



OUTLOOK

A publication of OLLI at the University of New Hampshire



University of
New Hampshire

In the beginning . . .

Once upon a time in 2003, in the College for Lifelong Learning (CLL), an idea was germinating in the mind of Dean Judy Zubrow. That idea quickly turned into a grant application to the Bernard Osher Foundation for the creation of a program aimed at noncredit education for seniors.

Within the next year, the grant was approved, community leaders in Manchester and Concord were invited to hear concepts, organization meetings were held in both cities, advertising for a Program Manager was placed and OLLI at CLL was born.

As 2004 drew to an end, under the guidance of the visionary Zubrow and her newly hired Program Manager, Sue Staples, and Program Assistant, Barbara Grant, Manchester had gathered an interested group to move the project along. On December 1, 2004, CLL’s vision for a statewide network of community-based institutes was presented to what would become the first steering committee. Names you may recognize from that original group included Zane Kroy, Reta McGregor and Norma Bolduc (later Steiner). And planning for a Spring launch began.

A mere six weeks later, Zubrow, Staples and Grant introduced the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute and CLL’s vision for the network of community-based OLLI programs to Concord’s organizing committee including at least one name you may recognize as a still-active member, Martha Clapp. Like Manchester, Concord began working towards a Spring pilot program.

Each of the two ran pilot programs in the Spring, each running four courses. Early evaluations showed the courses were well-received and ideas for future programming were received. Evaluation results looked much the same 20 years ago and today: 30%-50% rate of return on evaluations; suggestions that instructors should always use micro-phones.

Brochures from that time explained the concept of OLLI: “The Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) at CLL provides adults age 50 and over with an exciting opportunity to add to a lifetime of learning. OLLI is a community-based membership organization with a simple philosophy: an active mind creates a sense of mental, physical, and social well-being.

20TH ANNIVERSARY - IN THIS ISSUE

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“The program consists of lectures, short courses, and other educational activities that are shaped by the interests of the members. There are no tests, no grades, and no need for prior college experience—just the chance to join your peers in learning for the fun of it.

“Programs may be led by active and retired educators, topic experts, and qualified members. Most program activities are planned for daytime hours at easily accessible locations in the community.”

At the time there were 50 OLLIs around the United States funded by the Osher Foundation.

By the Fall term, the College for Lifelong Learning had become Granite State College and the combined membership had grown to more than 100. Two more familiar names joined and became active member volunteers – Jane Van Zandt in Manchester and Peg Fargo in Concord. Catalogs, while not as robust as today’s, took on a look and feel we would find recognizable today.

They weren’t called “previews” but open houses were held in each city and course registrations were taken by volunteers set up at tables at the open house or by mail. The precursors to Lunch & Learns were called “Lunch Bytes” and the first two might have been right out of today’s “Technology You Can Use” series. OLLI had a website! And it was then, as it is now, all about Learning for the Fun of It.

Learning for the Fun of It

Director's Notes

The Current Director of OLLI

Leading OLLI at UNH: A Journey of Resilience, Growth, and Community

When I accepted the position as the first director of OLLI at Granite State College (now the University of New Hampshire) to be hired from outside the institution, I was stepping into an organization that had already established a rich tradition of lifelong learning. With ten years of experience at the Osher Institute in Las Vegas, where I worked my way up to Program Manager, I felt well-prepared for this new challenge. However, nothing could have fully prepared me for the depth of passion, commitment and resilience I encountered from OLLI's volunteers.

What drew me to OLLI at UNH was not only the program's mission but the enthusiasm of the people behind it. The pandemic had deeply impacted all educational institutions. Yet it was clear from day one that OLLI's volunteers were committed to navigating the challenges and continuing to provide valuable learning experiences. Their resilience reflected the spirit of the program, and I was excited to help lead it forward.



Navigating Change in a Time of Transition

The past three years have been a period of immense transition and growth for OLLI at UNH. With much of the administrative team joining around the same time as I did, we faced a steep learning curve. Almost every system we relied on—whether it was for registration, communications, website management, or budgeting—needed to be updated. Transitioning to new platforms became a central focus of our work.

In addition to internal shifts, the broader University System was undergoing its own restructuring, grappling with financial and operational challenges. Despite these sweeping changes, OLLI has remained a strong and vibrant community, a testament to the dedication of its staff and volunteers.

