The Annual Meeting at the Mahaiwe Theater on May 24th was an exciting opportunity to review OLLI’s growth, celebrate our talented leadership, and welcome Peter Bluhm as incoming president. The ensuing 9th Annual Mona Sherman Memorial Lecture was sold out, as Cokie Roberts spoke on “Putting the HER Into HISTory.”

President Len Tabs chaired the meeting. He introduced Ellen Kennedy, President of Berkshire Community College. Ms. Kennedy glowingly remarked how the collaboration between OLLI and the college has positively impacted BCC students. She highlighted the mentoring program and OLLI’s annual $5,000 gift of books to the library.

Len Tabs reviewed OLLI’s operations. There are 1,038 members who chose from among no fewer than 70 courses in 2016. The organization boasts trips and special events such as theater parties, the faculty party, and the art show and auction. Other offerings include the Distinguished Speakers series, a Leadership Academy, and the mentoring program. There were special winter events in Florida. Len thanked the many volunteers, including the newsletter and catalog committees. Exciting new initiatives are the Shared Interest Groups (SIGs), University Day, and the updated interactive website.

OLLI Vice President Carl Shuster detailed the SIG program, which was inspired by reports from the World Health Organization and the Berkshires Regional Planning Commission.

In his role as Treasurer, Len provided the fiscal report, indicating a healthy financial condition from both operating income and OLLI’s endowment.

Next, in the election of board members and officers, the entire slate was accepted unanimously. New board members are Robert Desrosiers, Harold Shair, Christopher Guidette, Gordon Josephson, Ann Morgan, and Virginia O’Leary. Sandi Rubin will serve as secretary, Carl Shuster as vice president and Leonard Tabs as treasurer. Peter Bluhm brings many talents to OLLI as incoming President. Having served on committees and edited our newsletter, he brings a high level of professionalism to all his endeavors.

Megan Whilden, Executive Director, concluded the meeting. She showcased summer events and thanked the volunteers who make OLLI’s activities possible.

An annual highlight is the Mona Sherman Lecture, a memorial to an extraordinary OLLI leader. Lisa Sharkey, who is Ms. Sherman’s daughter, gave tribute to her mother and introduced Cokie Roberts. Ms. Sharkey, formerly a successful TV news producer, is now a senior vice president at Harper Collins Publishers.

Cokie Roberts, an award-winning journalist and political commentator, recently wrote We Are Our Mothers’ Daughters. Noting that traditional histories frequently downplay women’s contributions, she recounted little-known anecdotes of famous American women. Combining historical facts with humor and candor, Ms. Roberts reminded us that women have woven a social safety net throughout U. S. history and worked to perfect the Union, especially in the areas of abolition and universal suffrage. She noted that “from the beginning, American women were involved and were fierce.”

During the Q and A, Ms. Roberts discussed current issues. Her comments about her own mother’s political activism were particularly enlightening, and it was clear that both Ms. Roberts and Ms. Sharkey exemplify the best in mother-daughter role modeling.

— Linda Halpern

BCC President Ellen Kennedy has her book autographed

PHOTOS BY SUSAN GELLER
As OLLI’s newly elected president, I’d like to introduce myself. My wife, Valerie, and I moved here almost six years ago from Vermont. We moved south to be nearer to family, but we landed in the Berkshires because of its cultural opportunities and natural beauty.

We found Berkshire County to be like Vermont in many ways (if a bit warmer). Nature is important to life in both places. The mountains are always a backdrop and they provide rare opportunities to get away from one’s daily existence. But there were also two important differences. Tanglewood needs no introduction here, but it is a rare institution which greatly enhances our area culturally and economically. OLLI was the other surprise. We found lots of classes, lots of activities, lots of speakers. It quickly became clear that we had an extraordinary opportunity for an intellectually and socially vigorous life in our new home.

