Let me put my message into context, as you’ll be reading this many weeks after I write it. It is the coldest day (so far) of the season. Thanksgiving is behind us, Christmas and the New Year are still to come. I’ve just proof read the final copy of the winter catalogue. The study group offerings look terrific. Work on the spring schedule is well underway, and it is also shaping up to be exciting. So, I predict LLI 2014 will be as successful as LLI 2013 has been.

Most gratifying is that a number of new conveners have stepped up to the plate to share their expertise and their passion with us. Conveners are the must have ingredient that makes for a successful program. We are grateful to all of them!

There are some changes coming...nothing major but just enough to keep you on your toes. Because we’ve had such large enrollments in many of our study groups, we are going to be using only “05” rooms, which are larger. That means that, rather than have two classes meet side by side in rooms 505 and 506, we’ll now be on different floors in room 505 or 405 or 305. So, you’ll have to be attentive to information sent out just prior to the start of study groups. Of course, we’ll have our greeters stationed at the elevators during the first week of the term to help you find your way.

We are tinkering with some of our traditional social gatherings. This fall, rather than an opening luncheon before study groups started, we had a pizza party during the second week of the term. It was well attended and feedback appeared to be positive. Look for something similar next fall.

Our annual soiree is also undergoing some changes. It is a victim of its own success. We’ve outgrown having it at a private home. The committee is looking for an alternate venue that still allows us to provide our own appetizers and desserts and retains the homey atmosphere we all like. We’ll fill in the details as soon as we can.

What does not change is the thirst for knowledge and the desire for camaraderie that keeps us all coming to study groups. (cont. on pg. 2)
DOCUMENTING HISTORY

What do chemical engineering, educational psychology, and the Civil War have in common? The answer is Allen Ottens. Growing up in suburban Brookfield, young Al was a voracious reader, who expected to follow family tradition with a career in engineering. Otto Eisenschiml, an Austrian-born industrial chemist who had written several books on the Civil War, was a family friend. He presented one of his works, Why Was Lincoln Murdered?, as a gift to eight-year-old Allen, sparking an interest in the Civil War which has remained strong to this day.

Fast forward to the 1960s. When Allen was an engineering undergrad at IIT, he took an elective psychology course based on the writings of Carl Rogers, renowned founder of client-centered therapy. In Al’s words, “It was a life-changing event for me, this vastly different way to see the world based on (Roger’s) use of phenomenology.” Eventually, this led Al to a Ph.D. in counselor education from the University of Illinois.

Al’s early career took him east, first to a position with the University of Maryland Medical School and later to Cornell. But, although Al and his wife, Amy, loved the beauty of upstate New York, they were lured back to this area in 1966 when Al accepted a position at NIU. In retirement, Al’s memberships on the governing boards of Brookfield Zoo, the Manuscript Society, and the Woodstock Mozart Festival, not to mention his private counseling practice, have kept him quite busy. He also has convened several LLI study groups, most recently on The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln, that have attracted enthusiastic followings. Fortunately, he remains open to the idea of convening future LLI study groups; and, with his considerable areas of expertise, we can hardly wait to see what he proposes.

—Brad Pietens

ROOM CHANGES

LLI study groups usually have met in Rooms 505 and 506, next door to each other in the Holmes Student Center. Beginning this spring, study groups will now be on different floors using Room 305 or Room 405 and Room 505.

The Steering Committee voted for the change for a very good reason. Beginning in fall 2011, LLI has had nine terms in a row with enrollment increases over the previous year’s term. That has meant that some study groups have over 30, and as many as 40, members enrolled. While Room 505 can handle those numbers, 506 is too small. So, we are experimenting with using 405 instead this spring. As the term progresses, please let any Steering Committee member know your reactions, pro or con.

MUSINGS (cont.)

I’ve run into more than one LLIer in recent weeks who has said, “I can’t wait for LLI to start again. I miss going to study groups.” I echo that thought; I miss the study groups and I miss seeing all of you!

