GETTING TO KNOW WILLIAM “Bill” PARKER

by Nancy Kendrick

For the last ten years participants of OLLI of Temple University have had the opportunity to be members of a group dedicated to the consideration of the larger themes of life. William “Bill” Parker’s class, Modern Philosophy, exposes participants to a full menu of the concepts of western philosophers, and allows for active discussion on these topics. Bill Parker received his MA, BA in Philosophy at the University of Buffalo and did postgraduate work at the University of Pennsylvania. Following several years teaching Philosophy at Howard University, Bill became the Regional Director for the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency. During his twenty-five years with PHEAA, Bill received recognition as an administrator, innovator, and game changer. He played an essential role in ensuring that the Philadelphia region received its proper share of student aid funds from Pennsylvania’s programs.

What is the mission of the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency?

The PHEAA is a needs-based program funded by the Federal government and the State of Pennsylvania that provides grants, scholarships and loans to Pennsylvania undergraduate and graduate students. When I began working at PHEAA Philadelphia was not receiving its rightful share of financial aid. For example, Pittsburgh, the other large city in Pennsylvania, was receiving more financial aid money proportionally, than Philadelphia. It became my mission to improve this situation. I innovated a media campaign to get the word out about the availability of funds for student grants, scholarships and loans. I created and appeared in television and radio commercials that were run in the Philadelphia area, and I was also able to publicize the program as a frequent guest on TV and radio shows. The media exposure made Philadelphia residents aware of what was available to them, and was recognized as being responsible for Philadelphia finally receiving its appropriate share of student aid. During my tenure at PHEAA, Philadelphia became the top region in the State in the number and value of student grants and loans.

Did you start coming to OLLI (then called TARP) directly following your retirement from PHEAA?

No. After retiring I was able to travel with my wife. We travelled mainly in the US and were also able to visit Germany for a philosophy conference.
How did you become interested in OLLI?

I originally came to OLLI to see what it was about, and to take courses. I was particularly interested in a class on Sigmund Freud. I became acquainted with Murray Halfond, a former president of TARP, who suggested that I teach a class in philosophy. I have been teaching a philosophy class at OLLI for ten years.

Why have you continued to teach at OLLI?

In my professional career as a teacher, and as a lecturer for PHEAA, I was the person who spoke and disseminated information. While teaching at OLLI I was able to structure interaction between the students and instructor. This has been most enjoyable, as the students bring their vast experience and a willingness to exchange ideas. Philosophy is meant to encourage debate. I bring out the important facts, we bounce around the ideas, and see what we come up with. This is what makes the class special for me. The give and take of ideas, the interaction and class discussions keep me coming back.

Has your approach to teaching the class changed over the years?

When I began teaching the class I would present the material as a lecture, followed by discussion. I also encouraged different students to give a talk on a topic from Philosophy or on a specific philosopher. Ron Fischer was a strong participant in these activities. He was such an outstanding contributor that he was able to take over running the class during the time that I was unable to be at OLLI every week. My wife became ill, and I was her sole caregiver. When I returned to teaching the class following the death of my wife, I felt that it was an appropriate time to redesign the class. Adam Brunner was extremely helpful in suggesting the use of a Great Courses DVD. The lecturer on the DVD gets to the core of the philosopher’s concepts, but offers an opportunity for the instructor to add information. The DVD, along with my complimentary handouts, has allowed for a balanced presentation of material, discussion and the exchange of ideas that is so important.

Your class consists of a diverse and interesting group, what do you think draws them to the class?

In the ten years that I have been affiliated with OLLI there has been a strong interest in philosophy. I believe that the class attracts people who are seeking an interactive experience that encourages debate and consideration. The discussions are not meant to persuade or to belittle other people’s thinking. My hope is that students will come away from the class believing that there may be merit in the other person’s idea or stance, that it is possible to be more receptive to a variety of ideas, and that there can be strength and validity in the opposing idea. This is the mission of the class.

