

## Editor's Note

### When you're through learning you're through ...

A news photographer I knew in my days as a wire service reporter kept a few worn copies of The Harvard Classics in the trunk of his car along with his long lenses, tripods and boxes of Tri-X film. I asked him once if he read any of those books. "Oh, sure I do. Every chance I get. You know, when you're through learning you're through." His advice stayed with me. And now, many years later and retired in the Berkshires, I find learning through OLLI has provided me a new beginning that far exceeded my expectations.

So, when the opportunity arose, I jumped at the chance to be editor of *OLLI Update* — our newsletter. Working with talented and committed writers, editors, copy readers, photographers and a designer is a great way for an old newspaper editor and wire-service reporter like me to be even more engaged in our organization.

With this edition we're bringing you a fresh-looking newsletter that mirrors our handsome catalog. You'll notice some changes right away, starting with our new name — "OLLI Update," and our full color design. We've redesigned the front page, not only to make it more attractive, but to help you navigate the content throughout the publication. Other changes are a little subtler, like a more polished writing style, thanks to our ace proofreader, Assistant Editor **Sandi Rubin**.

Of course, we'll continue to bring you interesting articles about our activities and the people who make them happen and we'll cover interesting insights into

*(continued on page 3)*

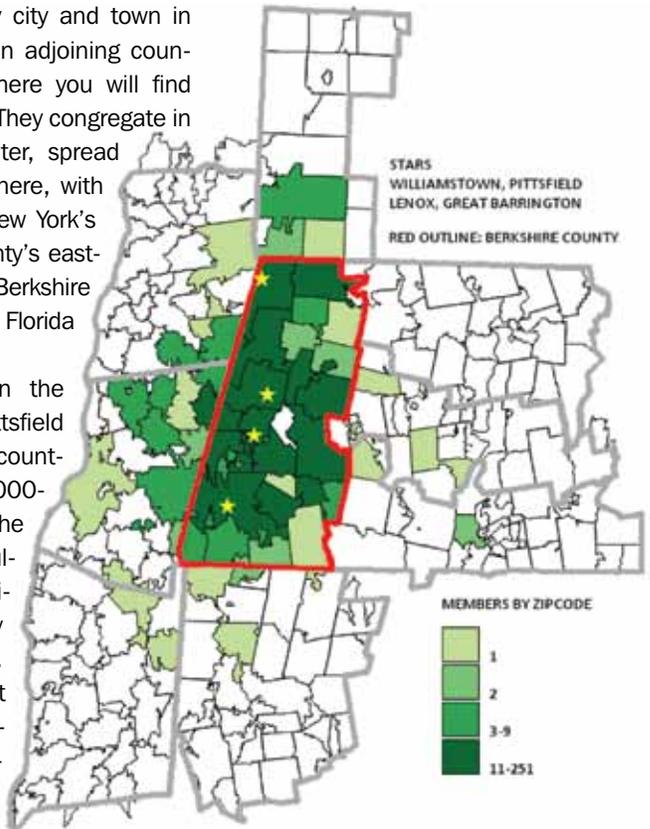
## Where in the world is OLLI?

Look in nearly every city and town in Berkshire County, and in adjoining counties and states, and there you will find OLLI at BCC members. They congregate in Berkshire County's center, spread north and south from there, with stronger numbers on New York's border than on the county's eastern edge. Only two Berkshire towns lack members: Florida and Peru.

The majority live in the mid-Berkshires, with Pittsfield and Lenox together accounting for half of OLLI's 1,000-plus roster. Though the county seat and its cultural capital boast similar enrollments, they differ in one respect. Census figures show that Pittsfield's 256 members represent 3 percent of the city's older adults, while Lenox's 237 members represent 14 percent of the town's seniors. Sometimes more is less.

Becket and West Stockbridge come in second and third in the ratio race, with 10 and 9 percent of those towns' older adults joining OLLI. Great Barrington (92) and Lee (60) outrank them on raw numbers, however. Such is the appeal of lifelong learning, as well as OLLI's social draw, that some members are the sole representative of their towns, notably New Ashford, Hancock, Tyringham, Savoy and Sandisfield.

