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Rebounding from COVID at Academy for Lifelong Learning

Lawrence Brown

Columnist

Cape Cod has a lively population of senior residents, not just for the climate and the beaches but because it's possible for people 50 and over to have a dynamic and engaging life here.

The things that civilize the community and make it vibrant never happen by accident. Civilized and vibrant people make these things happen — and the Cape has been lucky to attract a lot of people like that.

The Academy for Lifelong Learning has been running since 1987, offering academic and cultural courses for adults 50 and up. It's run and administered by scholars, teachers, professors and professionals in all sorts of disciplines. The classes are friendly and unpressured, and you'll find the classrooms filled with interesting people who've seen a lot, done a lot, and make for wonderful company.

I joined the program after retiring from 45 years of high school and middle school teaching. What I've gotten from teaching and what students get from learning are remarkably similar: opportunities to meet new people, make new friends, learn new things and keep the cognitive juices flowing.

This last thing — keeping the cognitive juices flowing — shows up in study after study as one of the best ways aging people can resist brain fade in all its forms. Almost 25 years ago, I heard a woman ask a Buddhist monk if he could summarize 'enlightenment' for her.

'You have food for your body,' he said, 'what do you have for your mind?'

It's possible that the people who suffered most from COVID-19 were the very young and the very old. Both groups suffered cruelly from the isolation COVID imposed on us. I'd just gotten used to teaching classes of adults when suddenly our rooms in the Cape Cod Community College were shuttered and we were reduced to staring at each other's faces at the size of credit cards on a computer screen. We all hated it. But then it sunk in. This was the only community many of my students had left. People had lost life partners; they were lonely and frightened— but we had each other, and we made the most of it.

The Academy still offers Zoom connections for people who want them, but happily, we're back in the classrooms together

where we can see and greet each other in the flesh.

One of the best things about the Academy for Lifelong Learning is the wide variety of courses you can take there — and the offerings are changing all the time.

Paul Coteus is offering a class titled Climate Change and What We Can Do About It. His course starts with the science; then we'll look at our own carbon footprints and how we can reduce them.

At the academy, you can learn new games and have people to play them with. Miriam and Herb Kronish will offer a course on backgammon. There is another course on how to play bridge.

Joseph Gonzalez will be offering 12 Film Movements that Changed the Art of Cinema. Starting with the silent era, each film will introduce a pivot point in the growth of content and the art of film itself. You'll see a movie each week and then discuss it. Joe worked in the industry for 36 years before retiring. You'll find a lot of experience like that among the volunteer faculty there.

There are several classes that deal with the phenomena of aging in one way or another, including a course by Maggie French on Aging, Philosophy, and a Changing Perspective

Suppose you'd like to write poetry or try your hand at a novel. The fall program offers courses in both. Mary Lou Mack is offering a class in watercolors. Another course is being offered in tai chi.

Susan Whalley and Steve Piontek will offer an Introduction to Nichiren Buddhism. They have 50 years of practice between them. There's a class on public speaking for the first time.

Interested in history? Russ Leng is a retired political science professor from Middlebury College. He's offering a class on Six Men Who Shaped the American Revolution.

Coteus is a retired physicist and IBM Fellow. He's offering The History of Earth: 4 Billion Years in 6 Weeks

I'm offering Turning Points: Six Revolutions That Changed Everything

Some courses are offered for six weeks, others for 12. There's a class on Butterflies across Cape Cod, another on The Music of Gustav Mahler

And I've just mentioned a few of the offerings, just enough to give you a taste.

The new class catalog is just out. Check the program's website www.capecodall.org. The best part of Academy of Lifelong Learning is that whatever turns you on, you'll find a classroom full of congenial and like-minded souls to make friends with.

Lawrence Brown is a columnist for the Cape Cod Times. Email him at columnresponse@gmail.com

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