

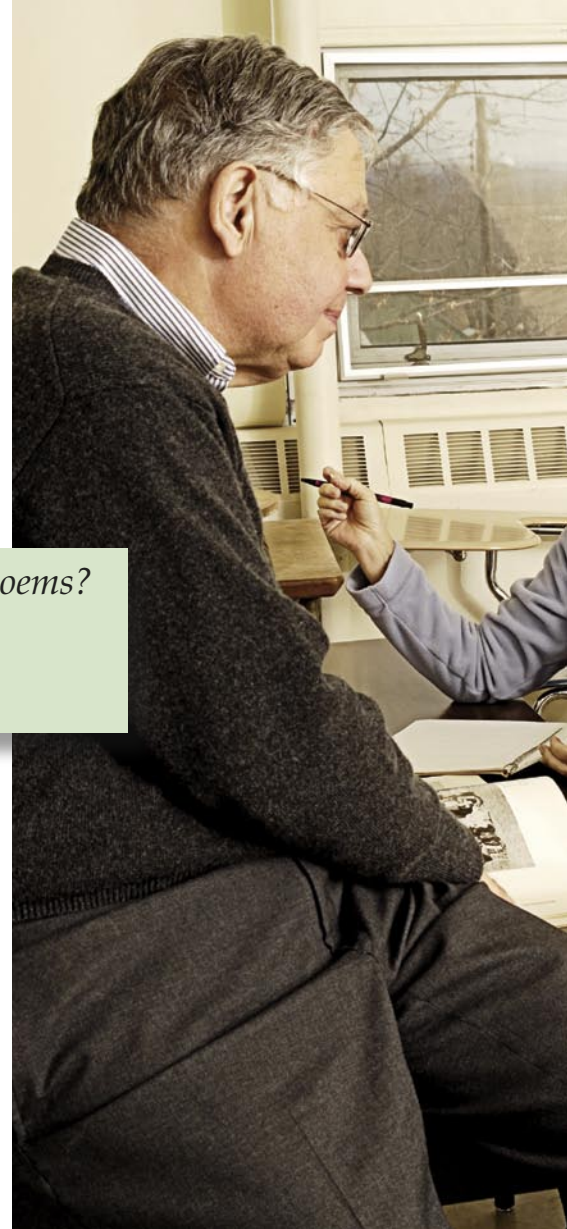
Encore Brings Learning Alive for Seniors

by Christine Godwin

Are you interested in learning about modern India?

Award-winning movies? The power of short stories and poems?

Philosophical studies? The science behind everyday life?



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ave you always wanted to water color, script or quilt, but have always been too busy working or raising a family? Perhaps you've wanted to teach a short course on a favorite pastime like, say, baseball history or radio's heyday? Or share your expertise about local history or opera? And do it all as a senior citizen-learner in a community college setting?

Those tantalizing questions are at the foundation of one of SUNY Orange's most successful educational partnerships: Encore, the College's 10-year-old program for "lifelong" learners. Modeled after the international Elderhostel program, Encore allows community and college lifelong learners and instructors to explore together wonderfully diverse opportunities in short courses, one-day special programs and travel-learn experiences.

The results of this vibrant program and partnership are invigorating for the learners and instructors while meshing perfectly with the mission of the College. For instance, during the Spring 2007 semester, Encore members are flocking to courses about "Modern India" and "Understanding Islam."

"I wanted to take both courses very badly. We need to learn about other cultures if we are to understand our world," says Encore student **Gail Harlach**, who found professor emeritus **Bob Foglia's** lectures on India mind-expanding; the sessions on Islam invaluable in separating stereotypes from the realities of a nonviolent religious system.

For **Renuka Khanna**, another student-retiree in the Modern India course, it was a superb opportunity to see her native land and culture from a different perspective, while Foglia saw the chance to instruct the course as "an opportunity to share one of my personal favorite subjects—and to learn from the responses and additions of the 'students', who bring their own seasoned worldly experiences to the forum."

SUNY Orange is completely invested in the Encore program, beyond simply sponsoring it with funding. President **William Richards** joined the Encore faculty, teaching "Conceptual Physics" this spring. How did the experience affect him? "I had a marvelous time discussing Aristotle, Ptolemy, Copernicus, Newton and many others with a wonderful group of friends of the College. The ideas and insights we shared with each other were memorable."

One obvious benefit of this special community-college partnership is the way it spans generations and age groups, and Encore member-students applaud the lifelong learning SUNY Orange encourages. **Dr. Fred Levinson**, who has studied jazz, big bands, global issues and cinema via Encore, says, "It's an inspiring program in continuing education, a worthwhile endeavor."

Delighting in exchanging the role of teacher for that of student, **Evelyn Noelle** says Encore's sculpting class allowed her to explore "things I had never tried before. I loved all of the creativity that, once tapped, came pouring out! I've always wanted to sculpt and now Encore has given me the chance to put my hands to the clay."



Professor emeritus Bob Foglia, left, and several of his Encore students discuss "Modern India" following a recent lecture.

says Encore president and founder, **Gertrude Mokotoff**. In addition, Encore strives to encourage ongoing learning. Last May, it created and awarded its first "Adult Returning Student" scholarship to a SUNY Orange student. This academic year it has also contributed \$5,000 to the College.

A former SUNY Orange Trustee and professor emeritus, as well as a past Middletown mayor, Mokotoff embodies the kind of ongoing educational commitment this partnership creates. "I will never stop learning myself," she observes, "and I believe that's what keeps us, our college and our community vigorous and alive."

Dr. Catherine Chew, vice president for academic affairs, agrees. "This is a wonderful win-win partnership for the College and the community. This group not only learns from talented colleagues on campus, but supports our academic programs in numerous ways such as a significant contribution for audio equipment for our theatre program."

Encore formally resides within SUNY Orange's Continuing and Professional Education division and the College provides office and classroom space for the primarily daytime courses. But the life blood of the program is the healthy mix of the college and community partnership and the shared dedication to "lifelong learning" and keeping "learning alive" at SUNY Orange.

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Gertrude Mokotoff was a motivating force behind the creation of Encore and remains one of the group's staunchest advocates.

At age 96 one of Encore's "senior" senior learners, **Nadia Tally**, says Encore offers her what she values most. Since retiring, she has avidly sought to study and discuss "everything that I don't know about. I like to find out about different things and I like the variety of subjects offered." She's taken Encore trips to the Culinary Institute of America, visited numerous historical sites, and studied opera and movies in Encore courses.

But this unique educational partnership has other paybacks.

"It reaches out and brings together lovers of learning from all areas of our community. And it infuses us all with new life, new possibilities,"