Berkshire County teems with OLLI enrollees, with 91 percent residing there. While a smattering hail from Hampshire and Hampden counties, many more cross the border from New York state's Columbia (42) and Rensselaer (10) counties.



Connecticut (7) claims more members than Alford (5).

Every community holds potential members. Cities; towns populous or small, rich with activities or lacking them; even Florida and Peru contain residents yet to learn about OLLI, where they can learn even more. Introduce yourselves. Invite them to join. — Katherine Zdeb

*Developed by OLLI member Mike Zdeb, the online version shows ZIP-specific totals when a cursor hovers over shaded areas. [bit.ly/OLLIBCCmap](http://bit.ly/OLLIBCCmap)*

**Top 10 Towns for OLLI Members:**  
Pittsfield – 256; Lenox – 237; Great Barrington – 92; Lee – 60; Stockbridge – 51; Becket – 41; Williamstown – 36; W. Stockbridge – 27; Richmond – 27; Dalton – 27

## President's Message

Over the last few months, I have thought again and again how lucky I am to live in Berkshire County, not least because of our OLLI. Okay, maybe I'm a glutton for punishment, but I signed up for six courses this fall. I don't regret it a bit. The instructors are bright, knowledgeable people, and the topics are more interesting than any of the talk shows available on radio or TV. I'm learning history, science, philosophy and law, and I look forward to the classes even on Tuesday when I am inside all day long. It's more fun than college, in part because I don't need to worry about papers and exams.

I've also come to appreciate the importance of our OLLI staff. Yes, we have volunteer instructors, but we still have two staff members who keep the wheels turning. Fortunately, the Bernard Osher Foundation has given us an endowment, and we use all of the income from that gift every year. But OLLI also relies heavily on our members, both for membership fees and for gifts made during the annual appeal.

When the OLLI Board of Directors meets, we often hear from the Membership Committee that our net membership is like a leaky bucket. We have water coming in the top of the bucket (new memberships), but we have many leaks at the bottom. Many first-timers especially fail to renew. I would ask you to think of the OLLI

membership fee like a club membership or a pledge to a charitable organization. Whether you are taking courses at the moment or not, your membership fee supports the structure that ensures continued excellent programs in the coming year. When the time to renew comes, please think carefully about keeping your membership alive.

Contributions are also a key revenue source. While fee-based income is an essential part of our overall revenue picture, it accounts for only half of our income. The rest comes from the contributions of organizations, in-kind support from Berkshire Community College, and of course, members like you who are committed to keeping our OLLI alive and thriving.

When my kids were in college, my wife and I paid tens of thousands of dollars per year in tuition. We thought college was worth the cost because it exposed them to varied intellectual experiences. As an older person now, I find OLLI to be just as valuable to my quality of life. Nothing else really compares. Perhaps only a few of our members can afford a donation as large as a college tuition payment, but I think the comparison is still instructive. Generous charitable gifts allow us to keep OLLI membership and course fees low. Please give generously to OLLI.



— Peter Bluhm

## Winter OLLI courses: Jan. 12 – Feb. 23, 2018

Have you signed up for winter courses yet? Please refer to the Winter 2018 Catalog or visit [www.BerkshireOLLI.org](http://www.BerkshireOLLI.org) for more details. You may register online, by mail, or by phone: 413-236-2190. Note that the OLLI office will be closed from December 25, 2017 – January 2, 2018. See you in 2018!

**TUESDAYS** Tuesdays at the Movies: Comedies Through the Decades — **TC**  
School Days: Reading Short Stories Out Loud — **SCC**  
Ezra Pound: The Man, the Myth, and the Making of Modern Poetry — **SCC**

**WEDNESDAYS** Today's Headlines — **CC**  
Intentional Communities — **CC**  
Love & Betrayal: Poems of Catullus in Latin — **CC**  
Americans in Paris: Expatriates of the '20s & '30s — **DE**

**THURSDAYS** The Gender Divide in U.S. Politics — **CC**  
Radicalization & Extremism in Prison — **CC**  
B is for Brahms — **CC**

