



Third Age Network (TAN)

An association of lifelong learning groups in Ontario
www.thirdagenetwork.ca

NEWSLETTER

February 2021

Report from Your Executive....

By Cathy Spark, President

Although we had optimistically hoped that we would be back to normal operations by now, that is – unfortunately – not the case. As a result, our Board met via Zoom again for its November meeting. While it was too bad that we could not all be together in person, it was nice that everyone could participate without worrying about driving in the wintery weather.

We continue to receive membership inquiries on a regular basis, but COVID has had an impact here too. While early in 2020 there was a lot of interest from small groups wanting to start up, the problems caused by shutdowns, etc. have made it difficult for some groups to make as much progress as they had hoped – resulting in start-up delays. Some of the newer groups have also had to make the difficult decision to temporarily cease operations. If you have a question about starting a group, or know someone that might be interested, please contact us at lifelonglearningont@gmail.com.

The importance of TAN as a network for its members is, perhaps, greater now than ever given the new challenges we are facing and the resulting modifications we need to make to how we serve our memberships. As a result, the following matters were discussed by the Board:

It was acknowledged that some of our discussion sessions / learning topics might have interest within our member groups beyond the TAN rep or Board members. This is especially true when committee chairs or programme leaders do not sit on the Board. It was agreed that others would be included in any future sessions that were relevant.

The importance of the shared list of speakers was emphasized as members indicated that they find the list invaluable. We are short information for 2020 speakers, however, and you are encouraged to send your information to lifelonglearningont@gmail.com as soon as is convenient so that the list can be brought up to date.

There was some discussion that establishing smaller

networks within TAN would also have benefit – networks based on such things as size, geography, programming, etc. The idea was enthusiastically received, and our TANPLAN group will take a look at how we might move forward.

Over the next while, TAN members will be turning their focus to both short- and long-term planning to address changes in audience and speaker preferences, cost models, delivery hybrids, etc. – changes resulting from our long COVID-19 shutdowns. Topics such as how to move back to ‘normal’ when restrictions lift and if / how we continue to reach our extended online audiences without losing our local focus will all be on the table. To help with that, we will be looking at ways to share questions, lessons learned and best practices.

Some things to note:

Please send samples of your speaker agreements if you are willing to share them with other members.

The insurance information on the website has been refreshed. There is no change in the basics, but there is updated information for members who may be considering taking advantage of our program.

For now ... Stay warm ... Stay healthy... Stay curious!

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Pivoting in a Time of Covid 19

By Barbara Barak

In March 2020, Thornhill Lifelong Learning (TLL) was running smoothly. We had sold out our third Spring series, our Board and Program Committee continued to work well together, our audience was committed to our lectures with over 400 registering online and more on a wait list. We were confident in our future. And then COVID-19 entered our lives and we had to re-imagine what we do and how we could do it. Within a short span of four weeks, we were:

- *pivoting from in person lectures to Zoom webinars; going from dealing with familiar technical issues with the staff of a local community centre to being on our own, depending on the know-how and new-found skills of our own tech team;*
- *working with speakers, most of whom were new to webinars*
- *serving a population that had been happy to come together in an auditorium, to individuals who had to download and deal with a technology most of us had never heard about a few weeks before and figuring out how long this situation would be our new world.*

We look back on those hectic days and wonder how we did it. These changes can be best described as a series of fortunate events that got us ready to meet the new realities and options presented by the pandemic.

In early December 2019, two of our committee members were in Florida and were scheduled to join our regular planning meeting virtually, but as it happened, a major snowstorm hit the GTA making even the scheduled meeting impossible. We took advantage of this situation and held the meeting on Zoom. This proved to be a big success and we realized that Zoom was a workable option, at least, to accommodate committee members who were unable to

make a meeting.

Our intrepid Tech Team, Faygie (also Chair of our Program Committee) and Bob Goodman realized that Zoom had another application – to help us meet the needs of those on our wait list, something we had discussed many times. We could use Zoom to stream the lectures in an adjacent room in the community centre to those who could not be accommodated in the lecture hall.

In early March 2020, Faygie, Bob and Silvia MacCon worked with one of our most popular speakers to record a lecture we could show to an in-person audience if a presenter had to cancel at the last minute. We still saw Zoom as a tool with limited appeal. We were still focused on our mission of presenting in-person lectures.

