

## Making LLI Happen

LLIfe: Italo Benin

The students in Italo Benin's philosophy class sit in rapt attention, some taking notes as fast as they can, some blinking and blinking as exciting new concepts pile up in their heads. "Intelligent people enjoy philosophy," says Dr. Benin, who admits he has never enjoyed teaching more than he has at LLI.

In order really to appreciate philosophy, he explains, two things are required: life experiences and freedom. Philosophical questions come late in life. "When we are young we are too busy living. As we get older, we gain a certain amount of freedom. We are no longer busy with time-consuming job commitments, and we no longer need to prove ourselves to the world."

Dr. Benin's popular class is an ongoing series called Self-Understanding. "Why philosophy?" he asks. "Philosophy is a human orientation characterized by critical reflection that questions the validity of any

claim to know the truth about anything. It questions the unquestioned assumptions of knowledge. In its purest form, philosophy is a problem-raising knowledge that questions the truth of any answer given in history. Its ultimate goal is to preserve the freedom of the mind. Such a freedom finds its creative expression in the ability to ask questions, for asking the question is the creative moment of understanding."

Born and raised near Venice, educated at Lateran University in Rome (where classes were taught in Latin), Dr. Benin spent 28 years as a professor of philosophy. After several years as a high school teacher in Italy, he joined the Marist College faculty in 1967. He has taught prisoners as well as school students: "There is no place like jail to raise philosophical questions." Through teaching, he says, he was forced to clarify himself, to develop his own philosophy of life which he is now sharing with his LLI classes.

Freedom is the essence of the human spirit, he believes. It is what makes us human. But we are like birds looking for a cage—we don't really want freedom. We want security, comfort, safety. "And philosophy can be a big cage, too," he reminds us.

In his spare time, Dr. Benin has also been an active volunteer for Hospice and Meals On Wheels. "The people I have visited through these activities have taught me a lot," he says. After a life-threatening illness of his own, he explains, he discovered that once you accept that you are dying, then you are completely free. "You become part of the world again, but free from it."

Dr. Benin and his wife, Sharon, live in Staatsburg. They have one son, a student at Marist, majoring in digital communications.

*Donna McLaughlin*

## So You Want to be a Presenter

What does it take to be a presenter for the Lifetime Learning Institute?

You might be surprised. You don't need advanced degrees, though some presenters have them. You don't need years of teaching experience, though some presenters have. You don't even have to be a member of LLI, though many presenters are chosen from our ranks.

You **do** need an idea, something that deeply interests you and in which you have solid layers of knowledge. And you need to have a little flair to present your idea to the curriculum committee to bring a course to life.

If the subject of your course is your passion, that's great! You need to excite that passion in those you teach. Peer learning is an important pillar of the LLI pyramid. The Institute benefits greatly from the input of its members.

If you can't stand up in front of a class for eight sessions, you might assemble a group of speakers to enlighten your subject.

As an example, some members are currently planning a class on the impact of political cartoons by seek-

ing out professors, curators of local museums, and *New Yorker* cartoonists to present individual segments. To develop the outline for the course, they are working online with a professor at the University of Southern California who teaches just such a course in USC's freshman seminar.

Your ideas are essential to a richly textured curriculum that will be a joy to all members.

*Midge Russo*

## Curriculum Corner – Peer Study

### *Lyric Poetry, The Enduring Impulse*

Our peer study experiment during the Fall 2005 semester was positive and rewarding.

Class facilitator, **Virginia Cleary**, introduced the topic with quotations and suggestions from some of her favorite poets.

In ensuing sessions, class members took the ball and ran with it. Under Virginia's direction, whether in teams or individually, they researched poets and poems and then reported on their findings to the class. As predicted, the result was lively and stimulating discussions.

The goal of peer study is to engage class members in research and discussion, either to deepen their knowledge, or to learn about a new topic. In the view of all the participants, this new direction in learning was successful and fun.

*Josette Lee, chair*

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### LLI Celebrates Its Fifth Year!

**Fiesta Internacional** is planned to celebrate the fifth anniversary of LLI at Bard College. Mark your calendars for an evening of fun, food, music, dancing and prizes, on Sunday, April 30, 5–9 p.m. at The Church of the Messiah, Rte. 9, Rhinebeck.

The idea of LLI was conceived by **Sylvia Erber**, a self-taught woman then in her early 80s, who craved academic stimulation. She found the Adult Education courses at Bard beyond her financial means, and the waiting list for Marist's Center for Lifetime Studies was about 350 people too long.

Not to be dissuaded, Sylvia invited a group of people to her home in the Spring of 2001 to explore creating such a venue nearby.

**Josette Lee** contacted Elderhostel Institute Network and enlisted **Joan** and **Jonah Sherman**, founders of the Marist CLS, to guide the formation of LLI.

The proposal was embraced by Bard dean **Stuart Levine**, who arranged for classrooms to be available to LLI on Fridays and classes formally began in September 2001. First-time presenters included **Alan Theodore**, **Joan McPartlin**, **Nancy Alden**, **Ed Morrison** and **Harriet Hoffman**.

Originally 75 members, LLI numbers have grown each year, as LLI serves a wider audience and garners a broad spectrum of presenters from academia, the professional world and LLI's membership.

Conceived as a dream, LLI now has over 220 members, and classes meet four days a week!

**Fiesta Internacional**, an international buffet provided by Gendron Caterers and music by MC/DJ Jim Storms and Co. will celebrate our past and future successes.

The cost is \$25 per person, limited to LLI members and "significant others." Reservations are required.

Make your checks payable to LLI/Bard College, and mail them to Arzi McKeown, 520 Glasco Turnpike, Saugerties NY 12477. Reservation Deadline is April 19.

For information and directions, please call 845 758-7314 or log on to [www.bard.edu/institutes/lli](http://www.bard.edu/institutes/lli)

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### Brown Bag Lunches

Our new Brown Bag Lunch series got off to a great start with the first presentation by Dean Stuart Levine. His photo essay on faces of visitors to Yad Vashem in Israel provided a view of people's resilience and ability to recover from tragedy. The Brown Bag Lunch series is designed to bring a small group of people together for a personal discussion about the presenter's passion or accomplishment. It is purposely set up this way to encourage people who normally don't teach to feel comfortable in this warm environment,

as well as to promote more intimate discussions. For this reason seating is limited to 20 people and reservations are absolutely necessary. The upcoming sessions are posted on the website: [www.bard.edu/institutes/lli](http://www.bard.edu/institutes/lli) **3rd Mondays: 12:30 p.m.–1:30 p.m.** Campus Center, George Ball Lounge Please make your reservation early.

If you are excited about something you are doing, we welcome you to share your enthusiasm! Please contact Arzi at (845) 246-3315 or [lli@bard.edu](mailto:lli@bard.edu).

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### *If you don't have e-mail*

Have you considered WebTV? This is e-mail on your television screen. At any major electronics store or by phone from MSNTV, \$200 buys a player (about the size of a book) and a wireless keyboard (for typing messages). In addition to e-mail, WebTV offers internet access with high-speed connections available as well. "Having a computer would give me agita," says Mavis Levy, LLI member and WebTV fan. For information, call MSNTV at 1-866-466-7688 (toll-free).

*Donna McLaughlin*