**FRIDAYS** Science Conversations — **BM**  
Advances in Medicine — **BM**  
Autism in the Age of Neurodiversity — **SCC**  
The Remarkable Life & Tumultuous Times of W.E.B. Du Bois — **SCC**

**BM** = Berkshire Museum, Pittsfield  
**CC** = Conte Center, Pittsfield  
**DE** = Devonshire Estates, Lenox  
**SCC** = BCC South County Center, Great Barrington  
**TC** = Triplex Cinema, Great Barrington

Can't decide what to take, or only in the Berkshires for part of the OLLI semester? Order a **Flexpass** and you will be able to attend up to six class sessions of your choice within a semester, as long as the class is not completely full. The cost is the same as a course and can be bundled together with classes as well.

## WINTER WEATHER CLOSINGS

OLLI follows the lead of Berkshire Community College when cancelling classes and events due to severe weather. We inform our students by email as soon as we learn of a weather-related cancellation. You can also check the BCC website for the latest information, which will be posted prominently on their front page: [www.berkshireecc.edu](http://www.berkshireecc.edu). Decisions are usually made and posted by 6 a.m. that day.

(Editor's Note continued from page 1)

OLLI itself. For instance, Assistant Editor **Katherine Zdeb** has an eye-opening piece on where Berkshire OLLI members come from. Assistant Editor **Linda Halpern** spotlights a new instructor who explores (and tries to explode) some of the myths about autism, and Assistant Editor Rubin recounts a celebration for **Art Sherman**, AKA "Mr. OLLI." And we couldn't let the 150th anniversary of the birth of Berkshire native W.E.B. Du Bois pass without a piece by our feature writer, **Joanna Fribush**. Our president, **Peter Bluhm**, offers a timely reminder that to keep OLLI going we must support it — not only with our presence — but with cash. So, send some.

From my first OLLI class with **Laura Gross Smith** on Boccaccio's *The Decameron*, to my latest, **Wayne Hammond's** Ancient Manuscripts, I find myself stimulated and entertained by topics I never had time to pursue. That may be your experience, too. So, I hope you will appreciate our effort to help you learn more about OLLI and stay abreast of what it has to offer, and I urge you to let us hear from you. Your thoughts and suggestions will help improve our publication and ensure we're never through learning.

— Chris Guidette

[clguidette@yahoo.com](mailto:clguidette@yahoo.com)

**OLLI UPDATE:** Editor, Christopher Guidette, Feature Writer, Joanna Fribush, Assistant Editors, Linda Halpern, Sandi Rubin, Judy Katz, Katherine Zdeb, Fran Wolk, Photographer, Susan Geller, Designer, Jane McWhorter

## Instructor Profile – Michael F. Wilcox

A novel that led to newfound self-awareness becomes the springboard for one man's exploration of some of the myths of autism, and for his efforts to help others.

"What does it mean to be disabled in our society?" asked Michael Wilcox in a recent address to a gathering of interested OLLI listeners. "Autistic people may require different solutions, but they share common challenges," he said. "We live in an age of neurodiversity in which autism and Asperger Syndrome need not be a barrier to a productive life."

In the winter term beginning in January, he will teach a course called "Autism in the Age of Neurodiversity" that will explore what is known about autism including new findings that may change many commonly held perceptions.

Wilcox transformed his life in late middle age when he was diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome. He educated himself about the condition. By combining business expertise with lifelong interests in philosophy, political science, economics and public policy, Wilcox became a passionate advocate for disabled and autistic people. He will work hard to dispel misconceptions in his course that celebrates neurodiversity, which views Asperger's as a difference, not a defect.

When Wilcox retired in the 1990s, he returned to his native Berkshire County. Then in 2005, he happened across the novel, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, and it opened his path to his transformational Asperger's diagnosis. "As I began to understand myself, I also began my life of activism," he said. Initially involved with the Asperger's Association of New England, he went on to political activities joining the Democratic Party and working in election campaigns in the 2006 and 2008 state elections. His subsequent work on the Massachusetts Special Commission Relative to Autism — as the only autistic person out of 45 members — led to state funded services for autistic adults. He also facilitated support groups for couples affected by autism. Wilcox is currently President of the Board of Autism Connections in Pittsfield. A state-funded resource center for the Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services, it serves the four western counties.

