Welcome, everyone, to another year of lifelong learning study groups — a chance to explore topics that you’re excited to delve into now and to make new friends along the way. Welcome back to school. Whether you’ve been attending our sessions for years or have just registered for the first time, we’re glad to have you. No tests. Enjoy!

I’ve been asked to chair the steering committee (apparently there were no other volunteers), and I will try to do the best I can. I am grateful to Carol Zar, who filled this role for more than a decade; to Elizabeth Bass; and to all of the rest of you who have kept this program going since it began.

My connection to LLI began quite a while ago, not long after I started my second career as a pastor in DeKalb. Bob Suchner asked if I might like to talk about poetry with retired teachers and nurses, electricians, bankers — Well, sure. We spent eight weeks discovering the poetry of the Midwest. Since then, I’ve convened 18 more study groups — on world religions, the Protestant Reformation, the Ten Commandments, fables and parables, myths and archetypes, the poetry of love. I’ve led classes on fake news and propaganda, the history of immigration and the power of photographs that, once seen, we cannot forget.

My point isn’t that I knew all these things, because I didn’t. But I learned them once I was given a chance to share them with you, I became curious, passionately so, about this topic or that one, and wanted to pass on my sense of wonder to people I love.

That has been LLI’s greatest gift to me.

And that’s why I encourage you to think about setting up a study group. Then, spread the word to your dearest friends.

I’m not sure why or how, but way back in 1994, I was asked to write an essay for NIU’s quarterly faculty bulletin, and I found a copy of it on my bookshelf the other day. At that time, and I guess this is still true, there were some heated discussions on campuses about what kinds of classes we ought to offer in the future. Then, as now, there was a push to teach people the practical skills they might need to get good jobs. Then, as now, there were teachers like me defending the value of a broader liberal arts education. Oddly enough, without knowing it, I was trying to make a case for something that sounds, today, like LLI. I then wrote about students:

“Let them learn how to make a living, and when they are ready — when they are beset by questions that the television, the bestseller or the magazine does not answer — let them come back to school, for another, richer period of study. . . .

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“A need for music, art or history may become more acute with age. We must do more to invite students to come back to discover what they missed, first time around. While we pay lip service to the notion of ‘lifelong’ education, our society provides few opportunities and scant support for real programs in adult education. . . .

“How are our students likely to be different, if Northern endures? More of them will be older, I hope — gray- or else white-haired folks less concerned with acquiring job skills than with answering spiritual or scientific questions, hungry for impractical knowledge. More will come to us after ending a career, in the middle of life. Some will want to study painting; some will want to learn to play the oboe; some of them may want to return to a subject they loved but abandoned when they first bought the car or signed the mortgage. In fact, I hope to be one of them.”

And now I am. I’d just turned 40 when I wrote those words. This year, I’ll turn 70. And I’ll be delighted, in the months to come, to sit beside you, and learn about things I didn’t have time for when I still went to work every day.

**Taking Care of LLI**

You learn interesting things both from the leaders and your fellow students in LLI classes. In just her second LLI session, Maureen Perchiazzi (Per-chee-ah-zee) found out that she was among a group of LLI members who grew up on Chicago's South Side.

Perchiazzi actually went to high school at Queen of Peace in Burbank, then to Robert Morris College to become a medical assistant. She started nursing school but had to leave after both of her parents died.

She then started working in the downtown offices of Commonwealth Edison/Exelon and ended up moving up the ladder, working for them for 34 years. She met her husband, Bill, at the corporate office. Some years later, he was transferred to the Byron nuclear facility, and they moved to Sycamore. Perchiazzi also worked at Byron, ending up as a records manager before she retired.

Retirement meant more time to travel, a favorite activity of Maureen and Bill. “We like seeing the differences between the states,” she explains. She now has been to all but eight states, Alabama and Alaska among these eight. When her in-laws were living in London, she and Bill traveled there and on another trip met them in Sicily. At home, they like to cook and enjoy attending local concerts, such as those by the Kishwaukee Symphony Orchestra.

