A TIME OF TRANSITION

A Word from our Director

We members of OLLI at DU are in for a time of transition. We have raised our term membership fee for the first time ever; we will be moving to an on-line registration process most likely during the Spring term; and I am only the second Executive Director for the organization as we bid farewell to Vonnie Wheeler who has been our guiding force for 21 years… since our beginning.

I have enjoyed the good fortune of overlapping with Vonnie for the two months leading up to the Fall term. Her knowledge of the University of Denver and of the Osher Foundation were difficult to condense even into that time frame. I am certain we missed a few of the contacts and bits of information that such a lengthy continuum of service obtains.

With these data points as a back-drop, let me provide a bit of information about myself and my thinking about OLLI at DU. First, I have been a member for the past five years. I became engaged early in my OLLI tenure first on the OLLI 2020 Committee; then as a Facilitator (I received my Senior Facilitator acknowledgement this past Spring); as President of the OLLI South Advisory Council and finally as Chairperson of the OLLI South Curriculum Committee. I have served in an informal manner on many of the various committees and in discussion on a wide variety of OLLI endeavors. By profession I am an accountant (CPA) and retired as a Divisional Vice President of a corporate customer service organization, heading the office in the Denver area.

To me OLLI is, first and foremost, a volunteer organization. Our product is created by amazing volunteers who spend countless hours preparing and sharing. Our price point is where it is due to the volunteer nature of our culture. At our heart is the volunteer attitude of each and every OLLI member. It is my intention to further grow this attitude of volunteering.

Secondly, OLLI is a learning organization. Learning in this format embraces a wide array of subjects, topics, presentation approaches, and individual styles. I have written many articles particularly about the uniqueness of each of our amazing facilitators. The desire to learn more about a wide range of topics is why the vast majority of us are members of OLLI at DU and this will be the focus going forward.

And finally, our OLLI at DU community is of great importance. As with any community, those individuals who invest their time and energy are the ones who benefit the most. To that end I encourage you to step forward and bring your amazing skills, aptitudes and passions.

I look forward to leading this amazing organization of incredible individuals like yourself. Please join me in supporting OLLI at DU as we move through this time of transition.

- Barbe Ratcliffe, Executive Director

CELEBRATING & HONORING VONNIE WHEELER

Vonnie Wheeler was honored at a special celebration hosted by the University of Denver on August 24 in the Driscoll Ballroom. Dean Michael McGuire welcomed over 150 invited guests (including her four adult children and grandchildren). A special surprise video titled “Vonnie’s Life in Acts” (created by OLLI South member Charlie Holt with help from Anita Leitner, Karen Thorne and Dick Wisott) was shown and enjoyed by everyone. The video, which included interviews from those closest to Vonnie, began with photos of Vonnie as a child and ended portraying her diverse, wonderful and passionate personality.

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A MESSAGE FROM VONNIE WHEELER

How fortunate am I! I have just spent the last 21 years in the company of people who inspire me, make me question, make me laugh and who appreciate that special deep-down sense of curiosity. I knew after working with the early pioneers of OLLI that these were the type of people I wanted to "hang out with."

I thank you from the bottom of my heart for this special time. I feel such comfort knowing "the best is yet to come," and with Barbe at the helm I'm sure it will.

Thank you special friends!

(Editor's note: Vonnie Wheeler, who retired Sept. 15 as OLLI at DU’s executive director, co-founded VIVA! with Lucy Creighton in 1996 with under 100 members. Now known as OLLI, the program has grown to more than 5,200 members.)

KNOW YOUR BALLOT —ALL OF IT!

by Marjory Beal

This is an extremely important election year, not only for the top-of-the-ballot races, but also for the items which will affect Colorado voters statewide and locally. Colorado allows citizens to place initiatives on the ballot after collecting a requisite number of petition signatures (5% of the total votes cast in the last Secretary of State election). These measures may be one of three kinds:

1. A Constitutional amendment, which will become part of the Colorado Constitution and may only be changed by a vote of the people,
2. A Statutory change to Colorado law, which may be changed by the state Legislature, if deemed necessary.
3. Referenda items that the State Legislature places on the ballot, which they feel are important for the voters to approve or reject.