Bill Parker’s Modern Philosophy class is offered in the Fall and Spring semesters.
Brief History of OLLI at Temple

By Ron Fischer

Many of our members are not familiar with the background history of OLLI at Temple, which goes back nearly 40 years. OLLI at Temple began in 1975 as ARP, Association of Retired Professionals with 85 Charter members. The organization was modeled after an adult education group at the New School for Social Research in New York City. The goal of ARP was to be a resource for seniors who desired to continue their education in a relaxed but serious university atmosphere. The first Director of the organization was Frank Tooke, who had been a vice-president of Westinghouse Broadcasting Company, the parent of KYW radio and KYW-TV. Thanks to a recommendation by Mr. Tooke, the former headquarters of KYW at 1616 Walnut Street was donated to Temple University as a center city extension. TUCC's first dean then appointed Mr. Tooke to help organize ARP using the facilities of Temple University Center City. Thus, ARP was organized at about the same time as Temple University Center City was started.

The first classes offered consisted of eleven courses in the Spring of 1976. The courses consisted of:

- Black History
- Bridge for Beginners
- Chemistry and Social Change
- Consumers Information
- Contemporary Affairs
- Conversational French
- Drawing for Beginners
- Grandparents Seminar
- Jewish History
- Nutrition and Foods
- Urban Studies

The organization met with immediate success and within six months there were 300 members and 30 courses. In 1979 membership rose to 622 and 50 courses were offered. Shortly after inception, the name of the organization was changed to the Temple Association of Retired Professionals from ARP to avoid confusion with the AARP. In 1998, the name was again changed to the Temple Association of Retired Persons to better reflect the actual members. When TARP became part of the Osher Foundation in 2008, TARP became OLLI at Temple. Since then, OLLI has steadily grown in membership to about 1200 with over 100 courses offered. It has had 12 different Presidents and 5 Directors since its founding.

It is interesting to note that during the first years of TARP, each member was interviewed personally by the Director before admission. The purpose was to help insure the applicant “will give something to the group as well as receive pleasure and learning.” The underlining was used in the original. This philosophy results from the pronounced egalitarian viewpoint exhibited by the TARP founders, where members were expected to be teachers as well as students. The expectation that members teach may also explain why TARP/OLLI instructors until recently were required to pay full membership dues.

The Friday forum has been part of OLLI/TARP since its beginning and has always been open to the public. Over the years, more than 1000 speakers have appeared, among them prominent figures from Temple University, Philadelphia Schools, elected representatives, educators, university professors, theater personnel, financial planners and others. Refreshments have always been part of the Friday forums.

Another important part of OLLI/TARP has been the library. It was named after Louis A. Freedman who was instrumental in establishing TARP at Temple University. The library has featured current fiction and non-fiction books, and contains a good collection of biographies and mysteries. It is staffed by knowledgeable volunteers and is open when OLLI is in session.

During the early years of the organization, there was a frequently published Newsletter informing members about courses, events and interesting facts about members. Two years ago the newsletter was revived in the form of the “OLLI Notebook” which is published periodically throughout the year. The difference is that now most OLLI members read the OLLI Notebook in digital format.

Sponsoring trips throughout the region has been part of the organization since its inception. In 1984, the organization sponsored overseas trips to Russia and Israel. Also, since the beginning of the organization, a benefit of a full year’s membership has been the right to sit in a regular Temple University undergraduate course at no cost. This may have reached a maximum in 1982 when TARP enrollment was 674 members and 248 elected to sit in courses at Temple University.

Special social events have been part of the organization from its inception. This includes a Holiday Party in December and a luncheon in May both having entertainment as a major component. For many years the Holiday Party entertainment consisted of a talent show by the members where they sang, danced, and told jokes. In a way our recently very successful talent show was a revival of this older practice.

OLLI at Temple has had a long and eventful history and its current successes indicate it will be with us for many years to come.
OVERCROWDING AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT

By Ron Fischer, President and Adam Brunner, Director

The demand for several popular classes at OLLI has been so high that some members have been unable to get into the classes. Why is this happening and what is the OLLI volunteer leadership and Director doing about it?