The first LLI class Perchiazzi took was Linda Fulton’s 2019 session on national parks and monuments. The two of them had met when they were given stations next to each other at a cooking class at the hospital. Now, Perchiazzi is a member-at-large on the LLI steering committee. She also has applied her tech skills to such projects as cleaning up the LLI Soiree mailing list.

“First I took one class, then a couple, and this winter I signed up for all six,” Perchiazzi notes. “I’ve picked up something I didn’t previously know in every class.” She enjoys the interesting topics LLI offers and how it keeps her mind active. So, whether or not you grew up on Chicago’s South Side, strike up a conversation with Maureen the next time you’re in class together; you may well have something in common.

— Elizabeth Bass
Upcoming Social Events

Save June 22 for our next LLI Soiree gathering. The committee will begin working on details in the near future. We look forward to a fun-filled time with fellow LLIIers and delicious food as well.

There also will be another LLI luncheon at Ellington’s Restaurant in the Holmes Student Center during our spring session. As soon as the second semester menus are available, we’ll choose one and set a date. Watch your emails for details on both of these events.

— Judy Olsen, Soiree Committee chair

Notables Stretch Your Mind

The economics of immigration. Railroads’ roles in World War II. Reevaluating Thomas Jefferson. Cross-cultural perspectives on life and death. Those are among the varied topics to be covered in our spring Notables sessions on 1 to 2:30 p.m. Wednesday afternoons. Everyone is welcome, even if you don’t sign up for the Notables session, and guests are always welcome at Notables. It’s a great way to introduce a friend to LLI.

Blooming This Spring – March 19 to May 9

Press Censorship, Language and Propaganda: Journalism in the Third Reich (4 weeks) Katerina Barbe
Discover how secret instructions to German press were implemented.

Italian Conversation for Travelers (4 weeks) Christopher Nissen
Pick up basic vocabulary for hotels, restaurants and shops.

Wonderment: An Exploration through Poetry (5 weeks) Joe Gastiger
Study poems that capture or trigger sense of wonder.

This Land is Our Land: America’s National Parks Carved by Ice (4 weeks) | Linda Fulton
Learn how ice erosion created Yellowstone, Acadia and more.

Mystery of Sound and Ritual: Tone Bowls and Chanting (4 weeks) Tony Tollerud and Linda Slabon
Find creative ways to relax and meditate.

Notables (8 weeks) Notables Committee
Listen to experts on topics such as immigration economics and railroads.

The Lincoln Assassination Circle: Who’s Who and Autographs, Paper Ephemera and Documents (4 weeks) | Al Ottens
Examine real documents from key figures close to Lincoln.

Unmasking Clayton Moore: The Evolution of the Lone Ranger (4 weeks) | Mike Korcek
Enjoy comics, TV shows and movies about the masked man.

Birth the Word: NIU Libraries Plans for a Book Lab course (1 day) | Beth McGowan
Hear about other labs, the plans for NIU’s lab and NIU’s history.

Back in 2004

If you had signed up for LLI, then called the Institute for Learning in Retirement, in spring 2004, here are a few of the classes you could have taken: Contemporary American Short Stories, Lewis and Clark, How Your County Government Works and NIU Notables.
In Memoriam
Richard Baker
Marguerite Key
Diane McNeilly
Colette Michael
Arlene Neher
Tom Smith
Gail Venteau

MARK YOUR CALENDAR
LLI Spring 2024 .......... March 19-May 9
LLI Soiree .............................. June 22
LLI Fall 2024 ................... Sept. 10-Oct. 31

LLI members examine one of the larger artifacts seen on a tour of the Southeast Asian archives at NIU in conjunction with Richard Cooler’s fall 2023 class on International Art Treasures: Revered, Discarded, Looted, Returned.

A visit to the DeKalb Islamic Center was a highlight of Islam 101, a fall 2023 LLI class, taught by Mohammad Labadi (in front), a leader at the mosque.