I hope you had a wonderful holiday and had the chance to see and enjoy your families. Now it’s time to get back to our LLI family. See you in class!
MEET SYLVIA: LLI’S OWN TECHIE

Judging by comments from conveners and members, the LLI Steering Committee’s decision to hire our own technical support staff has been a rousing success. In great part that has been because of Meghan Friel and Sylvia Crownhart, who shared the job in 2013. They sat out in the hall, ready to come to a convener’s aid as soon as asked. Meghan graduated in December; Sylvia will cover all study groups this winter and spring.

Sylvia first heard about the job on the Facebook page of Mark Pietrowski, who oversees LLI in the College of Liberal Arts and Science’s External Programming office. Sylvia first knew Mark when he worked at JC Penneys, while in high school, and she was in management. He went on to NIU and she was an NIU graduate in communications. They reconnected on Facebook.

To Sylvia, the position sounded ideal. “I loved my time at NIU,” she recalls, and liked the idea of being on campus again. The position also fitted around the school schedule of her special-needs 14-year-old son. And the skills needed were those she used at home.

The most frequent requests Sylvia gets are for help getting subtitles or the sound system to work. She has now figured out how to balance the sound system so that people in the back of Room 505, by the fans, can hear without blasting people in the front.

Sylvia grew up in Chicago’s Bridgeport and Ravenswood neighborhoods. She met her husband, Patrick, an engineer, at NIU. They have lived in DeKalb since their marriage and also have a daughter, who goes to St. Mary’s.

What has she learned from LLI? When you’re younger, Sylvia explains, you don’t realize that “if you have a thirst for knowledge, it never goes away.” Her favorite example is 93-year-old convener Al Resis, with his thirst to learn and a passion to share his knowledge.

B-R-A-V-O

The LLI team of (left-to-right) Brian Fulton, Cliff Eaton, and Jerry Smith placed second in Alrusa’s 14th Annual DeKalb County Community Spelling Bee in October. That was the highest finish ever for an LLI team. They sailed through “salvageable” and “electrolysis,” before misspelling “fibrillation” with only one “l” in the eighth round.
BLOOMING THIS SPRING AT LLI

March 18–May 8, 2014 (All study groups eight weeks, unless noted.)

The Poetry & Music of Love – Joe Gastiger & Jerry Smith
Poetic & musical views of the many aspects of love

How Do We Know That? Thinking About the Earth Differently – Wilson Wiedenheft (Weeks 1-4)
Historical events help us understand why earth is the way it is

Baseball Through the Ages – Dan Dillman
Innovators, clowns & heroes from baseball’s rich past

Roosevelt, Churchill & Stalin: Architects of Victory – Al Resis
Personalities, disagreements & resolutions that led to victory

The British East India Company to Google: Theory & Practice of the Corporation – Dick Dowen
Origins, whys & personalities of corporations

Three Operas by Three Middle European Composers – Jitka Hurych
The Bartered Bride, Rusalka, The Cunning Little Vixen

The 1940s (Part 2) – Elaine Spencer & George Spencer
Post-war Germany, the welfare state, China, baseball & more

Art of Rome Through the Ages – Judith Testa
Significant architecture, sculpture, painting & its patrons

Old Wine in New Bottles – Clark Neher
Classic operas & plays, contrasted with modern adaptations

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

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THE BUZZ...

LLI had record enrollments in each 2013 term. A big “thanks” goes to those members who reached out to recruit new members. Word-of-mouth is our best advertising.

Thank you to Pat Mehagan, Cliff Eaton, Eileen Dubin, and Thelma Coles for working the LLI booth at the past summer’s Senior Fair.

From the NIU Art Museum newsletter: “Jan (Modloff) rallied 30 members of the Lifelong Learning Institute for a curator’s tour of the On Watching and Being Seen exhibition. We couldn’t get this group to fill out a survey, however, as they were relishing the concept of going back to school without homework, tests or paperwork.”