Wilcox's winter OLLI course will explore what is known about autism now as compared with the historical view. His course will examine what it's like to be autistic; Wilcox knows firsthand the upsides and downsides. He will discuss the language of autism — the labels and medical model versus the neurodiversity model. His course will examine societal barriers to those with autism and disabilities in housing, education and employment.

Wilcox grew up in Stockbridge and earned a bachelor's degree in economics from American International College in Springfield, Mass. while working in data processing for an insurance company. He later earned a master's degree in economics from Trinity College in Hartford, Conn. His blog: "The Activist Aspergerian," can be found at [www.mfw.us/blog](http://www.mfw.us/blog).

— Linda Halpern

*Michael Wilcox will be teaching Autism in the Age of Neurodiversity in Great Barrington on Friday afternoons from 1pm to 3pm beginning Friday, January 19th. For more information or to register, visit [berkshireolli.org](http://berkshireolli.org) or call 413.236.2190.*

## Arthur Sherman, “Mr. OLLI,” Feted at Luncheon Gala

Arthur Sherman, a man who helped make Berkshire County’s Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) the successful organization it is today, was celebrated by more than 130 OLLI and family members at an Oct. 8 luncheon in Lenox.

Enthusiastic participants and Sherman family members raised \$38,000 at the event. They filled the ballroom at the Cranwell Resort to praise Sherman and hear the story of his extraordinary role in helping launch the organization that brings courses in a wide array of subjects to some 1,000 Berkshire older adults.

The money raised will create the Sherman Endowment Fund, which will provide a series of lectures by notable speakers. The lecture series is named after Sherman’s late wife, Mona, a past president of OLLI.

Family members, past OLLI leaders and Sherman himself recounted the remarkable story of OLLI’s creation. The effort began two decades ago, Sherman recalled, on a spring day shortly after his retirement from a career in business and rocketry in New York.

“One day, soon after I retired, I was sitting on the deck of our home enjoying a view of the beautiful countryside, when Mona said ‘Art, I hope you’re not going to spend the rest of your days watching the grass grow.’”



OLLI Executive Director Megan Whilden and Art Sherman hold Endowment check.

Sherman’s response was a resounding “no” and before long he became active in an organization called Berkshire Institute for Lifetime Learning (BILL) the predecessor organization of OLLI. His involvement began as editor of BILL’s newsletter and progressed to the presidency of BILL, a post Mona also held.

But it was at a Lifelong Learning conference in California that the Sherman’s learned of the Osher Foundation which funded organizations like BILL and were called OLLI.

They met with Mary Bitterman, president of the Osher Foundation, and asked to apply to become an OLLI. Bitterman explained that the Foundation was trying to establish an OLLI chapter in each state and

that Massachusetts already had three.

Undaunted, the Sherman’s convinced Bitterman that Berkshire County was a unique area, unlike any of the other Bay State locations, which were much more urban.

BILL at that time was associated with three institutes of higher learning: Williams College, Bard College at Simons Rock and Berkshire Community College (BCC). Bitterman said there could only be one institute to which funding would be given to support an OLLI chapter and that BILL would have to determine which institution that would be.

The Osher Foundation agreed to let BILL apply to become an OLLI and gave the organization seed money to start a process. Then the task of writing a proposal was undertaken meeting all the Osher Foundation criteria.

BILL at that time operated only with volunteers and an administrative assistant. The Shermans knew that to grow OLLI they would need a professional, salaried executive director to run the organization. The Osher funds provided for an administrative staff. BCC was designated the supporting institution and has remained so ever since.

In time, the Osher Foundation agreed to an endowment gift of \$1 million, BILL became OLLI@BCC and the income from the endowment enabled OLLI to hire a part-time executive director, Barbara Hochberg (who preceded Executive Director Megan Whilden).



Mona Sherman’s daughter, Lisa Sharkey, presides over a tribute to her stepfather. Astronaut Leland Melvin, a Sherman friend, appears on the screen.

