

## Discover the rewards of lifelong learning

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By Eileen Beal

Eightysomthing Lakewood resident Jane Scott (yes, that Jane Scott) has found out about it. So have 69-year-old Twinsburg resident Jerry Polster and 79-year-old Sagamore Hills Resident Jean Gellin.

“It” is the lifelong learning programs specifically aimed at retirees.

Indeed, Scott calls Encore Campus, the program she’s participating in at Tri-C’s Parma campus, “the back-to-the-classroom bonus that came with retirement.”

Programs are usually set up as classes or courses, but they are also called seminars, workshops and study groups. “Self-directed learning is a key component of most programs,” says Ron Browne, director of What’s Next!, a program at Fairhill Center.

Lifelong learning programs are offered by so many different organizations and institutions—universities and colleges, vocational schools, senior centers, retirement communities, adult education departments, recreation centers, libraries, art centers, the County Extension Service, etc.—that the scope and variety of classes is mind-boggling. “Some programs are content oriented,” Browne explained, “while others are more holistic, melding the mind-body-spiritual aspects of learning.”

Few people who enroll in a lifelong learning class stop with just one.

That’s because they are stimulating and enriching. “The goal of [lifelong learning] programs is to build new skills, knowledge bases, and ideas,” says Elaine Vincent, coordinator of Cleveland State University’s Project 60 Program. And they are fun. Speaking of the 19 classes—on everything from the history of the theater to WWI—he’s audited at CSU since 1996, Polster says: “I attend every class and I read the books and take notes, but I don’t take the exams and I don’t do the papers.”

And they are affordable. For example, courses taken through any state-sponsored college or university’s Project 60 Program are, based on available space, free. Courses taken through Tri-C’s Encore Program cost \$75; those taken through CWRU’s Senior Scholar Program are \$130. The five- and six-week courses offered through the Oasis Institute—they cover everything from the history of film to ballroom dancing this quarter—range from free to \$50 per course. Those offered at local art centers and/or through adult education departments (which tend to offer classes when older adults can get to them) cost from \$20 (single class) to \$80 (8-10 week series). The fee for What’s Next!’s six-week program—\$29-\$119—is based on income.

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Research has shown that heading back to class in your 60s, 70s, and 80s helps keep your mind sharp and alert. “When you use your intellectual ability—to read, discuss things, study things, do things—it keeps the [mental] acuity level high as you age,” says Elizabeth Fiordalis, the program manager for the Oasis Institute. But the benefits of lifelong learning aren’t all in your head. “When people get out on a regular basis, friendships are being made, and that helps people stay actively engaged with life,” says Janice Dzigiel, director of Tri-C’s Center for Applied Gerontology.

### **Sources and Resources**

For more information on lifelong learning programs, contact your community’s senior center and adult education department, your local state-funded college or university and the following:

Encore Campus Program (Cuyahoga Community College)  
[www.positiveaging.info](http://www.positiveaging.info)  
216-987-2274

Fridays at the College (Siegal College of Judaic Studies)  
[www.siegalcollege.edu](http://www.siegalcollege.edu)  
216-464-4050

Institute for Learning and Retirement (Baldwin-Wallace University)  
[www.baldwinw.edu/lifelearn](http://www.baldwinw.edu/lifelearn)  
440-826-2121

Oasis Institute  
[www.oasisnet.org/cleveland](http://www.oasisnet.org/cleveland)  
440-886-1157

Senior Scholars Program (Case Western Reserve University)  
[www.cwru.edu/artsci/conted/senior.htm](http://www.cwru.edu/artsci/conted/senior.htm)  
216-368-2090

What’s Next! Program (FairHill Center)  
[www.fairhillcenter.org/whats\\_next.htm](http://www.fairhillcenter.org/whats_next.htm)  
216-421-1350