

## NEWSROOM

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CLASSES, FRIENDSHIPS**HUNDREDS OF RETIREMENT-AGE PENINSULA RESIDENTS HAVE EXPANDED THEIR  
KNOWLEDGE OVER THE YEARS.**by [Jane Heeter](#) | January 8, 2020*Above: The Ukulearners perform at the 30th Anniversary Carnival**Read time: about 3 min*

Learning is a constant pursuit for all at Christopher Newport.

The LifeLong Learning Society (LLS) is celebrating 30 years of living up to its name. The organization provides hundreds of retirement-age Hampton Roads residents with the opportunity to expand their knowledge, make friends and take classes, tours and more.

The only requirement for admission over the past three decades: intellectual curiosity.

The possibilities are endless. Always wanted to learn Spanish? Take a 10-week course in the fall or spring semesters. Want to express your creative side? A watercolor class in a sun-drenched classroom is the perfect outlet. Need to fuel your word-crafting hobby? Make friends with the folks in the newly minted (m-i-n-t-e-d: 9 points) Scrabble Club.

LLS was formally founded in 1989 as the Elderlearning Society at Christopher Newport, an opportunity for retired locals to enjoy interesting study and group discussions. One computer course that fall blossomed into the LifeLong Learning Society, now offering over 175 classes during fall, spring and summer semesters.

While LLS is directed by a small and enthusiastic staff, volunteers help keep its Yoder Barn home just off Jefferson Avenue buzzing with activity. Volunteers help steer curriculum choices, stuff envelopes with each season's course catalog, direct traffic on busy days and, most importantly, act as the biggest word-of-mouth advertisers.

A friend of a friend of a member may hear about a new poetry class, and spread it around her group. Membership has increased every year this way; the original class of 54 learners has now grown to over 700 learners.

Instructors are current and former Christopher Newport professors, retirees imparting the wisdom they once practiced at the shipyard or in high school classrooms, self-taught experts who want to share their know-how and even some LifeLong Learners themselves.

Theodora Bostick, professor emeritus from Christopher Newport's Department of History, has taught LLS courses since 1996. After her retirement in 2006, she decided to join the LLS fun that she'd always seen as she looked out into the classrooms.

Bostick said she has been able to pursue a long-held interest in learning Arabic, give history lectures during an LLS trip to France and make friends with people she would not have otherwise known.

"I think one of the wonderful things is, in my own experience, developing new friendships. You meet some really interesting people," Bostick said. "Everyone comes from such a different background and from so many life experiences that every group you're in, whether it's a discussion group or a class or book club, it becomes an extraordinarily rich experience.

"I think along with the friendships comes being able to share with others and to get the benefit of other people's experience and background. It makes it an extremely stimulating experience."

Some classes and trips take place at longtime partners, including Jefferson Lab, the Mariners' Museum and NASA Langley Research Center. Those experts will often bring lectures to Yoder Barn, too, with the Virginia Symphony Orchestra's Monday talks drawing large crowds each fall.

Short field trips to nearby sites – previews of student shows at the Ferguson Center for the Arts are especially popular – add cultural experiences to the offerings. LLS also hosts an annual gardening symposium and writing conference.

Some classes start as a brief introduction to a topic during the short summer session and blossom into more.

Take for instance one of the latest sensations at Yoder Barn, the "Ukulearners." Instructor Mark Morgan introduced ukuleles, small, four-stringed guitars native to Hawaii, to a group of novices over a weeklong summer course.

Morgan was himself a beginner when a friend gave him the instrument about a year and a half ago, and he thought it would be a welcome addition to the lineup of classes offered by the LLS.

Enrollment quickly filled to over 50, and the group continued to practice for weeks after class ended in June, Morgan said. Ninety-eight-year-old Catherine Dycus, a resident of The Arbors at Port Warwick, is one of the LLS members who learned the instrument.

She asked her classmates to consider playing a concert for her neighbors, and they eagerly obliged.

"Oh, I've so enjoyed learning," said Dycus, the sole baritone Ukulearner.

The Ukulearners performed another set at the 30th Anniversary Carnival, delighting the crowd with their rousing renditions of "Amazing Grace," "You Are My Sunshine" and other classics.

The experience – taking a short class to learn a new skill, gaining new friends, sharing it with others – is a quintessential example of what LLS provides its members and the community.

"This is the epitome of LifeLong Learning," Morgan said. "You're learning something – and you're having fun."