events Committee

SPACE CAMP: OLLI MEMBERS ON A MISSION



(Photos by Chris Stuhlinger, Steve Stewart and Marie Arighi)

Coming Bonuses



Look for these images at <https://tinyurl.com/olli-bonuses> to obtain information or sign up for two April bonuses.

FORGOTTEN WOMEN AND HUNTSVILLE'S FUTURE



Hello, OLLI friends!

We have reached the halfway point of the spring term, and I am excited to share some special opportunities available this month.

We are offering two engaging bonus events that I believe you will find both informative and inspiring.

- Friday, April 3 — **Operation Paperclip's forgotten women.**

Rebekah Faris, a UAH graduate student whom some of you may know from classes with Marty Pols, will present on "Operation Paperclip's Forgotten Women: Gender, War, Food and Identity in the Space Age." This presentation will highlight the often-overlooked women who supported the scientists brought to the United States with Wernher von Braun. These women played a crucial role in supporting their husbands and families on

the home front, and their stories are essential to understanding this important period in history.

- Friday, April 17 — **Planning Huntsville's future.** We will hear from Dennis Madsen, a certified professional planner who is the manager of urban and long-range planning for Huntsville. Dennis will discuss the initiatives that the city has undertaken, and continues to pursue, to ensure a bright future for our region. His talk will provide insight into Huntsville's strategic planning and the steps being taken to prepare for the challenges and opportunities ahead.

I am looking forward to hearing from both of these speakers as they share historical perspectives and plans. Their presentations are sure to offer valuable information and provoke thoughtful discussion.

See you in class and at our coming bonus events!

Betty Koval
Bonus Coordinator

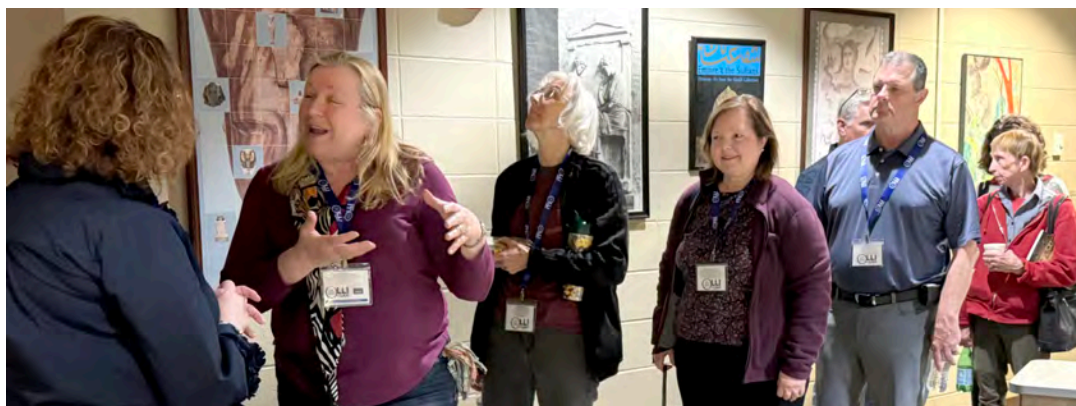


Visit uah.giftplans.org to access a free estate planning checklist for the New Year!



FBI ADDING FACILITIES, JOBS AT REDSTONE ARSENAL

Alicia Irmscher, supervisory management and program analyst for the FBI employee services team at Redstone Arsenal, gave a bonus lecture March 20 about the FBI's 50-plus years here, which have included recent and ongoing expansion of facilities for research, training and other purposes. She said former U.S. Sen. Richard Shelby, R-Ala., influenced the local expansion. Today 2,050 employees of the FBI and its contractors live in this area, and the number will reach 4,000 by 2030, she said. Some employees have declined to move here from places like the Washington, D.C., area, but attracting them gets easier as they tour the community and facilities and meet employees who have already moved, she said.



(Photos by Steve Stewart)

Member Services Committee

First place:
Untitled,
Kathy
Riggs



Second place: *Untitled, Bill Carswell*



Third place: *Yellowstone, Alice Searcy*

The winner and runners-up in last year's photo contest (at left) are on the wall outside the OLLI volunteer office (151 Wilson Hall). The theme was "Contrast." Winners of the 2026 contest will be announced at the annual dinner on May 19. The theme is "Nightlights."

IT'S CONTEST TIME!



I'd like to open this month's column in my role as past president to thank the members who were nominated for positions on next year's Board of Directors!

In his 1910 "Citizenship in a Republic" speech, former President Theodore Roosevelt honored the person actively striving in an endeavor over the critic.

Roosevelt emphasized that "the credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly" despite the risk of failure.

Thanks also to those of you who voted in the board election. We look forward to serving with these new board members.

Also by the time you read this, we will have received your nominations for Volunteer of the Year and your entries in the annual Philip Flowers Memorial Photo Contest. Thank you all for your participation!

Winners, as well as runners-up in the photo contest, will be announced at the annual dinner on May 19. Be on the lookout for more details, and be sure to make your reservations early.

John Mason
Member Services Committee Chair



The OLLI Insider needs your help!

Can you contribute articles, photos or other art for our monthly newsletter — either occasionally or as a regular member of the team, accepting opportunities to cover events and topics? If interested, please email

OLLINewsletter@uah.edu

or speak with an *Insider* team member, who may be wearing a name badge that includes the word "PRESS." You'll often see us shooting pictures.

Nominating Committee

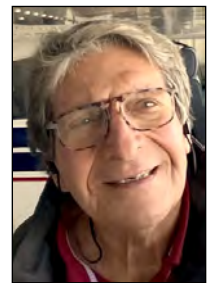
NEW MEMBERS OF THE OLLI BOARD OF DIRECTORS

These five new board members — chosen in an online election open to all OLLI members — will begin their three-year term soon.