A Growing Community of Lifelong Learners

As we celebrate our 20th year, OLLI at UNH continues to thrive with over 1,000 annual members from 136 cities and towns across eight states. Our members engage in a variety of in-person and virtual courses, Special Interest Groups (SIGs) and Lunch & Learn events. What makes our program especially flexible is that around 75% of our courses are one- or two-class sessions, allowing our members to fit learning into their busy lives without a long-term commitment.

Each year, we offer over 320 courses across the state, with nearly 80% held in-person or out in the community. While COVID-19 reshaped how we approach programming, our commitment to accessibility means we continue to offer courses via Zoom for those who prefer learning from home.

Looking Forward

I wouldn't trade places with anyone. Leading OLLI at UNH has been a rewarding experience, filled with challenges, growth, and the joy of watching a diverse group of individuals come together in the pursuit of learning. The enthusiasm and contributions of our members have made every day a pleasure. Together, we've built a strong, resilient community and I'm proud to be a part of it.

Cheers to OLLI at UNH—here's to many more years of learning and growth!

Warm regards,
Toniann Leavitt



OLLI Through the Years

Top left, a Governor's Proclamation commended OLLI for its service to the elder population on the occasion of its tenth anniversary. Above, a sampling of OLLI catalogs through the years.

The Founding Mothers



Judy Zubrow

“Thank you for including me in your founding mothers articles. OLLI is among my very favorite professional initiatives, and so I am pleased to have this opportunity to reflect on its creation and early years of development.”

Judy was the lead author of the initial 2003 grant proposal to the Bernard Osher Foundation. Upon being awarded the grant in 2004, she held primary oversight of the creation of OLLI at the College for Lifelong Learning, staying involved in its development until 2011 when she left Granite State College (GSC).

Judy’s organizational vision for OLLI was seated in the structure of the hosting college. Granite State College was a statewide institution with four regional centers, and so she envisioned OLLI as being embedded in communities across New Hampshire, originating from the college’s centers in Manchester, Concord, the Seacoast, and North Country. She proposed a member-driven OLLI in all aspects of curriculum and organization.

Limited resources and the ever-present unstable position of GSC as a separate college in the University System were the major obstacles, far outweighed by the enthusiasm and reception of the communities for the program. The acquisition of the right staff to manage this new program was foremost in her mind as the key to success. Judy hired Sue Staples as the first leader of OLLI and credits her for the program’s early successes.

We asked Judy, what do you think 20 years later?

I am very proud of OLLI and have followed its growth as a member. With UNH now serving as its host institution, many of the early challenges regarding institutional instability have been resolved. I look forward to continued success -- making community connections and bringing joy and intellectual opportunities to OLLI members.

--Judy Zubrow, OLLI Class of 2004

Sue Staples

Dear OLLI friends, Congratulations to you on the 20th Anniversary of OLLI in New Hampshire! I was pleased to be contacted to share some of my thoughts about OLLI’s early years. I so enjoyed my time with OLLI and often think of the people who were “founders.”

Sue was hired as the first program director for OLLI. Her experience implementing programs for the NH ServiceLink Network, Interfaith Volunteer Caregiver programs, and coordination of statewide volunteer events for Volunteer NH proved ideal to apply her experience and interests in a new and fun way.

She started with a vision to get 100 people to join by the end of the first three years concentrating at first on Manchester and Concord and recruiting and supporting a leadership team that would ensure that the new program would be “membership driven.”

Initially, it was challenging trying to get two locations off the ground at the same time. Shortly after getting the two groups organized, the college, which had just become Granite State College, moved operations from the Manchester Airport to Concord.

The most pleasant surprise in the formative months was the wealth of talent, experience, and enthusiasm that OLLI members brought to the table! With a simple structure and operational support, those early OLLI members were able to grow the program and add two more areas –Seacoast and Conway.

We asked Sue, what do you think 20 years later?

It was a joy to be a part of OLLI during its first years. I loved getting to know and work with so many different people willing to share their interests and skills – and to try new things. When we were just getting ready to launch, I remember looking at course catalogs from other OLLI programs across the nation. I was amazed and somewhat intimidated by the size of their memberships and the hundreds of courses they offered. It is wonderful to see NH’s OLLI twenty years later – with its robust membership and so many varied learning opportunities year-round – and still affordable! For me, it reaffirms the notion that life has much to offer us in later life if we stay open to engaging with it. – Sue Staples

Did you know?

