Have you noticed how many January magazines headline “Five Ways to Change Your Life,” “Seven Foods that will Change Your Life,” “Just 15 Minutes a Day to Change Your Life”? Each new year begins with thoughts and efforts for change. For some, change is inviting and fun; for others, it is uncomfortable, disconcerting, and possibly paralyzing. Do we need to change? Is change necessarily for the better? Whether we like it or not, change happens.

Last year I made some changes around the house. I created a play room for the grandchildren. As soon as they arrive, we head for the toys. It’s been a fun change. This summer I moved some furniture and accessories into different rooms and changed the décor without spending a dime. Well, I did buy a new rug, but I bravely bought it on-line. I felt like an HGTV decorator! However, my changes were simple compared to my friends, once world travelers, who purchased a second home in Arizona to be used six months a year and to let the world now come to them.

Accidents, surgeries, births, and deaths continue to change us. A few LLIers have had to deal with physical change, either with new body parts or unwanted limitations. It is good to know that their commitment to LLI overcomes physical changes as they return to classes as soon as possible.

An especially wonderful change is having new participants in our study groups. It might be interesting to learn how they found LLI and what their passions are. They may have suggestions for refreshing our programs. Please reach out to these new members so that they stay with us and increase the size of our LLI family.

LLI has reached its 10th anniversary. Have we changed since 2001? Should we be considering any changes? Sometimes it is hard to change things that work so well. It’s the old why- fix-what-isn’t-broken question. LLI’s founding mothers and fathers are no longer in the LA&S office, but the new staff continues to be committed to our purpose. The Field Trip Committee has morphed into the Cultural Events Committee. The field trips were wonderful, but the competition for our ideas and funds has multiplied so much that we were no longer serving a special need. NIU Notables were moved to Tuesdays to accommodate several Wednesday noon commitments. We created our soirees as fund raisers to help
ROCKIN’ ROUND THE COMMUNITY

If you’ve crossed paths with Jerry Smith—and that’s quite possible because he’s lived here for almost 50 years—you know that he’s out-going and a tireless booster for the local community. What you may not know is the unlikely journey that brought Jerry to DeKalb, to NIU, and ultimately to LLI.

Jerry and his brother were raised in Dixon by a single mom and their grandmother. Money was tight. By his early teens, Jerry was already working at a local business with thoughts of a career in retail sales. “College wasn’t even on my radar,” Jerry recalls. “But, after I graduated from high school, a local mentor took me aside and insisted that I should go to college. This friend arranged all the admission details and really made it happen.” Jerry still marvels at how quickly things fell into place; within weeks, he found himself a freshman at (then) Northern Illinois State Teachers College.

As a staff member at the Northern Star student newspaper, Jerry discovered a talent for writing and learned how the publishing business worked. He became a keen observer of local events. His gregarious nature made him a natural reporter not just for the Star but also broadcasting for the campus radio station, which led to a part-time announcing job at WLBK radio.

After graduation and a Viet Nam-era hitch in the Army, Jerry returned to DeKalb, eager to try something new. He began an amazing four-decade career that included being editor of the DeKalb County Journal, head of Castle Printing for 30 years, and, most recently, executive director of the DeKalb County Community Foundation until his 2008 retirement.

What’s all this got to do with LLI? The same wide-ranging interests, curious nature, and out-going personality that were hallmarks of Jerry’s professional life serve him well in retirement. He’s not only an enthusiastic LLI participant but also one of our newest conveners, putting together study groups on topics as diverse as philanthropy and Elvis. What’s next? Jerry confesses he’s been talking with LLI friends about collaborating for a study group on “music with Chicago roots.” We don’t know exactly what that means, but it is music to our ears.

–Brad Pietens

MUSINGS (continued)

pay our debt to NIU, only to have these parties become popular social events.

LLI is about serving the needs of our members with a unique program of learning, while enjoying the company of like-minded seniors. NIU courses also are available to everyone; but are we willing and able to commit to a semester-long study group, three times a week? No, we have so much more to do in our daily lives, and we are pretty fast learners too! Do we feel comfortable in a classroom of 19-to-22 year-olds? No, our life experience puts us beyond their understanding. Yet, we want to keep our minds actively learning more. I just wish I could remember it all!

The Curriculum Committee arranges study groups that are so interesting that we have the dilemma of choosing from many attractive options. But even that could change. It would be awful to think of not having LLI study groups! We need everyone contributing to the Curriculum Committee with ideas and with willingness to either convene a study group, find someone who will convene, team up with another member to convene, or make contacts to bring in experts for just one day. The more the membership helps, the better our offerings will be and the less likely we will be to exhaust long-serving committee members.