Donna Berger, a retired certified public accountant, serves on OLLI's Social Committee as well as the External Advisory Board of the UAH College of Business. She has presented at CPA continuing education seminars and has also presented at Leadership Huntsville on business topics. She is finance chair and a board member for Fantasy Playhouse Children's Theater and Academy. She leads the widows' group and serves on the cancer care team at Asbury Church and is a founder of Womenade Huntsville. Donna has been an OLLI member for three years.

Al Kilby learned to fly in 1975 and is a private pilot with an instrument and commercial rating. He flies out of Huntsville International Airport and Redstone Arsenal Flying Club. Al was born in New York, moved to California, joined the U.S. Air Force, and graduated from Cal State University Northridge with a degree in geography. He also lived in Florida. In 1985 he and wife Pam moved to Madison, Alabama, where he worked for Intergraph Corp. He retired in 2013 after serving as a technical marketing engineer for Mentor Graphics. "I love working with people," he said. "It doesn't matter what the tasks are." He has been an OLLI member since 2017, has participated in about 30 terms or semesters, and has served as a class facilitator.



Anita McKee has been an OLLI member for four years and has served as facilitator for five classes. She worked with Madison County Schools as a substitute teacher for five years. "Having taken many classes at OLLI," she said, "it is easy to see the professional standards for classes, programs and events are met on a consistent basis. I thoroughly enjoy the learning aspect of OLLI, but having the opportunity to share those classes and become friends with other OLLI members has been invaluable. ... I have held many volunteer positions requiring different skills, including event planning, financial positions and scholarship committees. I enjoy being around people and working together to achieve a task."

Roxanne Pennington has managed a travel agency, done financial planning, and owned a scuba-diving tour company. She was one of the Georgia Aquarium's first volunteers. In her church, she has directed the women's ministry and helped with the choir and praise team, the finance committee and vacation Bible school. She has been president of the Hampton Grove Garden Club and is a trained volunteer for Huntsville's Community Emergency Response Team. She is a published author with a degree in finance and an MBA. "My favorite accomplishment is my 41-year marriage to my college sweetheart, David," she said. She has been an OLLI member for one year, participating in courses and member interest groups including tai chi, writing and art. She helped organize a bonus lecture about bone health.



Suezy Proctor joined OLLI in January 2025 and is now the Curriculum Committee's discipline chair for hobbies and leisure. She submitted proposals for two classes — on North American Indians and storytelling — that are being taught this semester. She proposed the recent OLLI tour of National Speleological Association headquarters. She has been an international director for Toastmasters and served on the boards of various chapters of the Association of the United States Army. She founded book-review clubs and led book discussions at the Madison Public Library. Suezy has more than 50 years of professional experience in marketing, sales, training and business development. She has won speaking awards, and she formed her own business, The Speech Doctor, to coach speakers.

Curriculum Committee



Pilots who spoke for Lisa Brunegruff's course include (from left) Nicole Banks, Addison Barbeau, Roberta Woronowicz, Savannah Dearden and Abigail Abercrombie. Class members Esteban Selles (left) and Al Kilby are also pilots. Other photos show books used, a model of the jet that Barbeau flew, and her epaulets. (Photos by Alison Toney)

BALLOONS TO SPACECRAFT: WOMEN IN AVIATION



Lisa Brunegruff taught a fantastic new course on women in aviation this spring.

The class highlighted many women who piloted various vehicles, including hot air balloons, gliders, airplanes, dirigibles, helicopters and spacecraft. Many women pioneer aviators were highlighted for their achievements, performance records including firsts, and contributions to aviation.

A few of those discussed include Harriet Quimby; Pancho Barnes; Beryl Markham, who wrote about her aviation adventures in her memoir, *West with the Night*; and Louise Thaden, who won the first transcontinental Women's Air Derby, nicknamed the "Powder Puff Derby," in 1929. Thaden was the first woman to win the Bendix Trophy with her co-pilot, Blanche Noyes, in 1936 by flying from Los Angeles to New York in under 15 hours.

Five local aviators from the Ninety-Nines were invited to the last class. They shared their experiences and met with the class during the following reception. The Ninety-Nines is the International Organization of Women Pilots, founded by 99 women pilots in 1929 for the mutual support and advancement of woman pilots. Amelia Earhart was the first president.

The local pilots presenting were:

- Nicole Banks, an active pilot, antique aircraft enthusiast, and aviation insurance specialty broker.
- Addison Barbeau, a flight instructor and professional airline pilot who previously flew with Silver Airlines.
- Maj. Roberta Woronowicz, a Black Hawk helicopter pilot for the U.S. Army.
- Savannah Raskey Dearden, an F-35 fighter pilot in the Air National Guard of the U.S. Air Force.
- Abigail Abercrombie, an instrument-rated private pilot and vice chair of the Ninety-Nines.

This summer, the Events Committee has organized a docent-led tour of the Beechcraft Museum in Tullahoma, Tennessee, to view several hangars of Beechcraft planes from 1932 through the present, aviation artifacts and memorabilia, and an exhibit on Louise Thaden.

Online registration will be available under special events at uah.edu/olli.

Alison Toney
Arts & Letters Chair
Curriculum Committee

Curriculum Committee

OLLI FALL COURSE PROPOSALS DUE MAY 15



OLLI at UAH offers a wide and varied selection of engaging, dynamic courses. These offerings are shaped not only by instructor ideas but also by requests from our broader community.

Consider what has inspired you in the past or what you would like to explore in the future. What courses have you especially enjoyed? What new topics would you like to see offered? We encourage you to share your ideas with

the OLLI program director, Clay Williams, or the Curriculum Committee chair, Richard Brooks.