Facebook also launched in 2004

Founding Mothers (continued)

Barbara Grant

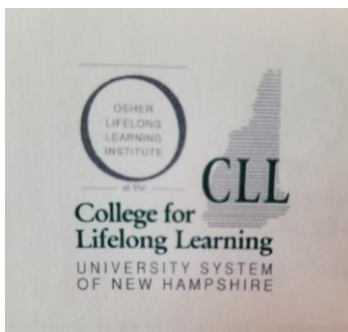
When Barbara Grant was hired in 2004 as the assistant to Sue Staples, OLLI's first director in New Hampshire, she had no idea the program would develop as it has. "Sue had a big vision. I was gung ho to do everything she asked," Barbara says.

The initial grant from the Osher Foundation allowed New Hampshire's OLLI program to launch in February 2005 with under a hundred participants.

"We used index cards," Barbara says, laughing. "We had to do everything from cultivating instructors to finding volunteers. There were no committees at that time. Our only example was the first OLLI located at the University of Southern Maine. But there were many volunteers, even in the first year. Sue and I couldn't have done it without them. We took one step at a time."

Barbara worked for OLLI until 2007, when she moved to another position at Granite State College. That was the year she became an OLLI member and continues to take OLLI classes. Barbara says OLLI has remained true to its values. "Responsiveness to member needs was the way Sue and I worked right from the start," she says. "I think it's still like that today throughout the OLLI system."

When asked about OLLI's growth in New Hampshire, Barbara doesn't hesitate. "I'm just astounded at the number of members and volunteers in four regions from all over the state," she says. "There's only one way to go and that's to keep moving forward. OLLI has prevailed and bloomed into everything Sue had envisioned."



Martha Clapp

One of the first recognizable names on the list of organizers 20 years ago was Martha Clapp who is retiring from OLLI activities, but was one of the last faces members saw opening the locked door for class attendees on Hall Street. We reached out to Martha for her memories about OLLI's start.

I was still pretty new in the area, having moved here as a widow in 2001, to be near my daughter.

There was an article in the Concord Monitor regarding the intended formation of an educational opportunity for seniors. I was aware of the OLLI organization as I moved here from Portland, ME where the OLLI program had been founded in the years that I lived there.

I went to a few of the organizational meetings held at Granite State College, under the leadership of Sue Staples and assistance of Barbara Grant.

The bulk of my memories of the early years are about OLLI under the direction of Ginny Gurseny and her visions of what OLLI should be. Granite State had moved from its facility in South Concord to Hall Street. At that time there was a ton of mailings, and a lot of idiot work to bring it all together - much of folding letters, placing address labels, sealing envelopes. There was a bulk of "committee" work to keep the lines of communication open within the membership.

Volunteers have been the backbone of the organization with the kind support of the office staff. My role was just a matter of filling in where I could. There was a lot of data input, grunt work like filing and stuff. But it was a grand format to meet good people and dig into life in Concord.

I relished the many opportunities provided with the "out and about" - visits to the Monitor, cemeteries, churches, stained glass windows, etc - wonderful tours. And so many classes on topics I would never have had an exposure to otherwise.

The sum and substance, I am so grateful for OLLI's existence in New Hampshire, Concord most especially of course, and to all the individuals who have made and make it possible. The amazing office staff in the OLLI office, the support of Granite State College - and to the myriad of volunteers.

I think of our great friends in OLLI often, with comfort and love.

- Martha

It happened in 2004

The Red Sox won their first World Series in 86 years!

Founding Mothers

Tessa McDonnell



I was a dean at Granite State College. One of my colleagues brought forth a proposal to the Osher Foundation for a grant to create an OLLI program at the college. We had a Leadership Council of senior administrators who voted on all external proposals. Being a member of that Council, I reviewed the proposal and voted in favor, as did everyone else, the vote was unanimous. We received the initial grant, and the rest is history.

Tessa joined as a member to support the program in 2009 and is presently the longest-term member affiliated with the Seacoast region.