The 118 OLLIs throughout the country have a membership in excess of 136,800. OLLI at Temple is increasingly popular in Philadelphia and surrounding communities, and at the end of the summer, we had a membership of over 1220, the most ever. Nationwide, retiree numbers are growing and in this region, many will retire to Center City and nearby, creating yet more demand for membership in OLLI at Temple. The reason for this popularity is not difficult to understand: OLLI at Temple is at a central location, has a vigorous learning and social environment, and has very reasonable fees.

The question is: what can we do to satisfy this demand? Can OLLI grow and yet provide an accessible learning and social environment for all its members?

Currently OLLI at Temple faces a number of limitations which foster overcrowding. These include limited room size for most of our classrooms, our policy of not requiring registration for most of our classes, and increased use of Temple University Center City (TUCC) for credit courses. It is clear that if we do not take some action, the overcrowding will continue and get worse. The following describes a number of solutions we have considered.

More Space at TUCC

TUCC has many classrooms available. However, most of the rooms are small, allowing about 30 occupants per classroom. Room 222 which seats 99 people, is available to OLLI only on Mondays and Fridays during the Fall and Spring semesters, and on Tuesday in the Summer semester, and we already have popular classes scheduled there. There are four classrooms at TUCC which seat 60 people, of which three are available to OLLI. If a class is sufficiently popular that more than 60 members wish to attend, we have a problem. We cannot knock a wall down to make a larger room available, because it would be prohibitively expensive to do so and Temple University does not want to lose a classroom at TUCC.

Rent Space Nearby

A frequent suggestion has been to rent larger rooms in nearby buildings. This would require members to leave TUCC and walk over to this rented space. We have carried out a brief search for such a space and the results were not encouraging. Also, classes elsewhere would reduce socialization between the members, something we would be reluctant to do. However, if members learn about an affordable venue within a few blocks from OLLI, please let us know about it.

Enhanced Technology

We have been successful using technology to transmit classes from one room to another at TUCC. However, there are drawbacks: the instructor has a limited sphere of motion (they cannot venture far from a microphone); the receiving class may not hear all of the discussion in the primary class; it is not possible to simultaneously transmit video and the instructor; and overall the experience in the receiving class is not the same as the primary class. Also, lapel microphones are often inadequate for transmitting sound from one room to another. Nonetheless, we are planning to continue to use this technology as much as possible where needed.

Registration for Popular Classes

OLLI currently requires registration for about 25 “select” classes. This registration, which is done manually, is carried out for classes in computers, Tai Chi, yoga and some art classes where physical space is limited or where there is a limit to the number of students an instructor can handle. This spring, Temple is introducing an on-line registration system for non-credit organizations like OLLI. This means in the future, you will be able to enroll in OLLI and for specific courses in OLLI online from a computer. (Help will be provided for those who do not have a computer.) This system will be used to register for the select courses, and also could be used to register members for very popular courses where televised transmission from one classroom to another isn't feasible. Registration for popular classes would be a means to inform a member whether he/she would be able to attend a specific class. A significant drawback to registration, however, is that it would not permit members to freely change from one class to another.

What Members Can Do

The current situation with overcrowding in classrooms is exacerbated by our long held policy of not registering for all classes. We are one of the few OLLIs which operate this way. For most OLLIs, members pay a small membership fee, and then pay a more sizeable fee for each class they attend. If a member cannot register for a desired class because it is full, they can register for a different class at the same time. For these OLLIs the disappointment occurs at the time of registration, not when arriving at the class -- as at OLLI at Temple. However, a major disadvantage at the OLLIs which require a separate fee for each class attended, members are not free to change to a different class if they do not like their first choice. The freedom to change classes at will has been a tradition at TARP/OLLI for its entire existence, and there is no desire on anyone's part to modify this. But perhaps we may have to consider registering for the popular classes that do not lend themselves to streaming into second classrooms. Alternatively, OLLI at Temple members can increase their chances of getting a seat by arriving at a class early. However, if the class is full please do not attempt to attend anyway. Please cooperate with the OLLI Monitors and find another class. Also, complaints about overcrowded classes should be directed to the President and/or Director, not to the volunteers or staff who have noth-
Another area in which members can help is finding additional instructors for classes which are very popular but have limited space. Good examples of this are Tai Chi and yoga. We could fill up additional classes, but we do not have instructors to teach them. We believe members who want additional classes in these or any subject should help us locate instructors for them. In essence, we ask members to not ask "Why don't we have a class in (fill in the blank)," and instead, take the responsibility for finding a person who could teach the class and bring him/her to our attention. Finding additional instructors for very popular classes would be a good way to alleviate the overcrowding we occasionally experience.