If you are interested in teaching a course, the process begins with a conversation. Reach out to the Curriculum Committee chair or the appropriate discipline chair (listed in the spring Course Guide) to discuss your idea and how it might best be presented. You can then complete the presentation proposal form that the discipline chair can provide. Proposals are due May 15.

Let us continue to foster intellectual curiosity and active engagement through the diverse courses at OLLI at UAH.

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

Member Interest Groups

COMING NEXT: BIG COVE CREEK, WADE MOUNTAIN

Two more MIG activities are planned for April. The first one will offer the choice of a nature walk or bike ride on local greenways, while the second activity will be a hike at a Land Trust nature preserve.

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.

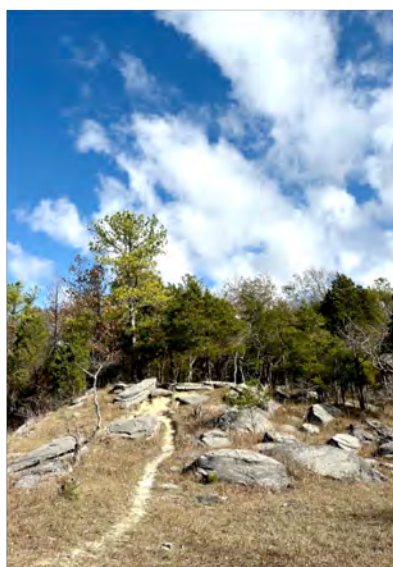
Join the MIG: <https://tinyurl.com/hike-bike-mig>

April MIG activities

- Sunday, April 12 — **Big Cove Creek/Flint River Greenways** (Hampton Cove), 1:30-3:30 p.m. Choose to take a leisurely walk along Big Cove Creek to the Flint River or ride your bike on the greenways (distance depends on group preference). Bring your own bike and pedal along an easy, relatively flat, scenic paved route along Big Cove Creek to Hays Preserve, and then along the Flint River Greenway to Southeast Old Highway 431. 3.5 miles one way (7 miles round trip).
- Saturday, April 25 — **Wade Mountain Nature Preserve** (north Huntsville), 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. 3.5 miles round trip, about 270-foot elevation gain.

See you on the trail!

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



Big Cove Creek/Flint River Greenways (top) and Wade Mountain Nature Preserve.

Travel Committee

EXPLORE GERMANY AND ITS TIES TO ALABAMA IN '27



The first 2027 trip is getting ready to open. Here's an introduction:

- **From Alabama to Germany and back again** — May 15-24, 2027. The threads connecting these two places are woven through triumph, innovation and transformation. This curated journey traces the remarkable ties between the Heart of Dixie and modern Germany. Walk through Berlin's Olympic Park, where Oakville's own

Jesse Owens defied Nazi ideology with four gold medals. Explore Peenemünde's rocket research facility, birthplace of technology that launched America's space program from Huntsville. Learn about the Berlin Airlift, when Alabama airmen helped save a city. And tour Hamburg's Airbus plant, mirroring Mobile's own operations. Discover how Alabama's story intersects with Germany's across continents and generations. To express an interest in attending this adventure with fellow OLLI members or to request more information, contact Lisa Brunegraff or go to <https://tinyurl.com/olli-germany-27>.



The Brandenburg Gate in Berlin and Peenemünde Historical-Technical Museum are among sites to see in Germany. Learn about Germany and its connections with Alabama during OLLI's group tour in May 2027.



Our fantastic Travel Committee members have itchy feet for exciting places. Over the next couple of months, we will provide details of new and exciting travel experiences. Stay tuned as we announce plans for 2027 and 2028 adventures.

You can still sign up for these trips in 2026:

- Steve Goodman is leading a wonderful **cruise along the Dalmatian coast** — April 24-May 11, 2026. This cruise 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 <https://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. The cost per person is \$4,699 (double occupancy, land only). For a detailed itinerary and registration information, contact Chris Stuhlinger or visit <https://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 offers: 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 <https://tinyurl.com/olli-nm-2026>.

Here are a few of the destinations that are still in the works:

- Kentucky — Bourbon Trail, rolling hills, horse races
- Northwestern United States, including Oregon: Rose Festival, roses, tulips and horse races
- Michigan — the Tulip Time Festival in Holland, Michigan, and Mackinac Island
- New York — Finger Lakes and Corning Museum of Glass
- Japan
- Alabama parks
- The best of Arkansas
- River cruise

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

News From UAH

OLLI NEVER WINDS DOWN

Spring weather is truly here, although our semester is winding down. It is hard to believe that we have only a month remaining of classes. There are still some wonderful bonuses and special events to attend, so we hope you take advantage of the opportunities. Register now online.

As your courses end, please remember to complete evaluation surveys that are emailed to you. These surveys help our wonderful instructors improve their courses and are useful for staff and the Curriculum Committee in planning for future semesters.

Putting a wrap on the semester is our annual meeting and dinner, which will take place on Tuesday, May 19, at Burritt on the Mountain. The event includes a dinner and bar plus announcements of the new Board of Directors and the coveted Volunteer of the Year Award. Its always a fun evening with our family, which is what OLLI is all about. By the time this newsletter comes out, ticket information should be available.

With spring semester on the verge of completion, it is time to talk about our summer semester.

Staff is finalizing a wonderful set of courses that will help you stay active during the summer months. The summer session takes place in June and July and features courses that are shorter in length to fit into everyone's hectic summer months. Details on registration will be available either later this month or the first of May, so be on the lookout.

We also have a few surprises set for August that we will announce in the next month or two. Plus, preparations for the fall semester have begun.

Fall classes will start in September. OLLI never truly winds down, as we are here year-round to keep you active and



**Clay Williams has returned to power.
Last month's insurrection is only a fuzzy memory.
(Photos by Justin Clay)**

involved. Remember, learning never stops or retires.