She remembers that OLLI faced the limitations of being part of a small college with its lack of visibility and resources. She worked full-time as the Dean of Students and External Engagement until 2014. In 2012 OLLI became part of her professional portfolio and she took an active role in its administration. The challenges she found at that point were a lack of program identity, competing priorities, regional variances and no cohesive plan for the future.

From the earliest years, Tessa was impressed with the enthusiasm of the volunteers. As OLLI became more organized she attended several large workshops and admired how great ideas were shared. Now, 12 years later, she admires that the quality of the courses, wide array of choices, and diversity of presenters is so stimulating.

"I am proud of where we are and the potential for where we can go!"

Betsy Gemmecke

Mount Washington Valley (MWV) Region started in 2008 as the Conway region. Betsy Gemmecke was a Granite State College employee who had a thought. So she gathered 14 leaders and friends to see if they thought it was viable and they came up with some twelve classes to get it off the ground.

Linda Derse was the first chair, leading a group of enthusiastic volunteers who embraced OLLI for its sense of community and opportunity to learn from each other. Betsy is still active in OLLI along with two of her best early recruits, Laura Jawitz and Patti Rau.

Building membership and spreading the word about OLLI was the main goal early on and continues to be a challenge in 2024.

Through the years . . .

After the first year OLLI continued to grow and develop. The mini term piloted in the Spring of 2004 gave way to a "real" term in the Fall, complete with a catalog and preview invitation mailed to a long list of interested seniors in the greater Manchester/Concord area. Click the picture below for a look at the first OLLI catalog.

Osher Lifelong Learning Institute
at Granite State College

Fall 2005

If you are age 50 or older,
with a curious mind
and a keen interest in learning,
Granite State College invites you to join OLLI
(the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute).

Take advantage of a unique opportunity
to renew your enthusiasm for learning—
just for the fun of it—no tests, no grades, no credits!

By the spring of 2006, OLLI was 300 members strong and, during the summer, meetings began at RiverWoods in Exeter to form a Seacoast learning site. Wasting no time, the first seven classes were held in Exeter in the Fall term of 2006.

September of 2006 also brought the appointment of OLLI's second Program Director, Virginia Martin. Volunteer leadership formalized into the first Steering Committee in the Spring of 2007. The committee comprised two representatives from each of the three sites and the Director. By December, OLLI reached its membership goal of 500 members, opening the way for the first million-dollar endowment from the Osher Foundation.

Spring 2008 marked the first planning meetings in Conway in which more than 35 interested seniors began formulating a curriculum for Fall term. And OLLI at Granite State College assumed its now-familiar four-region structure.

2011 brought another change in leadership with the appointment of Jane Fletcher as Director. 2011 also brought the fifth learning site to the OLLI family, Claremont. Regretfully, the initial enthusiasm for the concept of OLLI did not translate to a sustainable corps of volunteer leadership and the site was discontinued.

2012 welcomed a new era in member communications with the introduction of the monthly statewide newsletter, *OLLI Outlook*. Click [here](#) to read the first issue.

The Directors

Virginia Martin



After a year as a part time program assistant and coordinator, Virginia was promoted to the position of Director.

A long-time entrepreneur and M.B.A. graduate of New York University, Virginia brought experience in finance, marketing, publishing and management and additional interests in cooking, bunko, jazz and crafts to her new role.

Virginia served as director until 2011 overseeing a period of growth and maturity of the OLLI organization.

Jane Fletcher

Jane Fletcher was the longest-serving OLLI Director, appointed in 2011 and retiring in 2021. Before assuming her OLLI role, she had been employed with GSC for 16 years as the Director of a state Foster/Adoptive parent training contract. In fact, Jane had 31 years in the field of Child Welfare before switching to the other end of the age scale with OLLI. Her focus on the promotion of good mental health in older adults through social connections eased the transition.

Each director came to OLLI with a particular vision and plan. For Jane, joining OLLI in its sixth year, her emphasis had been a shared leadership model between volunteers and staff with a core value of mutual respect. Growing the membership and strengthening the regions became her focus. By the time Jane joined OLLI, the organization had grown to more than 500 members and matured its programming to qualify for its first million-dollar grant from the Osher Foundation.