Now that I have learned more about its past, our OLLI seems even more remarkable. Founders and early leaders like Tom Easton, Arthur and Mona Sherman and Norman Avnet managed somehow to pull the Berkshire Institute for Lifelong Learning (BILL) up by its own bootstraps and create an energetic institution with scores of active volunteers. Later, when Bernard Osher donated funds for the permanent support of an Executive Director and we became an OLLI, we got even stronger and even more dynamic. So my first thought today is of gratitude to all those who preceded us on the BILL and OLLI boards and as officers. We, who now take the classes and attend the lectures, owe many thanks to past volunteers who set such an ambitious scope for OLLI.

I also want to thank Lenny Tabs for his recent service as President. Lenny won’t toot his own horn here, but he deserves enormous gratitude. Under Lenny’s leadership we greatly improved our financial management system and our relationship to Berkshire Community College. Also, we have begun to offer a “university day” as an annual summer event, and OLLI has revamped its web site and begun to offer online enrollment. Thanks Lenny. I look forward to continuing to work with you as treasurer and as past president of the OLLI board.

Thanks also to all the volunteers whose work continues to be so vital. I appreciate the trust that the Board of Directors has placed in me, and I hope that over the next two years I can lead OLLI to become even more secure financially, to expand our reach to more people in the Berkshire region and to become even more effective at enriching the lives of older adults. — Peter Bluhm

President’s Message

Fall Courses ■ September 27 through October 27

| TUES. | Today’s Headlines – Steven Tobin – BCC | Beowulf and the Heroic Age - Nancy Walters – SCC |
| | A Serious Look at 20th Century Comedy – Halpern – BCC | Edith Wharton: Home and Abroad - Macheski – SCC |
| | Fine Art Photography – Kubis – Various locations | |
| | Partisanship, Gerrymandering & the Right to Vote – Hyson – BMUS | Architectural Gems – Various – Various locations |
| | Nixon – Wallach – BMUS | Bread and Pasta - Arkans & Koelle – BCC |
| | Ludwig van Beethoven: He Did It All – Stark – BMUS | Descartes’ Meditations: The Transition from Medieval to Modern Thought – Cameron – KF |
| THURS. | Environmental Law: Its Historic Past, Its Uncertain Future – McKnight – WC | BCC = Berkshire Community College, Pittsfield |
| | Frontiers of Science – Lebestky – WC | BMUS = Berkshire Museum, Pittsfield |
| | Memoir Writing – Dorsel – Sweetwood | BNRC = Berkshire Natural Resources Council |
| | Exploring Early Manuscripts and Printed Books – Hammond – WC | KF = Kimball Farms, Lenox |
| | Climate Change – Several instructors – MCLA | MCLA = Mass. College of Liberal Arts, North Adams |
| | International Folkdancing – Herzig – WHIT | SCC = BCC South County Campus, Great Barrington |
| | = Berkshire Community College, Pittsfield | WC = Williams College, Williamstown |
| | = Berkshire Museum, Pittsfield | WHIT = Whitney Center for the Arts, Pittsfield |

Please refer to the fall 2017 Catalog or visit www.BerkshireOLLI.org for more details.
Edith Wharton (1862-1937) is famed as a writer, as the first woman to earn the Pulitzer Prize for fiction and as designer of her Lenox estate, The Mount. What is not well known is her extraordinary humanitarian work during World War 1.

Wharton was living in Paris in the summer of 1914 when Germany bombarded Belgium and refugees began to pour into France. She immediately started to establish workrooms (ouvrôirs) for unemployed Parisian seamstresses, hostels for refugees, rescue homes and schools for Belgian children and tuberculosis sanatoriums for soldiers. Wharton drew on her fluency in French, her contacts with upper-class French society and her contacts among wealthy Americans to raise funds to establish and run these institutions.

In 1914, she co-founded The American Hostels for Refugees. Its multiple units took in 9,300 refugees in its first year. In 1915, at the request of the Belgian government, she organized the Children of Flanders Rescue Committee. This brought thousands of Flemish children from the cellars of their war-torn homes and burned-out villages to rescue homes in Paris. Recently, Anne Provoost, a Belgian author, spoke at The Mount about her grandmother, who had been one of the first children rescued from Ypres when Germany attacked the city.