In conclusion, I do want to extend my thanks to those who reached out to me in support after I was "indisposed" for last month's column. Your heartfelt concern was much appreciated. I managed to extricate myself and am fully back in charge of the situation. Both of you will be well-remembered.

Until the next coup ...

Clay Williams
OLLI at UAH Program Manager



Member Interest Groups

DINE OUT MIG VISITS SUSHIME ASIAN BISTRO

The Dine Out Member Interest Group visited Sushime Asian Bistro on University Drive Northwest on March 19. The restaurant features Asian cuisine in a décor that incorporates contemporary Asian elements. (Photo from Sandra Dabrowski)

People of OLLI

HURRICANE CAMILLE PASSED OVER ROBBIE HOOD'S HOUSE. SHE LATER STUDIED HURRICANES FOR NASA.

By Glen Adams

A father who was a rocket engineer and who once gave Wernher von Braun a tour. Watching rocket tests as a girl. Experiencing Hurricane Camille going directly over her house. Flying through four different hurricanes. Working with Native American scientists to create training opportunities for Indian students. These are just some of Robbie Hood's life adventures.

Robbie has led an exciting life and continues to do so. She is the subject of this month's *Insider* profile.

Robbie grew up in Neosho in southwest Missouri. There her father was a test manager for the Rocketdyne facility, which tested rocket engines before they were delivered to NASA for the Apollo program. He gave a tour of the facility to von Braun, an engineer and leader in Huntsville and the U.S. space program. Robbie's father would call the family right before an engine test, and they would all troop out to watch. "I will always remember the great force of the rocket blast shaking a forest of nearby trees," Robbie said.

Her parents also owned a farm and raised Hereford cattle. Robbie and her brother and sister grew up in the country playing in the fields, woods and creeks.

In the late '60s, the family moved to Picayune, Mississippi, when the Apollo engine testing was put at what is now the NASA Stennis Space Center. They stayed for only a few years because her parents missed the farm. But they were eventful years.

"I started eighth grade the year the Mississippi schools were integrated," said Robbie. "I gained a friendship with a Black female student because we were both the new kids in the school. And Hurricane Camille passed directly over our house. The power of the storm and the vast destruction it caused along the coast sparked my interest in weather and its impact on people."



Robbie Hood's family includes Robbie, Michael, and their three children: Sam in front and Dusty (left) and Kelsey in back. Robbie visited the home of her ancestor Cherokee Chief John Ross. Robbie's father, Kenneth Hood (left), gave Wernher von Braun a tour of Rocketdyne's test facility in Neosho, Missouri. Robbie and a NASA crew member prepared for takeoff on a hurricane science flight in a DC-8. In 2023, Robbie and Michael met Glen Adams by chance at a gold mine in Colorado and found that they lived near each other. Glen wrote this story.



Robbie and family returned to Neosho, where she graduated from high school and then went to community college, majoring in physics. She next went to the University of Missouri in Columbia to earn a B.S. in atmospheric science. From there, it was on to Florida State University for an M.S. in physical meteorology.

She not only got a degree, but also met her future husband, Michael Goodman, a fellow meteorologist.

They spent the next three years with Robbie in Boston and Michael in Madison, Wisconsin. When the forecast was right, they both moved to Washington, D.C., and married.

In 1986, they moved to Huntsville to work at NASA's Earth Science Division, and they have pretty much been here since.

"At NASA I worked on a team of scientists and engineers who studied precipitation within thunderstorms and hurricanes using a sensor mounted to an aircraft that could fly over the storms," said Robbie.

"I eventually became the NASA lead scientist for several large international weather experiments that were conducted in places like Australia, Brazil, Costa Rica and the Marshall Islands. These experiments used aircraft

(continued on the next page)

People of OLLI

ROBBIE HOOD, cont from previous page

carrying weather instruments, radar on the ground and weather balloons to study the rain, wind and lightning features of storms over the ocean. I got to fly through four different hurricanes on a DC-8 aircraft at 30,000 feet as other scientific aircraft passed below and weather satellites passed above.”

After 21 years at NASA, Robbie took a new job managing a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration program that tested the benefit of using drones to collect data for weather forecasting and ocean health monitoring. The job was in Washington, so Robbie and Michael spent nine years once again in a long-distance relationship.

Robbie retired from the federal government in 2017.

She has used her free time to explore her Indigenous heritage. Robbie is a direct descendant of Chief John Ross,

who was the leader of the Cherokees during the Trail of Tears. She is an at-large citizen of the Cherokee Nation and has researched Cherokee history in this area.

Robbie is also a letterpress artist who works with antique wood type letters and pictures to print posters and greeting cards.

In addition, Robbie has worked with the National Center for Atmospheric Research to explore how low-cost weather stations could be used by Native American communities for student training.

And she helped Native American scientists present their Earth Science research at the annual conference of the American Meteorological Society.

In her remaining free time, Robbie volunteers at the Food Bank of North Alabama.

Robbie and Michael have three adult children:

- Daughter Dusty, who is an orthopedic physician’s assistant in Chicago
- Daughter Kelsey, who is the manager of the Middle Eastern portfolio at the World Economic Forum in Geneva, Switzerland
- Son Sam, who lives in Huntsville and works remotely for Futura Systems, a computer firm in Atlanta that develops geographical information applications used to digitally map utility lines and power stations.

Robbie joined OLLI in 2024 and has already taken a variety of classes, ranging from the ukulele, tai chi, the North American Indians, English royalty and pirates.

Thanks, Robbie, for the many talents you are bringing to OLLI.