PHOTOS BY SUSAN GELLER

To qualify for another \$1 million, OLLI had to increase its membership to 1,000 people. When this was accomplished, the executive director became a full-time employee.

Soon after Mona Sherman died about ten years ago, Sherman began funding a series of annual lectures in her memory. As a tribute to her memory and her leadership in creating Berkshire OLLI, the Mona Sherman Memorial Endowment has been created to ensure the continuation of the free public lectures by notable speakers.

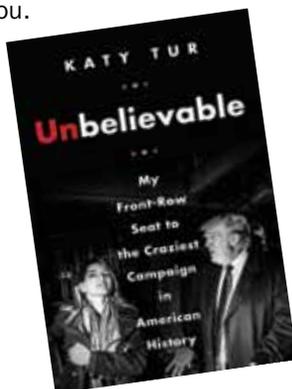
Tributes came from notables including Adam Falk, president of Williams College. There were proclamations by the Massachusetts State Senate, sponsored by State Sen. Adam G. Hinds, and from the U.S. Senate, sponsored by Sen. Elizabeth Warren in recognition of Sherman's efforts to advance adult education.

But the most touching tribute may have been from Sherman's son, Joel, who voiced his heartfelt gratitude for having been taught the value of knowing one's self worth and commitment to helping others — a lesson learned from Arthur Sherman's example. — Sandi Rubin

## A Gift For You

In thanks for your gift to OLLI of \$150 or more, we are delighted to send you a signed copy of the New York Times best-seller *Unbelievable: My Front-Row Seat to the Craziest Campaign in American History* by NBC journalist Katy Tur. Ms. Tur will be our 10th anniversary Mona Sherman Memorial Lecture speaker on May 25th, 2018. Save the date!

Donations to OLLI are tax deductible and can be sent to OLLI at BCC in the enclosed envelope, or to 1350 West Street, Pittsfield, Mass. 01201. Thank you for your support! OLLI thrives because of you.



## Justice, Reform and Hope are Topics of OLLI University Day

Efforts by legislators, police, social workers and even an artist to improve our civil justice system figured in an all-day round of discussions and lectures at the third annual University Day at Bard College at Simon's Rock — an event sponsored by OLLI and organized by OLLI board member Virginia O'Leary and her co-chair of OLLI's Social Science Curriculum Committee, Katherine Kidd. Over 60 people attended.

State Senator Adam Hinds (D-Berkshire) spoke on legislation he has co-sponsored to lower incarceration and recidivism rates in the Commonwealth by addressing the criminal system's disproportionate effect on those with lower incomes, and people of color.

Robert Bogomolny, former president of the University of Baltimore, and his wife Janice Toran, both retired lawyers and law school professors, led a discussion group along with others. They had taught an OLLI class called "Criminal Justice, Public Policy and the Individual" last spring.

In his keynote remarks Hinds noted success in producing legislation that has resulted from bringing together a cross-section of constituents — youth workers, advocates, and members of the judicial and law-enforcement agencies. The measure passed in the state senate and is awaiting action by the state house of representatives.

OLLI's program offered a broad view of how changes could also minimize the impact of incarceration on communities and families. Ben Forman, Director of Research at MassInc, addressed challenges communities face with high incarceration rates, highlighting mental health issues that need solutions beyond imprisonment.

Katie Byrne, coordinator of the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative, spoke on her agency's efforts to reduce youth detention through a partnership of social agencies, the courts, and families. Christine Judd is director of Roca in Springfield, an organization whose mission is to disrupt the cycle of incarceration and poverty by helping young people transform their lives. She said her organization's success requires youth workers, their clients, and law enforcement agencies to all work together.

Berkshire County's law enforcement agencies were represented by Berkshire County



*Bard College at Simon's Rock Provost Ian Pickford, along with a Simon's Rock student who attended University Day, and State Senator Adam Hinds.*

PHOTO BY SUSAN GELLER

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(University Day continued from page 5)

Sheriff Thomas Bowler. He discussed the success of in-house vocational programs at the Berkshire County Jail and House of Correction. That program and help for those with drug dependencies face budgetary challenges, he said.

