



Senior Lifestyles

Clark College classes prove that learning is a lifetime experience

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staff reporter

Retirement may mean freedom from work but it doesn't mean freedom from learning, says Lance Thompson, who is teaching a class for senior citizens at Clark College.

Thompson's class, "How the USA Got in the Shape It's in," is one of eight afternoon academic classes that have been offered through the Mature Learning program this spring. Each class is taught for two hours a week for five weeks.

"These classes keep people's minds engaged," said Thompson, who is teaching his first class at Clark, although he retired as a math and engineering instructor from the California community college system and has assisted with the Mature Learning program.

The "shape" of the U.S.A. in the class title refers to the physical shape; what issues caused state boundaries, what set the northern and southern borders of the nation.

"We'll teach a little history, a little math with longitude and latitude" and geography, Thompson said. "This is an exploring kind of course—what would we do today—we'd draw boundaries differently."

Like other Mature Learning

academic classes, Thompson's class has no homework and no tests, and students attend every Wednesday for five weeks, 2:30-4:30 p.m. The class that began May 13 and ends June 10 costs \$30.

"We're trying to keep life-long learning for people," Thompson said, noting that 12 percent or 13 percent of the population of Clark County is older than 60.

"Clark (College) is very good at supporting the Mature Learning program," he said. "We have good attendance and we get a lot of people back."

Tracy Reilly-Kelly administers the Mature Learning program.

"Students are there for the pure love of learning. We have a lot of these intellectual classes," she said. "We offer a variety each term, retired professors are a great resource for us."

Reilly-Kelly said eight five-week classes are offered each semester, and suggestions for subject matter are welcome.

"We love suggestions," she said, "and we're always looking for new instructors."

This year's academic classes included a day bus trip to the state capitol in Olympia, a look at the Legislature in session, and a discussion with Val Ogden, who served six terms

in the Washington House of Representatives before retiring in 2002. Forty-two people made the trip under the Clark College program.

"The trip gave people an idea of how the state Legislature works," Thompson said. "Some had never been to the Legislature."

A challenging topic, the human genome project, will be the subject of a fall class called "DNA, Genes and Personalized Medicine," to be taught by Philip Mirkes, a former researcher at the University of Washington and Texas A&M University, Reilly-Kelly said.

According to the college's online catalog, Mirkes will "offer a first-hand look at how an individual's genetic inheritance will affect the body's response to drugs (pharmacogenomics). He will assess and describe current and future efforts to produce tailor-made drugs adapted to each person's own genetic makeup."

The fall schedule is being created as the spring term ends. Printed catalogues listing the Mature Learning schedules are sent to all households in Clark County, Reilly-Kelly said.

The age of Mature Learning students varies from mid-50s to mid-80s, Thompson said.

The academic series scheduled each year from September through June is only one aspect of the program. Creativity classes that include painting, drawing and writing, take place year around, with various art

classes beginning in late June and continuing for five weeks. The fees for the creativity classes vary depending on the materials used, travel and other factors, Reilly-Kelly said.

"The Sights and Sounds of the City," a watercolor class that visits different locations in Vancouver, begins June 30 and costs \$75. Other painting classes start at \$60. The classes are popular and may fill up quickly, she said.