We ask you to help the Steering Committee, as well as the other committees, to refresh the LLI purpose. Your ideas may be the ones that bring about an exciting new decade of renewal.
IN THE BEGINNING...
November 8, 2000, might be considered as the NIU Lifelong Learning Institute’s birth date. For that morning, over 100 interested community members convened at the Holmes Student Center to discuss beginning an Institute for Learning in Retirement, LLI’s original name. They were called together by Arlene Neher and Steven Johnson, then directors of the external programming office in NIU’s College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Both now are retired and active LLI members.

Starting an ILR had been on Arlene’s and Steve’s agenda for some time but became a priority after Steven attended a national conference on ILRs. He was amazed by the work done by volunteers to organize and run ILRs. So, Arlene and Steve invited area residents who had gone on the college’s “Travel With A Professor” trips and those on Elderhostel’s list who lived within 50 miles of DeKalb to a “convocation.” NIU had a lot of experience with Elderhostels, having offered more than 75 by then, many attended by area residents. Some of these locals had urged the office to set up an ILR. “We knew we had the demographic in place,” Arlene recalls.

A steering committee of volunteers, including current LLI members Pat Mehagan and Elizabeth Bass, started going through shopping bags full of catalogs and other publications from ILRs across the country. They put together bylaws, policies, news releases, and the first catalog. In March 2001, ILR offered its first term of study groups and workshops.

Steven came up with the “NIU Notables” name for the weekly faculty lecture series, a common ILR program that he had wanted Northern to offer for some time.

Financial support, as well as staff time, in the early years, came from the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, which was committed to ILR’s success. Today, LLI receives financial support from NIU Outreach. LLI has found a way to be financially solvent, without high costs or subsidies. “LLI has matured into a well-run, semi-autonomous group,” Steven notes. Like proud parents, he and Arlene can now enjoy their child’s maturity and success.

LLI’s CHARTER TERM—Spring 2001
Study Groups & Conveners
American Mystery Short Stories—Sol Feldman
Future Presidential Elections—Kay Menzel
I Read it in The New Yorker—Elizabeth Bass
The U.S.: 1840s Through Reconstruction—Lou & Vera Bergren
Topics in Contemporary Science—Walker Bowman
Telling Tales—Shirley Chaney
A World of Beliefs—Annette Johns
Music Appreciation and History
The Terrible But Unfinished Story of Norodom Sihanouk: King of Cambodia
NIU Libraries: Online Catalog Access—Joan Aufdencamp
Surfing the World Wide Web—Norma Wiley
Mining the World Wide Web—Norma Wiley

MEMBERS ENROLLED
2001 CHARTER TERM AND 2010-11 TERMS
Elizabeth Bass
Marguerite Key
Nan Mason
Pat Mehagan
Clark Neher
Paul Pawlowski
Ivan Shils
Estelle Von Zellen
Mary Weigele
COMING THIS SPRING TO LLI

March 15—May 5

Unlikely Stories: Breaking Open Parables and Fables – Joe Gastiger
Topics in the Constitution of the United States – Gary Glenn
Local Government: Form, Function, Finance – Carol Zar
The Battle for Vicksburg – Richard Dowen
Burma/Myanmar – Arlene Neher
The Symphony Orchestra: Instruments, Players, and Composers
  – Al Resis
Lighthouses, Shipwrecks, Ghost Stories, and Folklore of the
  Great Lakes – Dan & Joanne Dillman
Countries Without Borders...and Other Islands – Steven Johnson
Local Faith Communities – Sue Stelling

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

LLI 10th Anniversary Luncheon      March 12
LLI Spring Term                   March 15–May 5
LLI Summer Term                   July 12–August 4
LLI Fall Term                     September 13–November 3

Remember: Notables are on Tuesdays.

IN MEMORIAM
Helen Sherbenou
Bev Southern

BRING A FRIEND
High school students who visit a college campus are much more likely to attend that college than students who don’t visit...and we think the same is true for LLI. So, bring a friend to any study group session or NIU Notable. And please pass along the names and addresses of prospective members for our mailing list to any steering committee member or email at NIULLI@niu.edu.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS
Winter 2011
Nita Chaligren, DeKalb
Mary Eakle, DeKalb
George Nenonen, Sycamore
Jane Nenonen, Sycamore
Carol Tweedy, DeKalb

NAMETAGS
Remember to wear your nametag, especially during the first weeks of the term. It’s an easy thing we can do to make new members welcome – and to help returning members.

LLI is 10 Years Old!

Be our guest at LLI’s anniversary celebration
   Saturday, March 12, 2011
   11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.

   Community Room, American National Bank
   Bethany Road & Route 23

   RSVP in advance to Sharon Tourville at stourville@comcast.net or 815-758-0236

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