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Member Interest Groups



A NEW KNITTING MIG AND A BIRTHDAY

Pam Collopy (top left) is coordinator of the new Mindfulness in Knitting Member Interest Group, which meets Fridays at 10 a.m. in Wilson Hall. Members who were attending on March 6 are in the bottom left photo. On the same day at the Tai Chi MIG, Roxanne Pennington (left) and Pam celebrated having the same birthday, March 9. (Photos by Sue Chatham)

CLASSROOM VIDEOS WITHOUT AD INTERRUPTIONS

Advertising will not interrupt videos shown in OLLI classes this semester if instructors use YouTube Premium, now available to them.

OLLI subscribed to YouTube Premium with help from a member who donated to the OLLI Support Fund. The donation honored Vanitha Singh, a

teacher who often uses videos. Her courses this semester are "Great Books: Reclaiming Conversation" and "Antidotes" (countering misinformation).

Teachers should coordinate their YouTube plans with OLLI staff, said Program Manager Clay Williams.

Videos embedded in slide presentations may require special attention.

The Support Fund is one of three options for OLLI donations at <https://tinyurl.com/olli-uah-donate>. If you want to donate for a specific purpose, contact Clay (Clay.P.Williams@uah.edu).

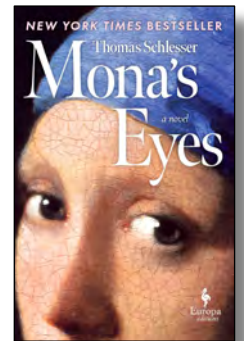
Member Interest Groups



OLLI READS WILL NOW MEET MONTHLY



The OLLI Reads Member Interest Group discussed Dan Brown's novel *The Secret of Secrets* on March 18 and decided to start meeting monthly, rather than every other month. The next meeting will be at noon Wednesday, April 22, in Wilson Hall, and the topic will be *Mona's Eyes* by Thomas Schlessler. This novel is about a 10-year-old girl who is in danger of losing her sight permanently. Her grandfather takes her on 52 weekly visits to art masterpieces in Paris. Mona learns how art shapes life, as well as lessons about generosity, melancholy, love, loss and revolution. On May 20, the topic will be *State of Segregation: America's Freedom Rights Struggles as Told by Alabama*, a nonfiction book to be published this month by OLLI member Mark Tenhundfeld. For more information about Mark's book, see Page 19. (Photos by Jill Stewart)



EXPLORING BLEVINS GAP NATURE PRESERVE

The Hiking & Biking Member Interest Group took a hike March 8 at Blevins Gap Nature Preserve (Varnedoe trail).



(Photos from Chris Stuhlinger)

Member Interest Groups



The quilts of Gee's Bend represent community and creativity by enslaved people and their descendants. (Images from Wikimedia Commons and Wikipedia)

WOMEN'S HISTORY: GEE'S BEND FOLK ART

Gee's Bend, known as Boykin since 1949, is a small, rural community southwest of Selma. The Alabama River surrounds the hamlet on three sides. Because of this isolation, quilts were more than just necessities; they became artistic expressions of women's lives, experiences and cultural heritage.

Gee's Bend history was marked not only by inequality, racism and poverty but also by community and creativity. The quilt-making tradition from these African American women dates to the 19th century.

Gee's Bend began in 1816, when Joseph Gee settled the land with his slaves. He expanded his cotton plantation until he sold both people and land to another relative, Mark Pettway, in 1845. Even though nationwide emancipation was ratified in 1865, many of these formerly enslaved people remained, becoming sharecroppers and later landowners.

Throughout the 20th century, the population lived in extreme poverty, which resulted in quilts becoming an essential part of daily life.

In winter, quilts fought off the bitter cold in beds or screened, wood-slatted walls, or they covered floors where drafts seeped into the homes. Without access to store-bought goods, women used whatever materials they had — old



work clothes and discarded fabric or feed, flour and fertilizer sacks — to piece together quilts that would keep their families warm.

The transference of aesthetic knowledge and skills from generation to generation was fundamental. The list of surnames of Gee's Bend women quilters reads like a family genealogy — Pettway, Bendolph, Kennedy, Bennett — sometimes four generations deep. Mothers instructed their daughters and granddaughters to create fabric artworks from a patchwork of materials.

Unlike the symmetrical patterns of traditional quilting, these “my way” quilts emphasized originality because of their imperfections and untrained creators. Gee's Bend quilts are personal and spontaneously created — drawing comparisons to modern abstract art. The quilts' bold colors and designs unknowingly replicate the ideals of modern abstract art movements: Frank Stella, Paul Klee, Piet Mondrian, Josef Albers, Agnes Martin, and hard-edge painters such as Ad Reinhardt.

However, many researchers state the quilts' patterns can be linked to West African tribal traditions. Historically, African textiles featured geometric patterns, natural shapes, and line repetitions combined with brilliant colors. So compare

(continued on the next page)

People of OLLI

BOOK EXAMINES STATE'S CIVIL RIGHTS LAW, HISTORY

Mark Tenhundfeld's new book tells the story of Alabama's civil rights struggles by examining law and history.

The book — *State of Segregation: America's Freedom Rights Struggles as Told by Alabama* — became available on March 27 from The University of Alabama Press at <https://tinyurl.com/state-of-segregation>. Blue Apple Books will have it in time for an event April 11 from 1 to 3 p.m. at 14 Main St. in Madison. Online sellers will be able to deliver it by April 15.

"I wrote the book because I wanted to help preserve the legacies and lessons of the freedom rights struggles in Alabama," Mark said. "Alabamians inherit a past that is largely ignored by many. Perhaps that's because the history is unknown, or uncomfortable, or considered irrelevant. This book tries to overcome all three obstacles by telling stories of how our struggles have helped shape the rights that all Americans enjoy today."