This year there are nine measures on the ballot for which voters must decide. They are as follows:

Referenda
Amendment T   No exemption to Involuntary Servitude Prohibition
Amendment U   Exempt Certain Possessory Interests from Colorado Property Taxes

Constitutional Amendments
Amendment 69   Statewide Healthcare System
Amendment 70   State Minimum Wage
Amendment 71   Requirements for Initiated Constitutional Amendments
Amendment 72   New Cigarette and Tobacco Taxes

Statutory Initiatives
Proposition 106 Medical Aid in Dying
Proposition 107 Presidential Primary Election
Proposition 108 Primary Elections

Obviously, voters cannot make an informed decision based only on the titles of these measures or the 30-second soundbites on TV. It is important that voters dig deeper in order to understand the initiatives and determine whether to support or oppose them. Each registered voter will receive “The Blue Book” which details each of the proposals. The book is compiled by a non-partisan group and is distributed to registered voters through the mail. Each proposed initiative is described, and the pros and cons of each are outlined. In addition, there are several other sources for information.

The League of Women Voters publishes a ballot issue booklet which includes similar information in a more succinct form. There are numerous discussions of the issues on public TV and radio. Online, VOTE411.org provides information on the issues as well as candidates for office in the individual’s place of residence. Also, the numerous local and regional elections, i.e. school board elections and county commission races, deserve careful consideration.

Don’t forget to review the judges that are up for retention or dismissal, as well. That information is also in the Blue Book.

Be an informed voter and protect our democracy at all levels.
HOT TOPICS LUNCHEON

The U.S. Supreme Court: What is at Stake in the November Election?

Nearly every issue that matters to the American people eventually finds its way before the U.S. Supreme Court. The next U.S. president will fill one vacancy on a court whose decisions often have been split evenly along ideological lines since the death of longtime Justice Antonin Scalia in February.

Michael Bender, a former Chief Justice of the Colorado Supreme Court, has plenty to say about the future of the U.S. Supreme Court and he will do just that at the Oct. 14 Hot Topics Luncheon hosted by OLLI Central. Bender will share facts about the court and mix in a fair dose of opinion as well when he talks at the Holiday Inn Denver-Cherry Creek.

Cost of the luncheon is $25 per person. The event is scheduled from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at the Holiday Inn, 455 S. Colorado Blvd, Denver.

To attend, send a $25 check made out to OLLI and mail to OLLI Hot Topics, 2211 S. Josephine St., Denver, CO 80208. Checks must be received by Oct. 2.

CANOE TRIP ON THE GUNNISON RIVER

by Barbara Shecter

It’s such a beautiful part of the state to explore by hiking or driving, but to be canoeing through the Gunnison Canyon (this past June) brings you so much closer to the landscape and the wildlife. Blue herons were our frequent companions as we paddled down the river, and petroglyphs were our window to the past as we hiked up Dominguez Canyon.

Swimming in the pools and waterfalls, delicious meals, starry night skies, singing, and learning from our guides were all an important part of the experience. And there was the delight of the time we spent talking to and learning about each other, while paddling, around camp, or while sharing meals.

How quickly we came together as a group – to support and encourage one another. An experience like this one with others who are interested, interesting, curious, and have a common perspective as OLLI members is a real opportunity that shouldn’t be missed!

SAVE THE DATE

OLLI INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM

Mark your calendars now. The OLLI International Symposium is scheduled for December 2. The focus of the symposium is on the response of other world super powers to the outcome of the U.S. presidential election.

We know that both candidates are a bit unique by the world’s standards. If either is elected, how will other super powers like China and Russia react? What might be the long term benefits and challenges of the future President and Congress? These questions and others will be addressed at this symposium.

