

OSHER LIFELONG LEARNING INSTITUTE: HEALTH CLUB FOR AGING BRAIN

A conversation with the new director, Kate Schaefer

By **Susan Schaefer**
UNDER THE HOOD



It is widely known that aging is accompanied by varying rates and degrees of cognitive decline. However, neuroscience research has revealed that by keeping physically, socially, and mentally active and engaged, we are able to mitigate, and even reverse decline.

Here in the Twin Cities, we are fortunate to have a resource that offers highly participatory lifelong learning, and solid camaraderie and engagement. Best of all, accessing it is convenient from all corners of our metro area.

The University of Minnesota's Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, better known as OLLI, is a respected and vital part of the University's College of Continuing and Professional Studies. Geared toward those over 55, anyone is welcome to join and participate.

Here's a little history:

In 1977, business executive and philanthropist, Bernard Osher, founded his self-named Bernard Osher Foundation to improve the quality of life through support for higher education and the arts, funding colleges and universities across the nation, with special attention to re-entry students. Investing significant funds through generous endowments, the foundation supports 125 lifelong learning programs on university and college campuses across the country, with at least one grantee in each of the 50 states and the District

of Columbia. Founded in 1995, UMN's OLLI has been recognized as an "exemplary lifelong learning program" by the foundation.

Despite the upheavals caused by the pandemic during the past years, OLLI has managed to pivot and cope. There have been a few changes. The main office recently moved from its former location in the McNamara Alumni Center on UMN's East Bank to its new home in Coffey Hall on the St. Paul Campus.

Also new is OLLI director, Dr. Kathleen (Kate) Schaefer, who brings a wealth of experience, leadership, vision, and passion to the role. We met virtually with Schaefer, who is a licensed psychologist, leadership coach, and educator, who has served as the AARP-MN Volunteer State President, and is a founding member of the Nexel Collaborative, a higher education consortium of institutions exploring ways to bring older adults back to campus. Schaefer graciously answered our questions:

OLLI has been referred to as a "health club for the aging brain," with much research dedicated to how intellectual and social enrichment help counteract cognitive decline. What are your thoughts about this as the new, incoming executive director?

Healthy aging is more than physical. It is about staying active and engaged, from a physical, mental, and social perspective. Staying curious, and being open to new learning opportunities, is good for our brains, but also for our well-being as we age.

OLLI offers opportunities to learn and stay mentally sharp, but it's much more than that. As a learning community, OLLI



During the pandemic outside OLLI classes continued to be popular, which included a drumming circle. (Photo courtesy of OLLI)

members develop deep connections with others who share a passion for learning. OLLI members actively participate in discussions, explore shared interests, volunteer their talents, and plan joint travel experiences. The bottom line: When we are part of learning activities that fully engage us, that invite us to actively participate and engage with others, we benefit on all levels.

What attracted you to taking the OLLI position? What do you bring to the table?

I am inspired by people in my life who approached their later years with a sense of curiosity, purpose, generosity, and joy. Every one of them embraced life as learners and teachers, mentors, and novices. They are my role models for living life fully at any age. I find kindred spirits with

in the OLLI community, and I am honored to play a role in helping this community thrive.

I have spent the last decade of my career focusing on ways to tap the talents of an aging population for the greater good. As an educator, program administrator, researcher, and writer, I centered my efforts on engaged aging, lifelong learning, and building community. Also, I am part of a network of people and organizations that see potential in our aging population.

How have the past years of pandemic and quarantine impacted our OLLI program?

Like everyone, OLLI had to pivot on a dime to convert our programming to virtual. We went



INDEPENDENT SENIOR LIVING | ASSISTED LIVING | MEMORY CARE

Find Your 'More' At Village Shores

So Much More At Village Shores!
Village Shores gives you private and beautifully designed living accommodations in an active, vibrant senior community. Residents at Village Shores can choose the level of assistance or care they need at every stage of their life. Our facilities offer healthy dining, life-enriching activities, expertly-trained care teams and engaging programs for the best in 55 and up living. Join our vibrant community, where friends are made, meals are shared, and abundant activities abound.

Voted the Best Senior Living Community!

Move into your apartment by May 31, 2022 and get \$1500 towards rent.



VILLAGE SHORES
A SILVERCREST COMMUNITY

6501 Woodlake Drive, Richfield | www.villageshores.com
Contact Judy at 612-746-4711 or jkoznic@villageshores.com