He said the book, which examines 32 U.S. Supreme Court cases, was written for a general audience. He "would particularly love for kids in Alabama schools to learn from their forebears that individuals can defeat institutional injustice, but that no one should take progress for granted."

"As I write at one point in the book, while people alive today didn't cause or cure slavery or the Jim Crow laws, '[we] will be measured by how honestly and successfully we deal with the problems that remain. Chances are that history will treat us a lot more kindly if we accept her offer of help.'"

UA Press describes the book as "exposing systemic discrimination and the enduring fight for justice" by blending "legal analysis, historical narrative and social commentary



Mark Tenhundfeld's book is available from University of Alabama Press, and a Madison store will have it in time for a book event April 11.

to expose the deep-rooted systems of racial, gender, and class-based discrimination in Alabama."

Both Mark and his wife, Lynda, are OLLI members. As a lawyer for 26 years, he worked at banking agencies and as head of regulatory policy for the American Bankers Association. He then taught high school government and economics for 12 years.

He is an OLLI board member and has taught OLLI courses, including one about the Supreme Court's history and another that he describes as an abridged version of his book. He and John Mason are writing a monthly column about the U.S. Constitution for *The Insider* and are thinking about teaching a Constitution course next spring.

Member Interest Groups

GEE'S BEND, cont from previous page

the designs yourself by examining the tribal backgrounds of Kente papermaking, Ankara textile cotton, or Mbuti bark-cloth. Review online traditional African basket or mat weaving made from elephant grass, raffia, sisal or palm leaves.

Gee's Bend quilters turned an everyday necessity into an icon of artistic creativity. Patchwork masterpieces made by the recycling of old materials resulted in a unique approach to quilt design.

The Whitney Museum of American Art, the National Gallery of Art, and the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C., have

displayed Gee's Bend quilts. In 2002, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, presented Souls Grown Deep. This Collection Transfer Program (<https://www.soulsgrowndeep.org/museums>) resulted in Gee's Bend quilts being part of the permanent collections in over 40 museums across three continents.

These Alabama women's artistic legacy provides a crucial chapter in the history of folk art quilting, of African American art, and of Southern American art.

Jean Krieger, Leader, Artist Studio MIG

PLATO DESCRIBES OUR GOVERNMENT?

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

By John Mason

In the past few months, Mark Tenhundfeld and I have been discussing the first three articles of our Constitution that outline governmental separation of powers — a mainstay of our founders’ vision. This month, I am going to attempt to — in a very roundabout way — tie that discussion up with some thoughts on what happens if those very prescient ideals fail to work. To do that, I’m going to reflect on a book on government written some 2,400 years ago (about 375 BCE): Plato’s *Republic*.

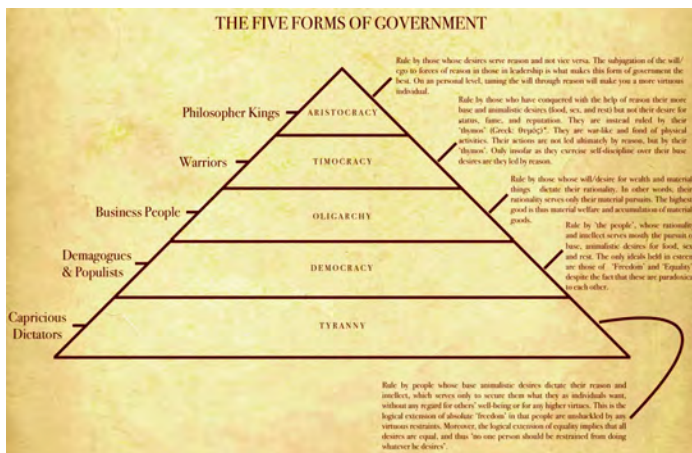
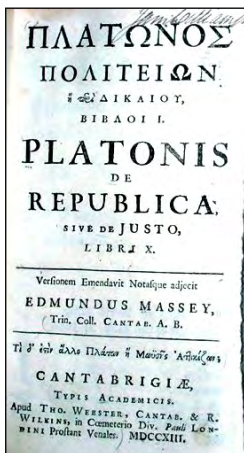


The *Republic* ostensibly develops the formation and government of the perfect city, Kallipolis, which Plato sets as his first type of state. Kallipolis is in reality a metaphor for explaining the human soul and

the necessity of understanding the importance of justice, wisdom and knowledge such that we can search for what he calls “The Good,” essentially the best we can individually be. Nevertheless, it provides us with a necessary lesson.

In addition to Kallipolis (the pure aristocracy), in the *Republic*’s sections most philosophers term Books VIII and IX, Plato discusses four types of what he calls “defective cities” (governments) that result from the degradation of his perfect state:

- Timocracy (rule by honor and military strength).
- Oligarchy (rule by the wealthy).
- Democracy (rule by the masses). This may have been Plato’s



Plato’s *Republic* and his five forms of government. (Wikimedia Commons)

preferred state, but he was concerned that too many disparate groups could cause its ultimate downfall by replacing virtues like justice and reason with spirit and appetites.

- Tyranny (rule by a single despot arising from the chaos of democracy).

While philosophers generally agree that this sequence is logical, they don’t all agree that it is a historical inevitability. Still, it demands our attention.

How does this relate to us, you wonder? Well, let’s take a look.

It turns out that our founders knew their Greek! They also knew the political philosophies of the enlightenment espoused by the likes of John Locke, who argued for “natural rights” (life, liberty and property), profoundly influencing the U.S. Declaration of Independence, and Baron de Montesquieu’s separation of powers (legislative, executive and judicial branches), directly influencing the U.S. Constitution’s checks and balances. And so, they proceeded to create a new government based on those principles.

John Adams had an inventive genius for constitutional architecture. Having left the Timocratic rule of King George III, he did not believe America was

being founded as an oligarchy (even though the founders themselves could probably be termed oligarchs), but he deeply feared it would become one.