Additional information will be forthcoming in the next few weeks. Space will be limited.
RUSSIA TRIP
by Janine Yunker and Brian Holland

The WorldView Program at OLLI is dedicated to making the history and culture of a focused country come to life. Throughout the year we experienced Russia through classes, field trips to the Russian Orthodox Church, dinner at an ethnic Russian restaurant and most especially with a visiting scholar from Russia who conducted three six-week classes.

The year culminated with an unforgettable trip to St. Petersburg. After months of planning and research we put ourselves in the hands of our carefully selected “connector,” Irena, our tour guide who showed us the depth of her country’s history, art, culture and people. Irena is a university chemistry professor during the school year and a freelance St. Petersburg tour guide during the summers. As a third generation, life-long resident of St. Petersburg, she and her family have lived much of the history of Russian since the Russian Revolution.

Through Irena and her family’s history we learned of the 900-day siege of Leningrad by the Nazis. Her grandfather died during the siege, defending their city; her grandmother survived and saved her two daughters (Irena’s mother who was 9 and sister who was 11) from the impending Nazi invasion by putting the children on trains shepherded to Siberia by the Russian Air Force. Her grandmother found her daughters almost three years later after the siege ended and brought them back to the city secreted in the luggage rack of the train.

What was also so remarkable about this OLLI trip? We came out of the Russian Art Museum greatly impressed by the artists of this country. Every street, building, palace and museum held works of such beauty and artistry. The Church on Spilled Blood’s beautiful exterior onion domes and interior mosaics were among the most impressive of all the cathedrals.

In several palaces (Catherine the Great’s and Peterhof – Peter the Great’s) we saw black-and-white photos of the destruction brought by the Nazi bombardment and siege. It is a tribute to the Russian people that these palaces and many others have been restored to their former glory.

Our visit to the Russian Political Museum was an eye-opener to how the Russians view their history. Our visits to a mosque and synagogue were made more memorable when we learned that the people of both of these communities were practicing their religions during the Soviet era when most religious institutions were closed and churches were used as warehouses.

One of our more memorable journeys was a meeting with the U.S. Consul and his staff. Fascinating to all of us was the dedication of these career American foreign service professionals in helping Americans in Russia during this conflict era dominated by Putin and his distrust of America.

We learned so much from Irena: from history to who sculpted a particular piece of work (whether on a building or in museums) to life today in St. Petersburg. She joined us for most evening meals, including our memorable meal at Troika Restaurant, which was followed by burlesque entertainment -- one we won’t soon forget as an OLLI “cultural immersion.”

REMEMBERING VICKI JONES

Victoria Jones, a former OLLI at DU facilitator and member of the Olli Central Advisory Council, passed away in late August at her home in Aurora at age 71.

Vicki was a producer of African American-oriented public affairs shows at Boston’s WHDH-tv who had been president of the Boston association of black journalists and, in the late 1990s, a board member of the national association of black journalists.

“Vicki was a great lady,” said Anita Leitner, a fellow member of the Olli Central Council. “I remember her especially for all the classes she facilitated and for our retreat two years ago when she talked about “people of color.”

Vicki was a Denver native who returned home in 2011.
THE OLLI LUNCH BUNCH

A group of OLLI facilitators, about 20 at the beginning, began to have lunch together every Thursday at a restaurant called 730 South (it was called something else originally).

According to longtime facilitator Dick Wisott, “We have been meeting every Thursday year around without fail and we have now reached a dozen years. We are given the back room so it is semi-private and we just lost our fourth person who died recently so our numbers are dwindling. But there’s still a core group of about 8 to 10 depending on weather and such.”

Wisott spoke earlier this year to the owner and suggested that he should put the group’s picture on the wall of the back room. He readily agreed, and the original picture was printed on metal and place on the wall along with a plaque, identifying OLLI at DU and the OLLI “Lunch Bunch.”

Celebrating & Honoring Vonnie Wheeler...

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Vonnie’s granddaughters also shared a song on stage that was created for the event titled “Grandma as a Carpenter.” Vonnie is a true carpenter in the literal sense – creating amazing woodworking pieces – but also as someone who has built marvelous programs and experiences for our OLLI program.