Not long after starting with OLLI Jane was personally challenged by the President of Granite State College with attaining a second OLLI endowment from the Osher Foundation. With strong commitment from both the volunteer leadership and GSC, statewide membership gradually increased from 835 to more than 1200. The second million-dollar endowment was awarded in 2015.

Throughout the 2010s, Jane oversaw enormous growth and progress. Increasing staff, upgrading systems, expanding the use of technology not just by the staff, but by the members! Expanding to an online registration system and a more robust website came with the inevitable training and cost challenges. So Jane also had the dubious honor of presiding over one of the few fee increases for OLLI.

That bit of necessary unpleasantness would fade into oblivion in the face of the biggest challenge OLLI ever faced – the COVID epidemic. Mere weeks after the start of the robust Spring term of 2020, suddenly the world came to a standstill. Within six weeks of the shutdown, OLLI held its first class on Zoom. Extensive training of staff, presenters and members was initiated and is still ongoing. Resistance to Zoom technology was high among many members and, over the year, membership decreased sharply. Despite that, those who stuck with the program continued to enjoy the quality and variety of programming OLLI was known for.

Early on, Jane says she was extremely impressed with the overall positivity of the program, the joy members seem to carry with them, especially after class, the self-driven volunteers, and the ever-evolving program enhancements.



Finally, she was astounded by the amazing, all-volunteer OLLI instructors who happily committed to a schedule prepared months in advance, spending hours preparing and researching their subjects and who would then show up for classes and engage members. And, after all that, they would appreciatively say how much they enjoyed the whole experience!

Although I had officially retired a week before the grip of the epidemic I stayed on part-time for a year and a half navigating through it with a solid team of staff and volunteers. Although it was a period of massive transitions for the college and the program, the results have been astounding! A brand-new staff team and an army of both well-seasoned and new volunteers have brought OLLI to yet another level especially with advances in the use of technology.

From my new perspective as a member, I could not be more impressed with how the program has begun to settle in at UNH while continuing to provide a wide array of classes in all four regions of the state and online. Overall I feel extremely fortunate to have ended a 41-year social work career with OLLI and am more than delighted to have “stayed for the friends.”

It happened in 2004

***The NASA Rover
landed safely on Mars***

OLLI – the Last Ten Years

Ten years ago OLLI celebrated with a luncheon at which volunteer Bill Faulkner opened with this statement of gratitude:

Be thankful for the decision that brought you to membership in OLLI, for the opportunity to share in continual learning, for chances to use those skills you've developed in many years of life, and for the friendships that continue to grow.

We are all grateful for the enrichment in our daily lives fostered by our involvement in OLLI.

Director Jane Fletcher followed with her own statement:

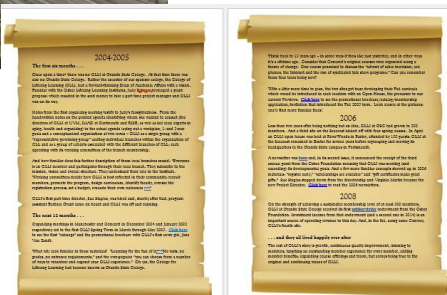
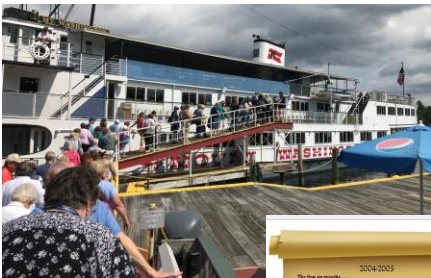
HOW FORTUNATE ARE WE TO BELONG TO AN ORGANIZATION WHERE WE

- **CAN TAKE CLASSES AT COLLEGE AGAIN ...THIS TIME FOR SHEER ENJOYMENT**
- **CAN FIND NEW FRIENDS TO HAVE LUNCH WITH OR PLAY CARDS WITH**
- **CAN REDISCOVER THAT OUR BRAINS STILL WORK**
- **CAN FEEL LIKE WE STILL HAVE A PURPOSE AND CAN MAKE A CONTRIBUTION ...EVEN AFTER RETIREMENT**

In the following four years appreciating the experience of bringing members from all regions together, OLLI held annual meetings, one hosted by each of the learning regions. The hallmark of these meetings were the annual reports, entertainment, delicious food and opportunities to explore the sights in each region.