He viewed the concentration of wealth as a dangerous threat to the young republic, arguing that a small, influential elite could easily dominate government and subvert democratic principles. The wealthy, he believed, get their way politically not because they buy influence, but because the very possession of wealth evokes the sympathy and admiration of ordinary people, who tend to associate wealth with happiness. He aimed to build a balanced democratic government to prevent such a concentration of power.

In his book *John Adams and the Fear of American Oligarchy*, Luke Mayville explores Adams’ defense of bicameralism and a unitary executive. Adams envisioned the chief magistrate as the natural ally of “the many” against “the few.” The Senate he conceived as a place of dignified quarantine for those dangerous few. “Adams’s solution,” Mayville explains, “was to corral the most distinguished citizens into a single chamber — one part of government, thereby preventing them from dominating all of government.”

Thomas Jefferson, on the other hand, (continued on the next page)

Constitutional Corner

PLATO DESCRIBES OUR GOVERNMENT? cont

believed that Americans, once properly educated (a key to Plato's perfect state!), could be trusted to separate the many from the few. Adams disagreed, but he did think a proper constitutional design could ameliorate the question.

Into the fray came the authors of *The Federalist*, who favored a representative republic over both pure democracy (which they feared would lead to tyranny of the majority) and oligarchy. They argued a large, diverse republic prevents any single faction — wealthy or poor — from dominating, utilizing representation and checks and balances to ensure stability. And in the end, this was the compromise chosen. It has worked pretty well!

As the founding fathers debated our Constitution, though, they remembered Plato's remonstrance that demagogues exploited democratic free speech to install themselves as tyrants. They sought to avoid this evil that they, like the ancient philosophers, called tyranny, thinking it the usurpation of power by a single individual or group, or the circumvention of law by rulers for their own benefit.

Why were they so concerned? Here's how Plato described the process:

The same thing happens with the popular leader. The mob will do anything he tells them, and the temptation to shed a brother's blood is too strong. He brings the usual

unjust charges against him, takes him to court and murders him, thus destroying a human life, and getting an unholy taste of the blood of his fellows. Exiles, executions, hints of cancellation of debts and redistribution of land follow, till their instigator is inevitably and fatally bound either to be destroyed by his enemies, or to change from man to wolf and make himself tyrant. ... [T]he greater the unpopularity of this [his] policy[ies], the larger and the more trustworthy must be his bodyguard.

Thus was born the separations of power and the checks and balances that, to paraphrase James Madison, prevent any one faction from becoming dominant.

In essence, then, the founders gave us all the tools we need to keep Plato's final degradation of state from happening. They gave us the Constitution, and they hoped we would elect representatives of honor and character, who would abide by that document's intent, striving to lead using only justice and "The Good."

Those are powerful ideals! The challenge, as Mark told me, "is for a country as large and as diverse as America to agree on how to achieve those ideals or even what the ideals are in the first place." Plato wasn't clear about how to prevent or to cure the fall from democracy, but the founders provided the outline. It's up to us to follow it.



Mark your calendar!

OLLI at UAH

Annual Meeting

- Food ■ Fellowship ■ Fun ■ Awards
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**5:30 p.m. on Tuesday, May 19, 2026,
at Baron Bluff at**

Burritt on the Mountain

3101 Burritt Drive SE, Huntsville

Tickets will cost \$35. Watch for details.

Huntsville Then and Now

Deb Barnhart (right foreground) with Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey. Dr. Barnhart was CEO of the U.S. Space & Rocket Center from 2010 to 2019. She died March 11 at age 73. (Photo from U.S. Space & Rocket Center)



DEB BARNHART WAS BOLD AND FULL OF IDEAS



By Lee Roop

When Dr. Deborah Barnhart died last month, everyone noticed. From statewide news agencies calling her influential to distinguished leaders across the political spectrum who called her strong, Barnhart was a force everyone seemed to know.

No surprise, really, since Deb, a retired Navy captain and one of the first 10 women assigned to duty aboard ships, commanded five units in her 25-year career.

She was a vice president of three large aerospace companies and she had several stops at the U.S. Space & Rocket Center, finally as CEO. The center calls her “a great friend and champion.”

To many locals, Deb was even more. She made deep connections and impressions on people who met her only once or worked with her regularly.

For me, she was a decades-long friend. Deb and I met at Butler High School, where she was in the class ahead of me. She was big and bold and full of ideas. Even in Huntsville’s bubbling stew of talent, energy and brains from everywhere, she stood out.

Deb actually “worked” for me in 1970 when she managed my run for Butler’s student body president. It was an event many likely don’t remember, but it’s something I never forgot.

“I’m hearing big things about your speech,” a young teacher told me as we walked to the Butler High School gym for Round 2 of the campaign’s speeches for students. Word

was getting around that I was challenging the status quo. I was taking on “the man.”

Deb was my speechwriter, and I still remember sitting at her kitchen table in west Huntsville working on my speech. She told me to go for it, to demand change. Tone the speech down? That wasn’t happening on any project Deb was involved in then. Or ever.

“A student should be able to grow his hair to his collar,” I said in my opening salvo. I continued with demands for more freedom for the student newspaper and other radical ideas for this Southern town that hadn’t caught up to the changes happening around the country.

It’s laughable now, but people gasped. And the gym fell silent. There were a few cheers, and there were boos.

My campaign fell short of winning. That’s a nice way of putting it. We were massacred. I can still hear my former girlfriend delivering her disgusted “I hate you” — pronounced “chew” — embarrassed for ever having been associated with the likes of me.

I survived my ignominy and made friends with a lot of people who were ready to catch up with the present. I went on to college and a long career in journalism where on a good day I comforted the afflicted and afflicted the comfortable, as the saying goes. I hope I lived up to the absolute certainty Deb Barnhart had in my ability to shake things up.