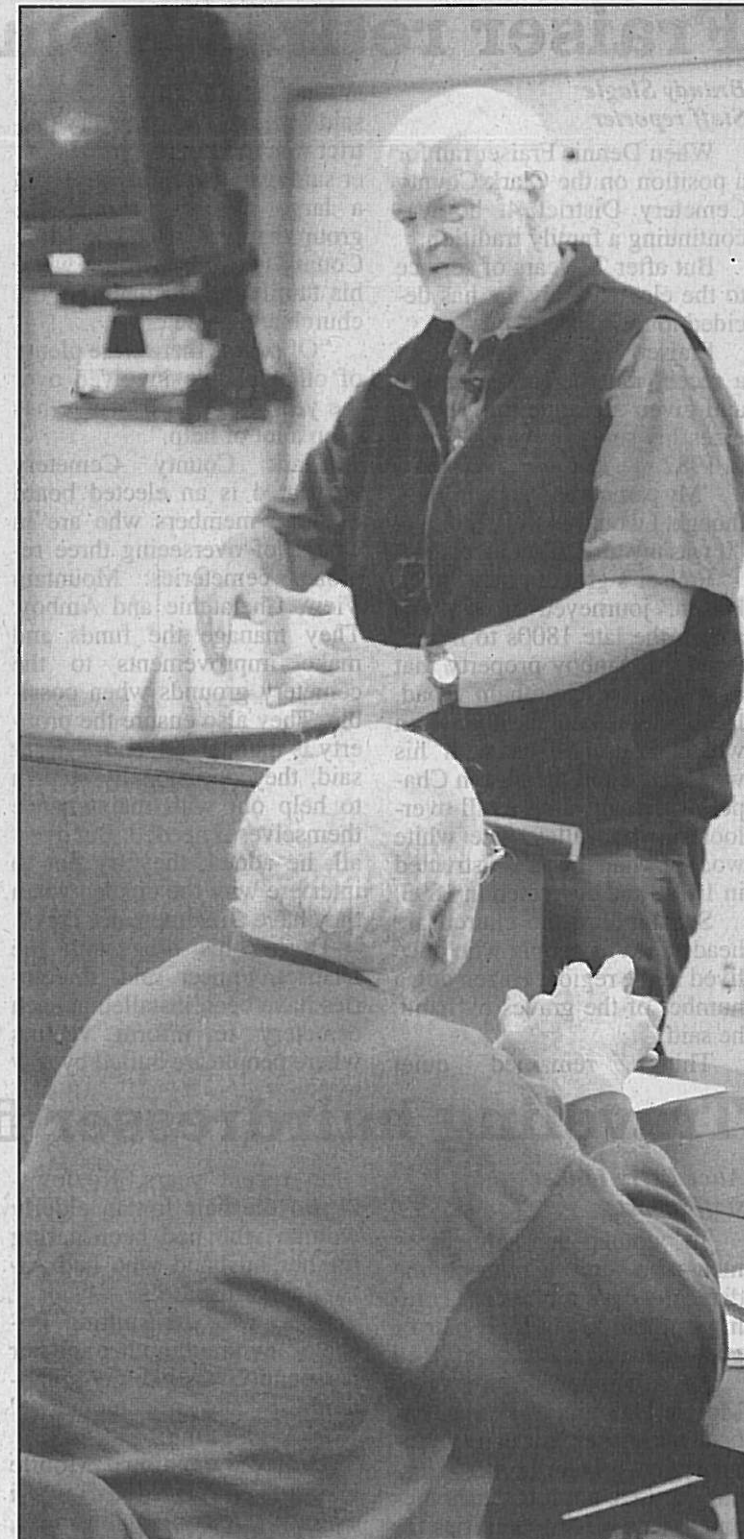
Fitness classes are offered year around, said Reilly-Kelly. Each five-week session costs \$30. In addition to basic exercise-fitness classes, the college offers Tai Chi, Yoga and Qi Gong, an ancient Chinese exercise and meditation practice.

Mature Learning classes are available to people 55 and older. The college also offers a gold card to people 60 and older. The \$30 card allows senior citizens to audit for-credit classes, if space is available, at a cost of \$5 per credit hour.

Reilly-Kelly said the most popular classes are languages and computer use.

Those who want to apply for a gold card must visit the registrar's office and show proof of age. Gold cards do not have to be renewed.

Mature Learning classes are listed in the college's quarterly catalogue and they may be viewed online at www.clark.edu. Click on the "corporate and continuing education" link and follow the link to mature learning.



LANCE THOMPSON teaches a Mature Learning class on U.S. history and geography at Clark College.

Photo submitted by Clark College