On March 17, a provincial lockdown was declared and came and went, but COVID-19 stayed. Our limited experience with Zoom was soon to prove invaluable. First came a new wrinkle in working with our speakers: our tech team met with the speakers individually a week before their presentation to ensure they were ready to offer a professional product to our audience. Webinar experience varied widely and our tech team spent many hours with each person. Our team had to quickly teach presenters how to share screens, play audio and video clips, and our MCs became comfortable using the Q&A function of Zoom to moderate the question period. We were ready to proceed with our Spring 2020 with a new look, new speakers, new technology, new challenges.

This lecture series was a learning experience for both our volunteers and our audience. Given the extraordinary circumstances we were all facing, TLL decided to refund the

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The hardworking Thornhill Board (they all seem to be happy with their efforts).

LLIR in Lockdown

by Sheryl Danilowitz

When the dark cloud of COVID descended on Canada and the rest of the world in March, LLIR (Living and Learning in Retirement, Toronto), like all other Third Age Learning groups, had to make major decisions about how to continue to keep our programs going. The classroom as we knew it was no longer an option, but classes had to continue. Fortunately, the LLIR Board had time to plan how to continue our lecture series set to start up again in September.

Our newly elected president Diane Johns wasted no time in setting up a steering committee to plan how to move ahead. One of our earliest decisions was not to use Zoom which, in our opinion, had many drawbacks. We were very fortunate to discover that one of our most recent Course Directors, Stacy Costa, had a background in innovation and technology. We employed Stacy and she, together with the expertise of Diane and a talented group of A-V volunteers.

The platform LLIR chose was Vimeo. The reasons we felt that it would be preferable were manifold. We could have our Course Directors upload their lectures in advance, giving a team of monitors the opportunity to identify any shortcomings with the lectures and having the CDs then polish their lectures before they were aired. Such shortcomings might include volume, or hesitations in

delivery, distracting objects that might be visible behind the lecturer, slides that might contravene copyright laws or any gaffes a Director might make. This meant that by the time the lecture was ready to be aired, it had been carefully polished and scrutinized.

A great advantage to having the lecture streamed is that our members can view the lectures at any time and not have to be at the computer at a given time. We decided to post four lectures at a time, giving our members the option of viewing all four instead of being limited to one. This was a hugely popular feature and in the final survey, members indicated that this was a great bonus for them.

Of course, having to pre-record a lecture and then upload it to another site proved to be too much of a challenge for some of our Course Directors, and a number of them withdrew, leaving us to scramble to find replacements. However, this did not pose too much of a problem and we now have a stable of speakers in reserve for when we return to the classroom.

We have been really pleased with the quality of lectures that we have been able to offer our members. It has required a great deal of effort on the part of our Board members, but we feel vindicated by our decision. Having the feedback in the form of comments like, "It was fabulous. All of it...the courses, the content, the delivery, the ability to watch whenever, having access to all four courses. "Thank you. Couldn't have been better. Loved it all" made all the hard work worth it.



*The LLIR team (top from the left): Diane Johns, Sheryl Danilowitz, Gary McKeever, Stacy Costa
(bottom from the left) Doug Begin, Del Milbrandt, Betty Ball and Mark Zarembo*

The Academy for Lifelong Learning Toronto Under Covid

by Jeff Biteen, chair, Curriculum Committee, Academy

When the pandemic hit us, we were in the midst of preparing our course calendar for the 2020/21 academic year, conducting our Spring marketing campaign and moving to a new facility. We had to scramble to ensure we could live up to the promises we had made.

The social distancing requirements and indoor meeting limitations meant that we couldn't conduct our series of Spring Talks, one of our most important opportunities to raise awareness of the Academy and gain new membership. We typically see an annual turnover of 10-15% of our membership, and Covid harmed our ability to market ourselves as we had in the past.

Our Covid Task Force quickly developed a plan for remote electronic delivery of our workshops via the Zoom platform in case we couldn't meet in the classroom come September. We announced that we expected to start the year on Zoom, and hoped to move into our new, and newly renovated, location for the second term.

On top of their health concerns, this idea caused much consternation among our membership. Our program has been built on its socialization opportunities. Some of our members told us that if they couldn't meet face to face with their co-participants they weren't interested in participating. Some members wouldn't participate for technical reasons, including the lack of a camera-equipped computer, no internet connection, no experience with remote video programs. Some were afraid that they wouldn't be able to manage the technology, especially if they were expected to deliver a presentation as part of the workshop curriculum. As a result, our membership level dropped 25%, from 400 to 300 active members.