Another cause of consternation is that some members join OLLI to attend only one or two specific courses. If these members cannot get into these courses they are disappointed. This approach to OLLI can be problematic. We should join OLLI to enjoy the full assortment of courses offered, which totals about 100 courses in the spring and fall and 50 in the summer. Please look at the full roster of classes available, and have a back-up class planned for those that are very popular.

We thank you for understanding the challenges we face and are open to hearing your suggestions.
The Trips Committee works to provide additional opportunities for self-development, self-enrichment and cultural enhancement in a social environment for our members. When we search for ideas, we consider:

- special exhibits at local institutions
- little known museums and other places of interest in the Philadelphia region, and
- trips to unique sites outside of our region (i.e. Washington and New York).

Our research starts with ideas from OLLI members as well as committee members. Our primary consideration for deciding on a trip/tour: will it interest OLLI members? Then, can we arrange for a reasonable cost for the trip/tour? Where possible, we negotiate for a senior or student discount rate which may be less than a group rate for admission and guided tours. We arrange for guided tours, when available, to provide an introduction to and to expand our knowledge of our destination.

For most trips/tours in Philadelphia, OLLI members use public transportation to travel to the destination. The committee members negotiate with bus companies for transportation to sites outside of Philadelphia, again looking for a reasonable cost for the bus.

The date of the trip/tour depends on OLLI's schedule and the schedule of events at the destination. We try for dates during the regular OLLI term and on the days with the fewest scheduled classes.

The destinations and bus companies have deadlines for final payments, usually 2 or more weeks before the day of the trip. So, we plan our last date of registration around their deadlines. Also, we need to limit attendance to conform to the capacity of the bus or the size of the group that the venue can handle. Occasionally OLLI members’ registrations for a trip/tour exceed one of these limits. Then, we will maintain a "waiting list" for registrants who exceed our limits. So, it’s important to let us know ASAP if you can’t take a trip/tour for which you are registered. Conversely, we need a minimum number of participants to cover the cost of the bus if we are to proceed with the trip.

Some of the places that OLLI members have visited with the Trips Committee include special exhibits at large institutions in Philadelphia (e.g. Franklin Museum and Penn Museum), guided tours of small museums in our area (e.g. Chemical History Museum and Art in Wood) and behind the scenes tours (e.g. Wanamaker Organ and Pennsylvania Academy of Art). There have been day trips, with tours, to New York (World Trade Center site and the Statue of Liberty) and Longwood Gardens. OLLI members have requested a return trip to Washington DC after a successful trip to the Supreme Court, Library of Congress and Folger Shakespeare Library a year ago. We’ll start working on that trip during the winter. So, if you have a suggestion for an interesting, and possibly unique, place to visit in Washington in the fall of 2015, please contact a Trips Committee member.

We plan at least two trips and/or tours during each session (fall, spring and summer). We usually do not consider anything between mid-November and mid-March due to uncertain weather conditions. Currently we’re working on a...
trip to Harrisburg and another to the New York Botanical Garden in the spring 2015. Look for announcements with details in February.

The Trips Committee now has a designated bulletin board on the fifth floor, near the library bulletin board. Check the space for announcements and/or for lists of registrants when a trip/tour is advertised.