Wharton took a personal interest in the young refugees. When some children’s Belgian families were unable to take them back, Wharton assumed responsibility for their education and arranged for their care in France.

All during this time, Wharton continued to write and travel. She wrote numerous letters as well as war articles for Scribner’s Magazine and the New York Times. As one of the first and few journalists allowed to be at the front lines, she witnessed military action in England and France. Her Scribner’s articles vividly described life in wartime Paris and in the battle zones. She disagreed with President Woodrow Wilson on America remaining neutral and strongly advocated for American involvement in the war. In one of her many letters to American friends she wrote:

The ‘atrocities’ one hears of are true. I know of many, alas, too well authenticated. Spread it abroad as much as you can. It should be known that it is to America’s interest to help stem this hideous flood of savagery . . . . No civilized race can remain neutral in feeling now.

As a fundraising project, Wharton organized and edited The Book of the Homeless, a volume of original work by celebrities, to be sold for the benefit of her charities. With the help of her close friend Henry James, she sent appeals for art and text contributions to highly regarded European and American artists and writers. The book, published in 1916 by Charles Scribner, included works by Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Claude Monet, Auguste Rodin, Joseph Conrad and Sarah Bernhardt. Profits were divided among the Hostels and the Children of Flanders Rescue Committee.

Edith Wharton wrote modestly of her efforts: “Everything I did during the war in the way of charitable work was forced on me by the necessities of the hour, but always with the sense that others would have done better.” The French government, however, recognized her outstanding work and awarded her the French Legion of Honor in 1916. She also received an award from Queen Elisabeth of Belgium. Edith Wharton died of a stroke in Paris in 1937 and is buried in the cemetery in Versailles.

There is so much more to know about Wharton’s life, work and era, and OLLI members will have two opportunities in the fall. The course schedule includes “Edith Wharton: Home and Abroad” by Cecilia Macheski and “World War 1: 1916 & 1917” by Greig Sedor.

— Joanna Fribush
One of my favorite things about OLLI and its members is how much we give back to the Berkshires community. OLLI members mentor Berkshire Community College students, many of whom are the first in their family to go to college. OLLI volunteers tape selected OLLI courses that are then shared online and on local TV so those who are not able to attend our programs can enjoy them at no cost.

Each year OLLI donates funds to BCC which are used to buy new library books. And each year OLLI offers the community a free lecture by a nationally known commentator or author through the Mona Sherman Memorial Lecture and the generosity of the Sherman-Sharkey family.

And we know that many of our OLLI members volunteer at almost every non-profit in the Berkshires, from tutoring children and cooking meals, to welcoming people to world class cultural experiences.

But most of all, OLLI contributes to the health and vitality of both our members and the greater Berkshires community by providing extraordinary opportunities to learn, to meet new friends, to explore new places and to volunteer in meaningful ways. In all of these ways, OLLI and its 1,000-plus members ensure that the Berkshires area is welcoming and engaging for everyone.

Thank you to each and every one of you for being part of OLLI, and for helping us make a positive impact in the Berkshires. — Megan Whilden, Executive Director
Instructor
Phil Halpern

Fall 2017 Course
A Serious Look at 20th Century Comedy, Part 2

Bon vivant, raconteur and a favorite OLLI lecturer—all of these descriptions apply to Phil Halpern.

Phil grew up in Philadelphia where he attended a Jewish Day School and then public schools. He attended Temple University, spending a semester in Jerusalem. Upon graduation he returned to Jerusalem to study at the Greenberg College for a year. Back in Philadelphia, he enrolled in a doctoral program in Jewish studies at Dropsie College (now the Annenberg University). Phil’s father was a highly respected rabbi whose first wife and two daughters were killed in the Holocaust. An 18th generation rabbi within his family, he was incapacitated by a stroke but always maintained his good spirit and sense of humor.