- ★ 2015 Concord – Pikes Peak in Henniker
- ★ 2016 Mt. Washington Valley – Purity Spring Resort, East Madison
- ★ 2017 Seacoast – Portsmouth Country Club, Portsmouth
- ★ 2018 Manchester – Falls Event Center, Manchester

Five years ago OLLI celebrated its 15th anniversary choosing to rock the boat with a lunch cruise on Lake Winnepesaukee aboard the M/S Mt. Washington.



Better and better – Courses seem to get better every term but wait! There's more! The benefits of OLLI membership that have been added over the years include access to a variety of extracurricular activities.

Special Interest Groups (SIGs)

- ★ Book Clubs
- ★ Movie Club
- ★ Hiking/Walking
- ★ Skiing/Snowshoeing
- ★ Creative Writing
- ★ Bowling
- ★ Quilting
- ★ Technology
- ★ Civics
- ★ Crafts
- ★ Meditation
- ★ and more

Social Activities

- ★ Lunch/Munch Bunch
- ★ Mug 'n' Muffin
- ★ Game Days
- ★ Virtual Happy Hour

Volunteer Development

- ★ Leadership Days
- ★ Curriculum Days
- ★ Membership Days

Travel

- ★ Day Trips
- ★ Overnights
- ★ International

New England Notables

- ★ Justice John Broderick
- ★ Mayor Ray Wiczciorik
- ★ Dr. Sylvio Dupuis
- ★ and more

Committee Memberships – If you immediately think “ugh, boring meetings!” think again! Well, maybe sometimes, but what better way to help forge the direction of OLLI (and make sure OLLI offers what you want!). Choose from statewide and regional committees, task forces and project teams.

Who's Who

In OLLI at the University of New Hampshire?

Administration Team

Toniann Leavitt, Director
Toniann.Leavitt@unh.edu

Tori Berube, Program Manager
Tori.Berube@unh.edu

Bryan Whittier, Enrollment Coordinator
Bryan.Whittier@unh.edu

Tessa McDonnell, Program Support
Tessa.McDonnell@unh.edu

Volunteer Leadership

Su Bennett & Bob Muzerall
Leadership Council Cochairs

Members

Alexandria Arnold
Michael Baker
Peg Fargo
Jacki Fogarty
Cindy Graham
Jim Mahoney
John Russell (secretary)

The Founder – Bernard Osher



Apparently Bernie Osher’s passion for healthy aging is not a passive interest. At age 97 he is starting to wind down his active role in the Bernard Osher Foundation where he is known for coming to work in his office every day.

Born in Biddeford, Maine, and a 1948 graduate of Bowdoin College, Osher’s early career was as the owner of a large hardware store on Main Street. Moving to New York to work in financial services, he subsequently moved to San Francisco, becoming a founding director of World Savings. After becoming the second largest savings bank in the United States, World Savings merged with Wachovia Corporation. An avid art lover, Osher purchased Butterfield & Butterfield, an auction house that became the fourth largest in the world. And then it was sold to eBay. But Osher did not just make money. In 2007, *Businessweek* named him the 11th most generous philanthropist citing \$805 million given to arts, educational and social services.

The philanthropy aspect of Osher’s life began in 1977 with the founding of the Bernard Osher Foundation supporting educational and arts programs in Maine and San Francisco, expanding later to a third category, integrative medicine. With a particular interest in lifelong learning for seasoned adults at institutions of higher learning, Osher provided grants to create 125 lifelong learning institutes, all affiliated with colleges and universities throughout every state in the country and Washington DC. Known as the “quiet philanthropist,” Osher was named the third most generous philanthropist by the Chronicle of Philanthropy in 2006.

The Osher Foundation began launching OLLIs in 2002 providing \$100,000-per-year grants to get OLLI programs organized. If a program reached 500 members and met a series of program standards by the end of its fourth year, it was eligible for a one-million-dollar endowment. Reaching a sustainable 1000 members rendered the organization eligible to apply for a second million-dollar endowment. The Foundation also created a National Resource Center (NRC) to support the OLLIs and funds a conference for OLLI directors and volunteer leaders every 18 months.

Special Edition

OLLI at the University of New Hampshire
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