Deb went on to so many things, always carrying that same fire and conviction she had at that kitchen table on 10th Street.

It is hard to believe that fire has gone out. The world is dimmer without it.

Rest in peace, Deb.



‘NEITHER RAIN, NOR SLEET, NOR SNOW ...’

Classes had barely started on the morning of March 16 — the day after spring break — when snow began falling. The weather did not deter students, including those who showed up at Maple Hill Cemetery for Chris Stuhlinger’s course on tree identification and historic gravesites. Seven people, about one-fourth of the enrollment, attended the shortened session, during which the snow subsided. “As you know,” Chris commented, “‘neither rain, nor sleet, nor snow’ will keep us OLLI members from learning!” (Photos by Alice Searcy and Steve Stewart)

3 UAH STUDENTS RECEIVING OLLI SCHOLARSHIPS

Three UAH undergraduate students are benefiting from scholarships given by OLLI:

- **Isabella Clifton** is working toward a Bachelor of Science, majoring in biological sciences with a concentration in biochemistry and a minor in marketing. She has tutored other students through UAH’s Student Success Center. She wants to earn a master’s degree, work in a research lab studying genetics and the impact of nurture on health, continue tutoring, and potentially teach in higher education. “My hobbies include all things artsy,” she said. “I love many forms of traditional art, including painting, crocheting and pottery. I love creating digital designs and webpage formats. I love theater, playing the piano and singing.”

- **Yessenia Reyes-Pascual** is pursuing a bachelor’s in chemical engineering. She wants to work part time or as an intern while in school, go to law school and become a lawyer. Her hobbies include watching movies, painting and drawing, sudoku, web surfing, collecting tabletop games and playing the flute.
- **Neomi Marriam** is seeking a B.S. in business administration with a management major and a human resources minor. She plans a career in human resources. She has served as an ambassador for the College of Business and was named one of the top 20 business students of 2025. She participated in the Boeing Innovation Challenge and the SAIC Joint Concept Challenge. She joined campus organizations such as DECA (formerly Distributive Education

Clubs of America), Women in Business and Leadership, and the Society of Collegiate Leadership and Achievement. She volunteers in Habitat for Humanity building projects and Manna House food distribution. She enjoys spending time outdoors, reading, cooking and taking on creative projects.

All three students expressed thanks for the financial support.

The OLLI at UAH Scholarship Fund helps deserving UAH undergraduate students. The scholarship assists in covering the cost of higher education, including tuition, books, housing and fees.

You can donate for scholarships at <https://tinyurl.com/olli-uah-donate>. Two other OLLI giving options — the Support Fund and Legacy Giving — are available on the same page.

A BROADWAY THEATRE RECEPTION — & JULIET

OLLI members received discounted tickets and a reception at the Broadway Theatre League's Feb. 27 performance in the Von Braun Center of *& Juliet*, a jukebox musical that asks what would happen if Juliet had outlived Romeo. Kip Driver, BTL's communications director, is wearing the "It's Show Time!" shirt here. A ticket discount is also available on *Water for Elephants* on May 5 at 7 p.m. It is a musical about a young man who finds new life and love on a circus train after his dreams collapse. Phone 256-518-6155 and mention OLLI to pay \$68 or \$77 per ticket, depending on closeness to the stage.



(Photos by Steve Stewart)

The Last Word

MEET JANET, GUARDIAN OF THE WELCOME DESK

Some elves sprinkle their magic with glitter and fanfare. Others — like Janet — bring their magic through presence, consistency, and a smile that makes every visitor feel instantly at home.

Every term, without fail, Janet “mans” the OLLI volunteer office for at least one two-hour shift — and often several more. She’s one of those dependable behind-the-scenes helpers who quietly keep the heartbeat of OLLI steady. Whether she’s greeting members, welcoming newcomers, or helping someone track down an answer, Janet brings warmth and calm to the office.

Her contributions don’t stop there. Janet joins OLLI trips, attends special functions, and steps in to help with socials whenever she’s needed. She’s present, engaged, and always ready to lend a hand — no fuss, no spotlight, just genuine care for the community she loves.



Janet Creech

So if you stop by the office and find Janet at the desk, consider yourself lucky. You’ve just encountered one of OLLI’s most gracious and quietly powerful elves.

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

RETENTION: THE KEY TO A STRONGER OLLI



Keep members engaged by welcoming them, mentoring them, building teams and telling success stories.
(Art by Meta Artificial Intelligence)

By Suezy Proctor

When volunteers step into a new role, they often inherit lists, files and responsibilities — but not always the context to explain how everything fits together. Clear onboarding and mentorship can make all the difference.

Recruiting new members is important — but retention is what keeps an organization strong.

When members are given what they need to achieve their goals, and when participation is fun and engaging, renewal happens naturally — whether programs are online, in person, or hybrid.

Too often organizations focus most of their energy on recruitment, yet the real strength of an organization comes from keeping the members it already has.

Retention builds institutional knowledge. We need members who have worked the program inside and out — people who understand how

things function and can guide others. When experienced members leave, we don’t just lose people — we lose knowledge.

One way to strengthen retention is to build teams. If a role feels overwhelming, recruit an understudy or two — or even a small team. Shared responsibility lightens the load and prepares the next generation of leaders.

Storytelling also helps. Volunteer testimonials, impact statistics, and success stories remind members why their work matters and how it contributes to OLLI’s mission.

Finally, onboarding matters. A clear and welcoming process helps new volunteers understand expectations, feel they belong, and become confident contributors. Done well, onboarding transforms motivated newcomers into engaged, long-term supporters.

Recruitment brings people in. Retention helps them stay, grow and lead.