Following the event, Vonnie said, “I have never in my life experienced anything like this evening – I am so very, very appreciative.”

With less than 100 OLLI members the first year, Vonnie has guided our OLLI program to a record 5,240 members this year – an amazing accomplishment. Vonnie is a unique and rare individual with commitment, drive and passion – her infectious enthusiasm, curiosity, unbridled creativity and vision will be sorely missed by all our OLLI members.

WorldView 2016/2017

THE YEAR OF SPAIN

We will continue the WorldView program in 2016/2017 with the country of Spain.

Spain has a history that dates back to the Early Middle Ages. Its cultural heritage is one of the world’s richest and most varied as it is the result of many interesting elements over the course of thousands of years. The cultural elements range from the Romans, through the Moorish elements to the Reformation, with each culture. This unique combination shaped its culture, art and architecture adding its own color and flavor to the land. Spain has introduced the world to Flamenco music and dance, Spanish guitars, bullfighting and Bakalao, a Basque codfish stew, just to name a few.

During the coming OLLI year, we will learn more about Spain, its language and culture art and architecture. Several educational classes will be offered about this delightful country, culinary classes highlighting the cooking of Spain, and classes on the language and its influence on ours.

The WorldView ‘Year of Spain’ will culminate in a trip to the Moorish region of Andalusia in Southern Spain planned for June ‘17. The extraordinary diversity of landscape, lifestyle and culture sets Andalusia apart from the rest of country, making it an altogether different experience than Northern Spain. For information about this trip please email Debbie in the OLLI Office at Debra.Loftin@DU.edu and she will email you detailed information including the tentative itinerary.

We encourage you to share your passion for Spain as a facilitator. Please contact Barbe Ratcliffe at Barbara.Ratcliffe@DU.edu if you would like to bring Spain alive for your fellow OLLI members.

The OLLI at DU WorldView program continues … join us for a Year of Spain.
MORE PROTECTION TIPS FROM THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY’S OFFICE

Those attending the Feb. 11 Midday Morsels presentation by Maro Casparian, director of consumer fraud for the Denver District Attorney's Office, heard variable tips about warding off consumer fraud, financial scams and identify theft. Here are some of the DA's tips:

If Your Identify is Stolen

• You are not responsible for losses from ID theft. Your credit should not be permanently affected. Cooperate, but don't be coerced into paying a fraudulent debt.

• File a report with the police/sheriff in the jurisdiction where you live and get a copy of the report for the credit agencies, bank and credit card companies

• Cancel each credit card. Carefully monitor your credit card statements for evidence of fraudulent activity

• Contact your financial institution and cancel all accounts and PIN numbers. Stop payments on outstanding checks.

• Consider placing a security freeze on your credit file, or

• Report the theft to the fraud units of the credit reporting agencies. Request the credit reporting agencies to flag your credit file for fraud.

• Consider subscribing to a credit report monitoring service that includes fraud-watch emails and frequent credit reports

• Ask utility companies to watch for anyone ordering services in your name

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

OCTOBER 11
Midday Morsels. “Let’s Take a Walk in Our National Parks.”
Harvest Bible Chapel. 11:45 – 12:45.

OCTOBER 14
Hot Topics Lunch, OLLI Central
“The U.S. Supreme Court: What is at Stake in the November Election?” Holiday Inn Denver-Cherry Creek

NOVEMBER 11
Fall Term ends

NOVEMBER 14
Winter Term Registration Begins

DECEMBER 2
International Symposium

JANUARY 9
Winter Term Begins

Sheldon Friedman, longtime OLLI facilitator, retired lawyer, writer and playwright, has a new book published by Custom Books, Hong Kong. The book, The Velvet Prison, is available in hard paper and from Kindle Editions on Amazon.com. It will go into international distribution by the end of the month and be available in many different formats. The book is historical fiction, tracing the life of a young man who wants to be an artist and a young lady aspiring to be a Broadway star. Their two worlds collide and a family once shattered is brought together. Sheldon is presently facilitating The Genius of Woody Allen.

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