The knock-on result was to reduce the number of participants registering for many of our workshops. Low registration forced us to cancel some workshops and limit some to one semester.

The wonderful job done by our technical volunteers and our task force allowed us to develop a robust delivery system, training for all our workshop facilitators (leaders), training videos and one-on-one assistance for our members, and a positive, robust, clear and open communications program for everybody. We even provided "meet and greet" opportunities for workshop facilitators and members to meet online before their classes began.

The crowning achievement was our recognition of the importance of socialization to the Academy's success



over the years. For the expenditure of a relatively few dollars, we increased the number of Zoom licences we used, and the length of our meeting times. While the classes kept the same schedule as usual, we provided workshops with an extra 30 minutes before and after the workshop for the groups to chat among themselves and catch up with each other. For seniors who were "huddling in place", this bi-weekly opportunity to see familiar faces was welcome.

As far as the technical side was concerned, our members exceeded our expectations. Most embraced the technology, many sought and received assistance from our technical support volunteers and, after the first class or two, things ran smoothly. We are even in the process of adding some Zoom-only workshops to our calendar for next year, regardless of whether we return to the classroom.

Pandemic May Result in Loneliness

This time of Covid isolation may lead to loneliness, says an article on the American Psychological Association website. It goes on to say that the "connection between social relationships and health is often overlooked".

The "lack of connection, social isolation and loneliness are comparable" to many other physical effects.

As many of our TAN groups have found out, moving to communications via Zoom or other programs have helped us maintain these social relationships.

The article is interesting but strangely does not mention the importance to mental and physical health of the whole complex of learning methods we employ, whether they be lectures or peer learning.

When someone listens or reads or discusses the great issues facing us or the wonderful lessons from the past, even though remotely, something wonderful happens and loneliness and isolation are minimized.

It may be that the connection between learning and mental and physical health is not yet recognized by the medical profession. Those of us who so thoroughly enjoy the whole process can attest to its benefits.

Sheilagh Hickie

Zooming in Burlington

By Graham Swanson

3ALB (Third Age Learning Burlington) had a very successful series of presentations on the Zoom platform in the fall of 2020. The title for the eight sessions was "Reaching People Through the Arts." Our members adjusted to the Zoom format easily. Some registrants from previous sessions were not interested in Zoom sessions so didn't sign on but the over 200 registrants spoke highly of the interest and involvement in the program.

Although there was a large number already registered for the eight presentations, many sites had more people watching the Zoom. We do not have an accurate total number but it is well over our usual 240 attendees. The winter series has drawn a bigger group of registrants mainly returning third age learners but many first time registrants.



The topic 'Current Issues in Democracy and Politics' has excited many people. The series offers presentations by Bob Rae and Steve Paikin as well as professors of political science from local universities. We will continue the virtual presentations next fall as we anticipate that safe distancing may still be in effect. The Zoom platform has been so well accepted that we are considering offering both in person and virtual presentations in the future.

Thornhill (from Page 2)

Series fees. Over 960 households (with a potential audience of 1100+) joined us. At the end of the series, we surveyed our audience. To our delight (and somewhat to our surprise), they told us how much they enjoyed the sessions and appreciated our hard work. They also said they would be willing to sign up and pay for webinars.

The lockdown came and went, but COVID-19 stayed. Over the years, some of our audience has asked us to record both in person and virtual lectures and with Zoom this became a practical option. We had discussed this matter previously but concerns over copyright had stopped us from going ahead with it. Glenn Yaffee (Learning Unlimited Etobicoke) helped us work through the issues. Given the legal pitfalls streaming these sessions can bring, TLL decided not to record our presentations. However, we did add copyright waivers to our speaker contracts and now display copyright information at the beginning of our webinars and on our website.

As in all successes, it takes a village and so we want to acknowledge the leadership and expertise of Frank Nicholson whose help was essential throughout our journey with Zoom.

COVID-19 has given us a chance to think about and consider new ways to engage our audience. It has called on us to be pragmatic and resourceful and to learn new skills. It has allowed us to look outside the borders of Southern Ontario to find excellent speakers. We don't know how much longer we will stay virtual. We have surveyed our users recently and at this particular time a significant number told us that they would be fine with continuing with webinars. Once the pandemic is under control and people are comfortable

coming back to in person sessions, we are open to offering lectures in person or via Zoom or a hybrid of both.