Phil left the graduate program and started working in the nut industry. He moved to New Jersey where he met Linda, his wife of 41 years. When he developed non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma after the birth of their second son, the strength and good spirit that he fortunately inherited from his father helped Phil to a full recovery.

Linda and Phil started coming to the Berkshires in 1983 and bought a second home here in the 1990s. They moved to Lenox full time when they bought Brook Farm Inn, which they operated for fifteen years. Phil’s ebullience and warmth made guests feel very welcome and Linda’s attention to detail and great hosting combined to make the inn function well and kept the same guests coming back year after year. Active in his community, Phil served on the Lenox Chamber of Commerce and was president for one term.

Phil loves learning about comedy—not just the jokes—but also the back stories about the comedians and the evolution of the art. Continuing the course he taught for OLLI last year, this fall Phil will offer a course on comedy beginning in the 1950’s. He also recently taught a course on Jewish humor at Temple Anshe Amunim.

In addition to their two sons, Linda and Phil have four grandchildren. Now that they are retired, they have more time for OLLI classes, more time for their grandchildren, and more time to travel. They recently spent time in Argentina where Phil reconnected with friends with whom he attended school in Jerusalem.

— Sandi Rubin

Voulez vous parler francais? OLLI members interested in speaking French language and experiencing French culture are welcome to join this Shared Interest Group. The SIG was the brainchild of Monica Sinclair and several others.

Monica explains that speaking another language “is a mindset; it’s an openness to other cultures and ideas.” The core mission is to bring together Francophiles who appreciate the French way of life, including good food, wine and coffee as well as the je ne sais quoi of charming French towns, museums, movies and other arts. Perhaps most importantly, Francophiles appreciate a certain respect for intellectualism that is characteristically French.

Having lived in France, Monica considers herself comfortable with the language, although not fluent. The group is inclusive; all are welcome. Fluency levels range from rudimentary high school knowledge to native French speakers. Meetings are held mostly in French, although members sometimes consult Google’s translation app.

Monica notes that OLLI is similar to the University of the Third Age (U3A), an international movement whose aims are the education and stimulation of retired people—those in their “third age” of life. Emphasis is on sharing, rather than formal teaching.

The SIG began meeting last November and has since met every two to three weeks in coffee shops around the county. They’ve been joined by native French speakers who currently work as chefs at Chez Nous, a Lee restaurant. The SIG selects topics in advance, for example, French proverbs, or politics in France. One member hosted a wine tasting in June.

The group is growing, evolving, and sharing ideas for new activities. It is organized democratically.

If you are interested in joining, please contact OLLI member Monica Hailes at monica@hailes.com. — Linda Halpern
OLLI Celebrates its Volunteer Faculty
Pittsfield, Country Club • June 27, 2017

OLLI instructors and co-leaders of OLLI’s Performing Arts Initiative, Barbara Waldinger and Nancy Vale

OLLI Executive Director Megan Whilden and former OLLI board president Arthur Sherman

BCC Dean of Community Outreach, Education and Workforce Development Jill Sasso Curtis with Abbie von Schlegell

OLLI Past President Leonard Tabs with Distinguished Speakers Series co-chair Hope Hagler and Ellen Tabs

Thaddeus Kubis, instructor

Claudia Coplan, Josie Thompson and instructor Susyn Reeve
Thanks to our OLLI Volunteers

OLLI’s strength and vitality comes from its corps of active, committed volunteers. They recruit our lecturers, plan and teach our courses, run our special events, host our SIGs, keep our membership growing, help in the office, publicize our activities, communicate with our members, supervise class arrangements, provide leadership and generally pitch in wherever needed. These men and women, over 150 of them, gave OLLI their time, energy, creativity and skill during 2016 and 2017. We offer them our sincere thanks, and we hope we have included everyone.