Artist Phyllis Kornfeld, founder of Cellblock Visions, teaches art to inmates. Her display of students' expressive work was a highlight of the event. The numerous works offered inspiration and hope that true reform will result from collaborative efforts. — Linda Halpern



Keynote speaker State Senator Adam Hinds addresses a concerned audience.



Clockwise from upper right:

Shirley Edgerton of the Berkshire County branch of the NAACP, center, leads a lively discussion group.

Berkshire County Sheriff Thomas Bowler

OLLI member Will Singleton (left) listens to attendees.

Phyllis Kornfeld talks about her prison art collection on display.



PHOTOS BY SUSAN GELLER



## Thank You To Our OLLI Donors

As a non-profit community organization, OLLI at BCC relies on the generosity of members like you to ensure OLLI can continue to offer vibrant educational programming, scholarships to all who need them, mentoring opportunities to BCC students, and much more.

Enclosed with this newsletter you'll find a donation envelope. We hope you will use it to support your OLLI. You may also donate online at <http://bit.ly/SupportOLLI>.

The list below acknowledges OLLI donors who gave between July 1, 2016-June 30, 2017. Thank you each and every one for your generous support of lifelong learning in the Berkshires for all!

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## *The Remarkable Life & Tumultuous Times of W.E.B. Du Bois*

One of America's most prominent African American scholars, political activists and leaders, William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, was born in Great Barrington on February 23, 1868. The 150th anniversary of his birth will be celebrated this coming year by the town and by OLLI with a special course, "The Remarkable Life and Tumultuous Times of W.E.B. Du Bois," led by Randy Weinstein and Gwendolyn Hampton Van Sant.

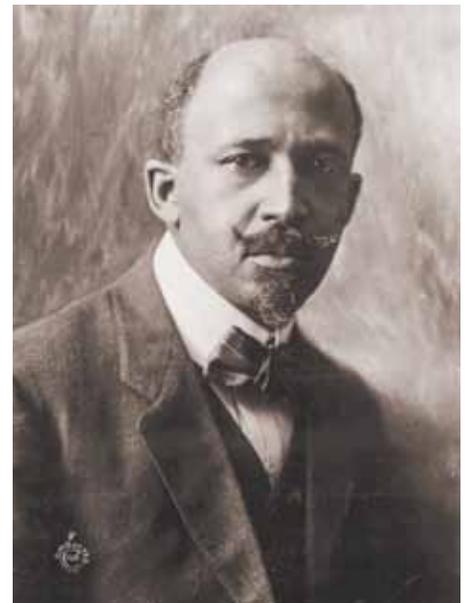
The OLLI classes will explore what it is about Du Bois that so moves Great Barrington to commemorate his life and why he continues to remain relevant – a fount of wisdom regarding racial equality and justice, health care and universal brotherhood. The first and last classes will be held in conjunction with Great Barrington's celebration: January 18 at the Triplex Cinema and February 23 at the Mahaiwe Theater — the exact date of his 150th birthday.

Du Bois's reflections on his early years in Great Barrington indicate the tremendous effect they had on his lifelong pursuit

of education and social justice for all. He called Great Barrington "a boys paradise," where he experienced a good education in integrated schools, and acceptance in the church and community. It was "worlds apart" from the life he experienced after graduating from Great Barrington High School and attending Fisk University (an African-American school) in the Jim Crow South. After Fisk, Du Bois went to Harvard where he earned an M.A. and also became the first African American to earn a Harvard Ph.D.

Du Bois's commitment to help black Americans overcome prejudice and exclusion continued throughout his life. In 1905, he helped found the Niagara Movement, which called for an end to discrimination, and a few years later he helped to found the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People – the NAACP. Believing he would never see true equality in the United States, Du Bois moved to Ghana in 1961, where he died three years later at age 95, on the eve of the Civil Rights March on Washington.

— Joanna Fribush



*"The Remarkable Life & Tumultuous Times of W.E.B. Du Bois" course begins Thursday, January 18th at 3:30pm at the Triplex Cinema in Great Barrington and continues for the next five Fridays. To register or for more information, consult your catalog, visit [berkshireolli.org](http://berkshireolli.org) or call 413.236.2190.*