All that being said, we are presenting our Spring and our Fall 2021 series on Zoom.

Big Thinkers Wanted

Every organization needs ideas and people to implement them. TAN is now in need of members with big ideas on how we can grow and prosper in the coming years.

The TANPLAN (a long term planning committee) is developed by a committee. The new chair, Gaby Arato (garato@bell.net) is looking for new members to join him.

The committee provides the TAN Board with suggestions on such things as making our government and medical communities aware of what continued learning means for populations as they age, what our TAN members want from us in the way of conferences, ongoing help etc, or how do we cooperate with other lifelong learning groups across the country.

So, if you have ideas (and who doesn't!!) please get in touch with Gaby. We welcome you to play a role in developing the plan that will help TAN take the next steps to growth and fulfilment.

Survey Says: Majority of Those 55 And Older Should Be Called....

By Cathy Spark

Geezers, golden agers (popular in the 1950s), codgers, old farts and old fogeys. Over the decades many terms have been used for those over 65 – some in jest and some not.

Things have changed now, of course, but we still struggle to find a term for adults 55 and older that is broadly acceptable.

Do we need a special term? Not surprisingly, one collective noun cannot effectively represent a group that covers 40+ years in age and a wide range of characteristics and interests. There can be a great difference between a newly retired 58-year-old and someone in their 80s or 90s. Good health, a curious mind, an active lifestyle, and a rewarding social life can apply at any age – as can its opposite. When does 'old age' begin, anyway? We are not all the same in our approach to aging – and approaches are changing with each successive generation.

But whether we are referring to ourselves, or others are referring to our demographic, there are times when a collective term is required, and the medical community, gerontologists, and marketing firms have spent a great deal of time listening to seniors' (the term I will use in this piece) focus groups, surveys by seniors' organizations, and conversations among peers to find a term that is not only respectful but also representative of our current lifestyles.

However, despite all of this research and discussion, no mutually agreeable term(s) have been identified. In North America, terms such as seniors, older adults, silvers, elders, and third agers have been met with

SENIOR STORIES

Boomers Hate Being Called Seniors

By *Suddenly Senior* · Mar 26, 2018



some approval, but “seniors” are also high school students, and indigenous groups feel that “elders” portrays an additional cultural level of position and respect. Commonly used terms like “Baby Boomers” and “retired people” are now dated. “Elderly”, “old” and “senior citizen” are now perceived to connote frailness, illness and irrelevance. The organization Journalists on Aging has currently settled on “older adults” as a respectful, neutral, flexible term, but that, too, may change with time. The fact that there seems to be little agreement about even one or two of the currently favoured descriptors is representative of the varied nature of our demographic.

Some new terms are appearing now – some tongue-in-cheek, but some being used more broadly – J.A.L.O.s (just a little older); NQYs (not quite young); EWs (experienced and wise); YAHs (young at heart); superadult; and senager. My personal favourite is “perennials”, a term developed by Laura Carstensen, founding director of the Centre on Longevity at Stanford to represent new life, strength and resistance.

Whether or not we find a term that can be broadly accepted remains to be seen. But it is important that it represent the next phase of our lives – whatever shape that may take - rather than be anchored in our past. One of the participants in a working group on the topic – a lively 90-year-old – perhaps summed it up best with an old adage “Call me anything so long as you don’t call me late to dinner.” Sums it up nicely, I think.



For your help in making this Newsletter possible. Please continue to send your articles, photos, etc to me,

Sheilagh Hickie, editor

shickie@bell.net

Learning during the pandemic

A two-headed opportunity masquerading as a problem

By Graham Ford,

We (Summer Lectures Club, Guelph) are at war with a terrible, tiny enemy that has taken lives, devastated our economy and changed our ways of living. And unique in this war, we seniors are in the firing line. While thus embattled, how do we fulfill TAN's objectives, which read in part to "provide **opportunities for older adults to learn in a friendly, social setting**"? In wars we forge new tools and find new ways to use existing technology. We seniors are nothing if not resilient; we've spent lifetimes solving problems, we have faced down the virus and will come out of this war equipped to make third age learning better than ever.

1. "opportunities for older adults to learn"

Until March last year we accepted, enjoyed and thrived on the limitation imposed by needing to find a coordinated time and place to suit both learners and the lecturer. We barely contemplated, indeed we resisted the notion of proceeding in any other way.