Trips Committee members
- Roseann Gill, Chairperson
- Bob Alcorn
- Howard Lowell
- Zhanna Prysler
- Elly Shapiro
- John M. Smith

Please contact any of us with your ideas and questions or leave a message for the committee with the staff in the OLLI office. We'll get in touch with you. We’d like to hear from OLLI members with connections to an institution or venue and who could help us arrange special tours, both in the Philadelphia area and at sites within a 2-3 hour drive of OLLI.

The past and present members of the Trips Committee thank OLLI members for your participation in past trips and look forward to seeing you on future trips.

From Ron Avery’s Collection of Philadelphia Lore

Ron Avery is a Philadelphia historian and author of three books and numerous articles about the city and its colorful past. A native of Philadelphia, Ron retired from a career as a newspaper journalist and columnist several years ago to devote his time to teaching, (his courses at OLLI are among the most popular), freelance writing, and collecting jokes, quotes, and anecdotes about Philadelphia. Here are some samples from Ron’s collection.

“I once spent a year in Philadelphia; I think it was on a Sunday” W.C. Fields

After a visit to America in 1918, the Prince of Wales was asked about his impressions of Philadelphia. He allegedly answered, “I met a lot of fine people named Scrapple and ate a lot of Biddle.”

“Philadelphia merely seems dull because it’s next to exciting Camden, N.J.” Robert Anton Wilson

Muckraker Lincoln Steffens writes extensively about voter fraud in Philadelphia in his classic 1904 study of political corruption, “The Shame of the Cities.” He says one politician reminded his audience that they were in the same ward as Independence Hall. He named important signers of the Declaration of Independence. “These men, the fathers of American liberty, voted down here once.” And then he added with a grin, “They vote here yet.”

“Philadelphia, the city that gave us Sylvester Stallone and Legionnaire’s disease.” Bill Bryson

Speaking of an accused cop killer in May 2006, Police Commissioner Sylvester Johnson expressed his hope that the suspect “would never see the day of light.”

“The streets are safe in Philadelphia; it’s only the people that make them unsafe.” Mayor Frank Rizzo

A character in the Christopher Morley novel “Kitty Foyle” declares: “Philadelphia had her spell of modernism and revolution back in the 18th century and then got through with it once and for always.”

Did you hear about the Philadelphia cop who found a dead horse on Susquehanna Avenue and dragged it a block to Berks Street before writing his report? When asked why he had risked a heart attack and slipped discs to move the carcass, the cop explained, “Because I couldn’t spell Susquehanna.”

“Last week I went to Philadelphia, but it was closed.” W.C. Fields

Photo by Leon and Joanne Kellerman. St. Mary Organist.
When I walked into the OLLI First Annual Art Fair on November 7, 2014, I was reminded of part of a poem “OLLI Acrostics” written by Laura Williams - Chassot, who was just one of the 28 visual, performing and literary artists participating.

“OLLI’s like a candy store, options galore
Lighting up our world as we ask for more”

There we were, in Room 222, which had been magically transformed from a class and meeting room into something magical with a totally different vibe. Walking in at 10 A.M I was thinking of Harry Segal’s “Another Opening, Another Show” and was thinking, wow, this isn’t just another opening, this is a FIRST for OLLI, and it looks like it’s going to be a huge success. Boy was I right!

I must admit, probably because I’m 77 years old and have spent 40 of those years in New York City, I am somewhat jaded and cynical and often not easily impressed. But as the day went on, I felt like a kid at his first three-ring circus, or like Laura’s poem, in a candy store. I realized I had often taken my ten-year experience at OLLI for granted and now was seeing this organization in a totally different light.

I met many people who were new to me and chatted with others I hadn’t seen in a while, and I was learning that everyone I met had so many dimensions to them, most of which I had been completely unaware.

I had never met Laura Williams-Chassot, who in addition to writing poetry is an award-winning artist with exhibitions to her credit on both sides of the Atlantic in the U.S. and Europe. But what I will remember most about her is this comment: “What I like about OLLI is when I speak up in a class and am sometimes hesitant and slow putting my thoughts together, nobody will rush me. Here I don’t have to apologize for aging.”