Antoville, Ellen
Aylesworth, Chris
Barnett, Charlie
Bastow, Ev
Bieniek, Robert
Bluhm, Peter
Bluhm, Valerie
Bookless, Maxine
Brand, Barbara
Breskin, Arline
Brooks, Jock
Brotman, Joan
Brown, Carl
Cahill, Margaret
Caine, Deborah
Calman, Helene
Cass, Claudia
Chanler, Shelley
Cicchillo, Mary Anne
Cohen, Marsha
Coplan, Claudia
Cromwell, Judy
Crosson, Nancy
Cukor, Adele
Degenhardt, Ruth
Deinard, Lile
Desrosiers, Bonnie
Desrosiers, Robert
Dobelle, Kit
Donath, Sheila
Dorfman, Ann
Easter, Lee
Epstein, Phyllis
Evans, Richard
Fields, William
Fisher, Andrew
Fisher, Jacqueline
Fisher, Karel
Flaum, Marilyn
Flaum, Paul
Foster, Rose
Fowler, Jacqueline
Frankel, Elisa
Fribush, Joanna
Gabor-Hotchkiss, Magda
Ganot, Bonita
Geller, Michael
Geller, Susan
Gerard, Joseph
Goldberg, Sheldon
Gorham, Susan
Greenapple, Larry
Greenbaum, Barbara
Grogan, Lina
Grogan, Ray
Guidette, Christopher
Hagler, Hope
Halpern, Linda
Hamblin, Carol
Hartman, Barbara
Haus, George
Hayes, Joanne
Joseph, Judith
Joseph, Thomas
Josephson, Gordon
Katz, Judy
Kennedy, Lucy
Kesner, Judy
Kidd, Katherine
Klocke, Anna
Koelle, Rosanna
Koelle, Thomas
Konove, Kay
Lane, Barbara
Latimer, Bill
Lee, Robert
Leibowitz, Augusta
Lenehan, Lois
Les, Caren
Levin, Judy
Levitan, Katherine
Lipkowitz, John
Margolis, Marilyn*
Margolis, Michael
Mascelli, Louis
Matturo, Richard
McNulty, Karen
Michelman, Enid
Milazzo, Marie
Morgan, Ann
Nardacci, Judith
Nesis, Leon
Neumuth, Edwin
Nishman, Judith
O’Leary, Virginia
Oransky, Lesley
O’Toole, Carroll
Paradis, Roger
Plager, Helen Louise
Poutasse, Margaret
Rosen, Charlene
Rosen, Robert
Rubin, Alan
Rubin, Lenore
Rubin, Sandra
Sabot, Carol
Sambel, Linda
Schneiderman, Myrna
Shaffer, Helen Mary
Schorr, Marney
Scotch, Rose
Segal, Anthony
Selkowitz, Elizabeth
Shair, Harold
Shalan, Arline
Shapiro, Howard
Shapiro, Shirley
Sherman, Arthur
Shuster, Carl
Shuster, Claudia
Siegel, Carole
Sinclair, Monica
Smilow, Turbi
Smith, Dorothy
Smith, Elske
Smith, Vicky
Solomon, Lonnie
Spatz, Naomi
Sternman, Chelly
Sternman, Lance
Stewart, Ronald
Strauss, Lawrence
Swiss, Kirk
Tabs, Ellen
Tabs, Leon
Tinari, Alex
Vale, Nancy
Vandervort, Carolyn
Walden, Jean
Waldinger, Barbara
Wallach, Stacy
Walters, Nancy
Weaver, Terry
Weinberg, Fran
White, Donald
White, Patricia
Williams, Selma
Wolk, Fran
Wolk, Joel
Youdelman, Bob
Youdelman, Karen
Young, Elizabeth
Zaret, Minna
Zdeb, Katherine
Ziskind, Ross

*deceased

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Highlighting OLLI Instructors at the Colonial
Spring Semester Open House – March 29, 2017

William Cameron and William Travis (instructors)
Betsey Selkowitz and Chris Guidette,
Karel Fisher (instructor)

PHOTOS BY SUSAN GELLER