The virus has turned this thinking on its head. Most third age chapters now vigorously pursue remote learning. Through video-conferencing we've learned to recruit lecturers and invite attendees from anywhere in the world. And how many elderly, frail members, housebound or in retirement homes, did we lose when they could no longer travel to a venue? How many now attend our meetings through smart phones or computer screens?

Our only remaining (artificial) limitation is that the lecturer should live in a convenient time zone. We still hanker after live, interactive presentations. It is however possible to record the lecture, and participants are free to choose their own time to absorb it. What is more, video-conferencing can be used in conjunction with a live audience. It will surely enrich our ways of meeting, long after the pandemic is behind us.

LLL Navigates to Webinars

By Jenny Birrell

Many of our over 2900 members are missing our meetings at Later Life Learning, Innis College but we have successfully transitioned to Zoom Webinars. As a result of much hard work by Mike Orr, our website chair, we now have a brand new website:- lltoronto.org

There were some growing pains in the Fall as members learned to navigate the new site but we are now in full swing. We have 1060 members registered for the Winter session which consists of three webinars and two discussion groups, book club and current affairs. Do log in to the site for lots more information!

Our meetings will continue on-line in September with two of our speakers joining us via Zoom from British Columbia and Italy respectively. Registration will begin in April. Plans for January 2022 are still tentative-perhaps combined in person and on-line. Time will tell...

Who would have believed that Covid 19 would hold us hostage for so long!



2. "a friendly social setting"

As Lyndsay Green observed in *The Well-Lived Life, preparing for retirement*, "The most valuable part of your Retirement Savings Plan is your emotional circle, and that can't be bought". We gratefully embrace opportunities to engage with the vibrant, interesting members of the Third Age movement. But must this be face to face?

Lectures can and should include social time. Video-conferencing may not replace the camaraderie that comes with warm friendly faces and the scent of fresh roasted coffee in a meeting hall. But online, we can see and greet fellow members who've linked in. The interaction is immensely wider than it can ever be when we greet fellow members one on one. And if the audience becomes too large, it is a simple matter to break into small discussion groups. *In this spring and summer of lockdown, Third Age Learning has an important role to play to keep us connected and engaged.*

Beginning March 29th, and for chapters taking a break as winter ends, Guelph's Summer Lectures Club offers a series of twenty weekly lectures featuring speakers from far-flung corners of Canada, and invites third age members to register. Some highlights . . . Zoom will help attendees leap 5,000 KMS to meet a speaker in Whitehouse in the Yukon one week, 2,000 kms east onto an island in the Bay of Fundy in the week following, and meet sign-language-using chimpanzee descendants of Washoe, the chimp that was famously was taught to sign in the nineteen eighties in the next.

To learn more and to view the complete series, log onto the website, www.summerlectures.com

Zoom Works Fine for BALL

by Ann Wagner

The Bluewater Association for Lifelong Learning's (BALL) 2020-2021 on-line season has been a great success in this challenging year! We've offered six lectures in each of the following series from World Religions to the History of Grey Bruce Counties, along with our upcoming series titled Human Adaptation Over Time! More than 400+ members are tuning in and viewing our Zoom webinars, which have included special individual lectures on such topics as the presidential election in the United States or protection against money fraud.

The technical expertise of the Website Chair and the diligent and creative work of the Program Committee have been instrumental in helping us adapt to a new mode of delivery for our renowned lectures. The introduction of a one-time replay of recorded lectures with the permission of our lecturers has allowed us to reach a larger audience by offering an additional time slot for convenient viewing and a second chance to watch lectures using the same Zoom link. We look forward to supportive discussion with TAN regarding copy-right responsibilities.

During our 10- minute intermission within each lecture, members are treated to the recorded music of local talent, while viewing slides and photos with information on our upcoming lectures. We've had an excellent response to our on-line evaluations after each lecture, and the constructive feedback and positive comments help guide future programming. Our 2021-2022 season is nearly finalized and the program for 2022-2023 is well underway in its planning. We are exploring the possibility of offering both an on-line and on-site component for future BALL seasons, when we are able to safely gather together again. We welcome you to our website at <https://www.bluewaterlearns.com/> to discover our upcoming series on Human Adaptation Over Time and our final special lecture titled Tom Longboat's Legacy: A History of Athletic Excellence and Agency.