One of the great photographers I met for the first time was Bob Offenberg who explained that in this computer age he now enjoyed manipulating his photos as much as taking them.

"In the old days you could only do this during the printing process and you were often using chemicals that were very dangerous,” he said, “And today you don't necessarily need big expensive cameras.”
interviewed. What I liked most about my chat with her is that she introduced me to the online Broad Street Review, a website that describes itself as an "arts and culture website for thinking people with strong opinions, that welcomes commentary from professionals and amateurs alike about the performing and visual arts as well as any other field of interest to our eclectic group of contributors."

Ruth Erenberg, who teaches Drawing/Painting and the Elements of Composition, said when she first started teaching she dreaded coming to class.

"But as the weeks went on and I saw how the students were improving, and I was learning so much from them, I had an epiphany and was touched by the muse."

But what really blew me away were the comments of Toby Blender at her watercolor exhibit.

"When I retired seven years ago as a bookkeeper I wanted to spend time with anything that did not involve numbers," she explained. "I've been with OLLI seven years, and if I had known earlier that it existed I would have retired sooner. Besides, OLLI now keeps me out of the bars where I was meeting too many strange men."

"Can I quote you on that last comment?" I asked. She laughed, "Of course you can."

The performing artists kept us entertained throughout day in the front of the room. There was the Henri and Patty Duo, playing French Music, Rosalie Grant and Mitch Davis gave us a poetry reading. Many other members delighted us with their talent, and they included Gerry Alexander, Linda Beckman, Dick Brown, Jeanne Buerkel, Jean Haskell, Eileen Levinson, Sandy Philips, Alison Tasch, and Roy Yost.

There were many colorful exhibits by the visual artists, and in addition to the members I mentioned, included: Edith Agard, B.J. Crim, Yvonne Cross, Mitch Davis, Fradele Feld, Uta Fellechner, Jackie Goldstein, Joyce Halpern, Lois Hulet, Ivan Kaminoff, Pearl Kramer, Rochelle Lewis, Daryle McCormick, Edwina F. McMaster, Marcia Radbill, Lidia Rakhman, Sam Ross, Harold Schwartz, Rosalie Grant and Barbara Williamson.

Among the literary artists, I didn't know Herb Ershkowitz had written the book, John Wanamaker: Philadelphia Merchant. I hadn't seen John D'Alessandro for a while, but I have read his book, Teacher! Teacher! Sara Richardson, who is one of my many 2101 Co-op neighbors who are OLLI members, showed me photographs not included in her book, Fearless and Free, which is now on my nightstand.

And what would this fair been like without those delicious goodies we nibbled on while going from exhibit to exhibit? There were 36 OLLI members who answered the call from a flyer that said "Dust off your baking pans and dig up buried recipes."

By this time we all know that the loudest applause and a standing ovation for the success of this Art Fair goes to its star, Donna Satir, OLLI's Fundraiser, and her merry band of 18 assistants. When I told Donna I knew this was her idea and congratulated her, she was quick to reply, "Yes it was, but I must confess, I stole it."

Donna browses the newsletters of other OLLI chapters looking for fundraising ideas and special events. Earlier this year she discovered that the OLLI at the University of Georgia was holding its Third Annual Arts Fair. The first was held in a space similar to our Room 222, but now the fair had so many exhibitors it moved to a large church parking lot.

Donna started to work on the fair in June, and stressed that OLLI did not have to spend any money to put it together. "This was not a fundraising event, it was a real community builder," she said. "This fair was not about me. It was a real team effort and I'm so proud of everyone involved who came up with so many good ideas. The day before the event we all pitched in and we spent nearly four hours repackaging the baked goods. When the day was over, so many people worked so hard, without being asked, to put the room back together again."

What about next year? It was obvious from Donna's smile and the twinkle in her eyes that she and the many volunteers, exhibitors, performers, and bakers had already come up with some new ideas for 2015. Meantime, another round of applause for the many OLLI members who contributed to making our first Arts Fair such a big hit!